

# Meeting summary for New Mexico Hair Sheep Producers Quarterly Meeting

Saturday, March 1, 2025 @ 7:00 pm

## Members Present:

Debra Jameson, Jennifer Moberly, Estella Levy (Sin Colita Katahdins), James Johnson (W.R. Johnson & Sons), Patrick Lee (Circle 7 Dorpers), and Chantal Orosco

## Quick recap

The group discussed their recent activities, including the movement of herds, upcoming sales, and new contracts. They also discussed the demand for different cuts of lamb meat, the need to source more lambs, and the potential for expanding their distribution network and partnerships with food hubs and restaurants. The conversation ended with discussions on the importance of grass-fed animals, the potential for lamb sales, and plans for future meetings and membership.

## Next steps

- Patrick to bring 30 lambs ready by May/June.
- Patrick to give Chantal's number to his wife for further communication.
- Chantal to update the website with membership producer bios, videos, and photos.
- All participants are asked to send photos of lamb dishes to Chantal for website and Instagram updates.
- Debra to pick up 20 lambs from Dr. Florian Sanchez in Belen next week.
- James to bring 12 lambs to Fiesta Meats on March 9th.
- Estella to potentially bring 9 lambs earlier than June.
- Chantal to continue reaching out to the Texas Department of Agriculture regarding cross-state partnerships.
- All participants to attend the next quarterly meeting in June.

## **Summary New Members and Upcoming New Mexico Dorper Association Sale**

The group discusses recent activities and introduces new members. Jennifer talks about moving her herd across the highway, while Debra mentions an upcoming sale on March 15th and a new contract with the Navajo Nations (Shiprock) for 1,000 pounds of meat. The group shares experiences cooking green chili stew using a popular recipe. Patrick, a new member from Arizona who owns a transport company, joins the call while driving to Detroit. James Johnson, another new member from Deming who raises Dorper sheep, is also introduced. Chantal, who is feeling unwell, begins to start the meeting.

## **Increased Demand for Sourced Lambs**

Chantal discussed the need to source more lambs due to increased demand from the Navajo nations and Laguna Pueblo. The Navajo nations are contracted to purchase a thousand pounds of meat at a minimum price of \$15 per pound. Monticello also mentioned partnering with a wholesale meat distributor, Beck & Bulow and a food hub in El Paso to expand the distribution network. The plan is to connect with producers across different states to meet the growing demand while simultaneously helping those other producers. However, there are still logistical challenges, such as the distance to processing facilities and the lack of a local USDA plant in El Paso. Chantal discussed the partnership they have for distribution with Zach Withers of Polks Folly Farm and the new potential with Desert Spoon Food hub who travels all the way to Albuquerque once a week.

## **Livestock Processing and Sourcing**

Chantal discussed the issue with the electrical wiring at the New Mexico State University USDA facility, which was causing problems with the opening. She also mentioned her plan to source meat for distribution and discussed partnerships with food hubs to reduce costs. Jason and Estella clarified their livestock breeds, with Estella having only Katahdin and Jennifer having a mix of Dorper, Katahdin, and New Mexico Dahl. Patrick also mentioned his Dorper livestock. Chantal and Debra discussed their successful approach of purchasing animals for \$5 a pound hanging weight from James, who was pleased with the arrangement. Due to the Taste the Tradition/ Grown with Tradition/ Homegrown parameters set forth they need to be sure that the lamb sourced in New Mexico stays within those programs while the meat sourced from Arizona and Texas could be utilized at grocery stores and restaurants who are not under the same programs.

## **Local Business Partnerships**

Debra and Chantal discussed their ongoing business with BomVida, which purchases around \$400 worth of meat monthly, and Toucan Market which is consistently buying 30# of lamb meat every two weeks. Chantal mentioned an upcoming shipment to Ship Rock and the potential for more customers through Desert Spoons Food Hub out of El Paso.

Debra plans to purchase 20 lambs from Dr. Florian Sanchez for the next round in March.

They also discussed their participation in a challenge at the Santa Fe Brewing Company and potential partnerships with local restaurants and Manko food truck Chef Ray Naranjo.

Debra mentioned their group invitation into the El Dorado Farmers Market and other potential opportunities. Chantal highlighted a partnership with Cooking with Kidz and Drinking with Adults, aiming to supply meat for their fundraising gala events in Santa Fe in order to showcase the meat to prestigious chefs and establishment owners in the Albuquerque/Santa Fe area.

One thing that is an ongoing concern that has been voiced to Chantal and Debra is the concern for consistency with a supply. Many of the grocery stores we are now working with have ran into problems with supply consistency in the past.

## **Demand for Lamb Meat and Supply**

The group discusses the demand for different cuts of lamb meat, with stew meat, ground meat, and ribs being the most requested specifically to the Senior Centers on the Reservations. They consider using older sheep (2-3 years old) to meet demand once the lamb supply is exhausted, though this would require updating their state licenses. Chantal reports that their meat processor's capacity has improved, allowing for increased lamb processing. Debra mentions she currently has five freezers full of meat, and they are using a delivery truck nicknamed "lamb chop" for distribution.

## **Lamb Progress and Future Plans Discussed**

The meeting was primarily about discussing the progress and future plans of the group. Chantal mentioned that they were not pushing for membership as hard as they were in January, but it would still be an option for people to join. Debra suggested that the timing of their start might have been awkward due to lambing season. Estella mentioned that she

had thought she would have lambs ready in June, but could potentially bring them sooner to Fiesta Meats. The group also discussed the possibility of bringing lambs to a nearby USDA-inspected facility for processing. Patrick, who is located in Phoenix, offered to transport the lambs to New Mexico, which is still substantially closer than San Angelo. The group agreed to keep each other updated on their plans.

### **Patrick's Sheep Farm**

In the meeting, Patrick discussed his sheep farming business, mentioning that he has about a hundred head of ewes and feeds them straight hay. Chantal and Debra discussed the importance of focusing on grass-fed or hay-fed animals due to the anti-GMO sentiment. They also talked about the Navajo Nation's involvement and the programs through the State of New Mexico. The possibility of expanding to other states and starting chapters was also discussed.

Patrick expressed interest in becoming a member and mentioned his connection with Harry Owens, who would be at the auction on the 15th. The group also discussed the potential for lamb sales at the New Mexico Dorper Association sale on the 15th of March and the importance of showcasing lamb dishes on their social media platforms.

The next quarterly meeting was tentatively planned for the first Saturday in June. Zoom link will be provided prior to the meeting date on the Facebook page.

This was AI-generated and proof-read by Chantal.