

## A Big Prairie Perspective

Mark Meurer, President

It "Hitting is contagious". I used that phrase a lot when I coached baseball for nearly a decade. As hitters gained confidence, it affected everyone up and down the lineup. I also used the phrase "Baseball is a thinking man's game" over and over and over. I insisted that every player knew what he was going to do with the ball before the next batter ever stepped into the box. Thinking ahead and knowing what to do in every situation made us a winning team.

As you know, I love sports and I love raising Polypays. We're at time within our breed association that can best be described as "contagious", and I don't mean spreading viruses! From coast to coast, producers are experiencing the benefits of Polypay genetics and it's become "contagious" in terms of breeding stock sales. The demand for Polypays over the past year or so, has been nothing short of phenomenal! The confidence that producers are showing in our genetics is as great as I've ever witnessed. Even with current low market prices, Polypay genetics continue to be in great demand. I'm expecting this trend to continue (not low market prices!) as more Polypay genetics get utilized in the commercial industry and confidence in our genetics continues to grow. Polypay genetics are contagious, because our results prove that Polypays do pay and should be the foundation of most flocks.

I also believe that raising Polypays is a thinking man's/woman's endeavor. Just like in baseball, we need to be thinking ahead and determining where we want to go as breeders and as an association.

As breeders, we need to be thinking about our customers and what drives them? What can we do as individuals to make our sheep better and meet the demands of the commercial industry? As a true commercial breed of sheep, collecting information, wheth-

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## APSA Board of Directors

<b>Mark Meurer, President</b> 1669 Midway Rd. Ashton, IL 61006 <a href="mailto:meurer66@gmail.com">meurer66@gmail.com</a>	2023-1  815-973-5576
<b>Jeremy Refshaw, Vice-Pres.</b> 1339 290th St. Waubun, MN 56589 <a href="mailto:refshawranch@yahoo.com">refshawranch@yahoo.com</a>	2025-1  218-230-5383
<b>Matt Chadwick, Secretary</b> 200 Shadow Circle Murray, KY 42071 <a href="mailto:chadwicksheepcompany@gmail.com">chadwicksheepcompany@gmail.com</a>	2024-1  270-227-8731
<b>Mark Van Roekel, Treasurer</b> 3891 390th St. Orange City, IA 51041 <a href="mailto:mandbvr@gmail.com">mandbvr@gmail.com</a>	2023-2  712-540-8710
<b>Kayla Inbody</b> 10356 Cty Rd. 30 Dunkirk, OH 45836 <a href="mailto:flinn_13@hotmail.com">flinn_13@hotmail.com</a>	2024-1  419-306-2451
<b>Nicole Jessent</b> 20009 62nd St. McLouth, KS 66054 <a href="mailto:kmewert@embarqmail.com">kmewert@embarqmail.com</a>	2025-1  913-796-6044
<b>Zach Meinders</b> 42645 20th Ave Buffalo Center, IA 50424 <a href="mailto:meinders2@hotmail.com">meinders2@hotmail.com</a>	2025-1  515-320-3835



## *Big Prairie Cont.*

er through on-farm testing or through programs such as NSIP, we need to keep ourselves in the fore-front of continuous genetic improvement. Don't forget, phenotypic selection should never be overlooked. Structural correctness and structural integrity should always be first and foremost in our decision making processes.

As an association, we're thinking ahead to a national sale, expanding our reach to young producers through our Starter Flock program, continuing to support grants and research, such as Dr. Ron Lewis' grant, and increasing our exposure as the premier source of sheep genetics in this country. To do this, we welcome three new board members who will help lead the association for the next few years. Welcome Nicole Jessen of Shady Lane Farms, Zach Meinders of Meinders Stock Farms and Jeremy Refshaw of Refshaw Ranch. Thank you for your dedication and willingness to serve the association! Also, thank you to our retiring board members who poured their hearts into our association. A tremendous thank you to John Anderson, Bryce Freking, and Dr. Kathy Ewert for your vision and leadership over the past few years.

As always, if you ever have questions or just want to chat, please give me a call anytime. It's an honor to serve as APSA president and represent the best sheep producers in the nation!

Respectfully,  
Mark Meurer  
APSA President  
815-973-5576

## **Advertise**

Advertising in the APSA newsletter is available.  
Rates are

Full Page: \$85  
7.5"w x 10"h

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Quarter Page: \$25  
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3.75"w x 5"h

Ads you would like put in the Summer newsletter should be sent to [brettpharo@gmail.com](mailto:brettpharo@gmail.com) by July 15.



## **Starter Flock Winner**

The APSA Board of Directors decided two years ago, that the association needed to do more outreach to young sheep producers who have an interest in Polypay genetics. Under the leadership of Jeremy Refshaw, the board initiated a Starter Flock program designed to get top Polypay genetics into the hands of young producers. Individuals had to apply for the Starter Flock grant, which consists of a \$1000 buying credit, and educate the board on why and how they would utilize Polypay genetics in their flock.

This year's winner of the Starter Flock grant was Nehemiah Stokes of Michigan. He presented a detailed plan and great knowledge of how he would utilize his new genetics. Nehemiah and his family attended the Annual Meeting in Spencer, IA this summer, where Nehemiah and his family were welcomed as new Polypay members. Congratulations to Nehemiah on being selected the 2022 APSA Starter Flock recipient. Starter Flock information can be found at the APSA website.





## Sale Results

2022 has seen an explosion in the number of on-line sheep sales, including many featuring Polypays. Polypay sheep have consistently sold very well, often topping the market. There were also the usual in person sales at Sedalia and Spencer. Below are some data from some of those sales that were open to multiple flocks.

The first sale of the year was the Polypay Proven Ram online sale on February 15. Any proven Polypay rams were welcome to be sold. 8 rams were sold for an average of \$1812. Topping the sale was a UW ram sold by UW for \$3300. The second high selling ram was a Kaeb ram sold by Don Hausser for \$2300.

In March 15, the APSA sponsored a sale, for APSA members and restricted to sheep born between August 15 and November 15. 4 rams sold for an average of \$662, with the top two being consigned by Shady Lane (\$800) and Refshaw Polypay (\$750). 7 ewe lambs sold for an average of \$571. Refshaw Polypay's pen of three ewe lambs brought \$700 each to top the ewes.

Next up, other than private flock sales, was the Midwest Stud Ram Sale in Sedalia on June 16. 4 ram lambs sold for an average of \$875, with L&K Sheep Co. selling the top two at \$1500 and \$1400. L&K also had the top selling ewe lamb, which brought \$800. 6 ewes sold for an average of \$542.

July featured two major sales for Polypays that are on NSIP, and online sale July 11 and the Center of the Nation NSIP Sale on July 30.

In the NSIP online sale, 24 Polypay rams sold for an average of \$1271. High selling ram was consigned by Diamond K and sold for \$4250. Following that were sales by Refshaw Polypay for \$2300 and Van Roekel for \$2100. 22 ewes were sold for an average of \$531. JCC Polypays had the top sellers with one pen of three at \$855 each and a pen of 2 at \$755 each.

The biggest Polypay sale of the year, as usual, was the Center of the Nation NSIP Sale in Spencer. Following our annual membership meeting on Friday night, the sale on Saturday saw strong demand for Polypay genetics. 46 Polypay rams sold for an average of \$1740, and 25 Polypay ewes averaged \$972, easily topping all other breeds present. A whopping 9 Polypay rams brought over \$2000, with 5 reaching at least \$3000. High selling ram, sold by Diamond K, sold for \$5000. Big Prairie sold a ram for \$3600, UW for \$3200, and both Freking and Refshaw for \$3000. JCC Polypays topped the ewe lamb prices with a pen

of three at \$2400 each. Refshaw Ranch sold a pair of ewe lambs at \$1100 each.

In addition to these sales, there have been several private flock online sales that have gone very well. And farm gate sales have remained strong. Demand for Polypay genetics is strong, indeed.

## Carlson Retirement

The Polypay breed was recently informed by John and Colleen Carlson, owners of JCC Polypays, that they were retiring from the Polypay business after years of successful breeding stock production. Because of John and Colleen's dedication to the Polypay breed, a plaque and proclamation were presented to the Carlsons during the 2022 APSA Annual Meeting in Spencer, IA in honor of their service to the Polypay breed and association. Thank you to the Carlsons for years of support and influence within the Polypay breed.



# Genetics Issue Reprint

Brett Pharo

It has been requested that I reprint the Polypay portion of the article/interview that appeared in the August issue (Genetics Issue) of the Sheep Industry News. So, here goes.

Sheep Genetics USA traveled to the upper Midwest to visit with two longtime Polypay and Suffolk breeders. Representing Polypays is immediate past president of the American Polypay Sheep Association, Brett Pharo of Michigan, and speaking for the Suffolk breed is Jeremy Geske of Minnesota, who is currently president of the United Suffolk Sheep Association.

*SGUSA:* Brett and Jeremy, your respective breeds have had a much different history within the United States. Will you briefly describe a little of the history?

*BRETT:* Polypays are a composite breed developed in Idaho as a result of a dream of producer Reed Hulet to create a breed that could produce two quality lamb crops and one wool crop per year, to make sheep more profitable. He shared his dream with his brother Dr. Clarence Hulet, at the U.S. Sheep Experiment Station. There they crossed Finnsheep X Rambouillet and also Dorset X Targhee. Then, in 1970, crossed the resulting animals to create the four-breed composite.

The Polypay breed was developed as a production/performance breed and was the first breed to request cross-flock evaluations from NSIP. The original by-laws of the American Polypay Sheep Association did not allow the showing of registered Polypays in the show ring. In the words of Dr. Hulet penned in 1992, "We have been pleased with the resolve of foundation Polypay breeders who have resisted the attraction of the show ring, which shifts the selection pressure from production to appearance. There seems to be little correlation between appearance and productivity. Thus, when one uses selection opportunities to enhance appearance, one reduces the opportunities to enhance production."

With the rapid early growth of interest in the breed, that prohibition was overturned and for a time much emphasis came to be put on the show ring. In the last several years, though, we have turned that back around and put the emphasis back on production. Now around three-quarters of all registered Polypays come from NSIP flocks.

*SGUSA:* Your breeds hold prominent positions

within our commercial industry, Polypays as a maternal breed and Suffolks as terminal sires. What changes is your breed making to meet demands of those commercial producers?

*BRETT:* The high participation rate of Polypay seedstock producers in NSIP provides commercial producers with the genetic prediction data needed to select breeding stock that are more likely to meet the unique needs of their individual operations. I think commercial operators understand - sometimes better than purebred operators - that when it comes to the EBVs, maximum and optimum are not synonyms. Needs of confinement operations, pasture operations, and range operations are different. The Polypay breed has animals that can meet those varying needs.

The NSIP tool is still but one tool in the genetic toolbox, and Polypay producers continue to do careful phenotype selection, as well. The allure of chasing the highest number can be almost as strong as the allure of chasing show ring awards, so care must be taken to consider the whole genetic package and match it to the need(s) of commercial producers.

Those careful considerations of both phenotype and genotype are being done by progressive Polypay breeders throughout the US.

With their prolificacy, mothering ability, out-of-season and accelerated lambing, and availability of EBVs through NSIP, Polypays have become a foundation maternal breed for commercial producers across much of the country.

*SGUSA:* Genomics is playing a greater and greater role in genetic advancements. What is your breed doing to face those new challenges?

*BRETT:* The APSA has been an active supporter of genomic research. The GEMS research project is underway to work on providing genomic-enhanced EBVs, as well as develop EBVs for more traits, and the Polypay breed is firmly engaged in this. Tissue samples are being collected from participating flocks across the country. Having data come from flocks in the industry - as well as from research flocks - keeps the focus on the needs of the American sheep industry.

