

**Developing a Sheep Marketing Educational Website for Educators and Novice Producers**

Sarah L. J. Thies  
Purdue University  
915 West State Street, LILY 4-401  
West Lafayette, IN 47906  
406-450-2703  
thies0@purdue.edu

Neil A. Knobloch  
Purdue University  
915 West State Street, LILY 3-232  
West Lafayette, IN 47907  
765-494-8439  
nknobloc@purdue.edu

## **Developing a Sheep Marketing Educational Website for Educators and Novice Producers**

### **Introduction/Need for Innovation or Idea**

Over the years, the number of sheep in the U.S. has been declining and factors including inflation have challenged the industry to adapt (American Lamb Board, 2023). Sheep producers are looking to diversify their businesses (USDA, 2020). For example, one of the market outlets for the sheep industry is restaurants, but because of COVID19, producers turned to other options including marketing their products locally (American Lamb Board, 2023). The changing attitudes and values of consumers are also driving a change in the focus of how producers market their products. Consumers want to know where their products come from, producers' stories, and how the product was grown and/or processed (American Sheep Industry Association, 2020). Organizations such as the American Lamb Board (2023) are setting goals and creating funding opportunities to create educational programs and help producers expand their operations and businesses. There are sheep marketing plan materials online, however, the materials often focus on marketing either wool or meat instead of helping producers see their options for marketing multiple products and diversifying their business. Business plan resources for sheep producers available often are handouts to fill out and lack a commentary about the process as well as various examples. The goal of this sheep marketing educational website was to provide short videos that guided producers through the steps of developing a market plan with relevant examples and handouts that they could use, if they desired.

### **How It Works/Methodology/Program Phases/Steps**

A comprehensive instructional design process (Merrill, 2012) was followed to design the educational website. First, a needs assessment questionnaire was developed to produce results that would guide the creation of the website. The needs assessment questionnaire was dispersed through social media, emails gathered from public breed directories, and snowball sampling occurred as well. The needs assessment provided information about the demographics of sheep producers from 41 states including years of experience (range: 1 - 80), operation demographics, marketing experiences, and the resources they used. Results from the needs assessment showed that producers market various sheep products in various ways with the majority reporting off the farm, or directly to consumers. Under other, producers reported word of mouth as a common marketing strategy. In response to the resources producers use, the top five responses were: other producers, periodicals, social media, extension educators, and sheep101.info. When asked what educational resources producers would use, the top five "Would definitely use" responses were: websites, extension educators, an online resource bank, articles / blogs, and YouTube. Second, informed by the needs assessment questionnaire, the Sheep Marketing website is a public website available to sheep producers, educators, and any business person. The videos and content were designed for beginner producers, producers looking to expand their business options, and high school students. The videos are accompanied by study guides and examples and were uploaded through YouTube. Third, for accessibility, the content uses neutral colors, two dyslexia friendly font styles, and word documents with alternative fonts. The website has a page for educators with the aligning national standards and other supporting content for implementation. Fourth, participants from all levels of experience who responded to the questionnaire provided resources they used. The resource page is a library of extension publications, books suggested by other producers, periodicals, university sheep program websites, and other resources for producers. Finally, a questionnaire was adapted from course and teacher evaluation tools

(Curriculum Support Guide, n.d.). Using Qualtrics, the review questionnaire was sent via email to a convenience sample of producers, educators, and industry advocates. The questionnaire targeted the marketing content and briefly covered the accessibility and website navigation.

### **Results to Date/Implications**

The educational website (<https://sites.google.com/view/sheep-marketing/home>) consists of a home page that displays all six of the videos that were developed. From the home page, each video has its own website page with additional resources and industry examples. Based on producer feedback, the website has a resource page that links producers to educational materials. There is a page for educators that outlines the standards the videos address, lists essential questions (if taught as a unit), and extension activities. The resource bank consists of a list with links to 1,350 extension publications, a list of books that producers reported using, a list of sheep industry periodicals, links to university sheep operation social medias and websites, a link to the USDA market report, and links to sheep industry focused podcasts.

We are receiving feedback (on-going) regarding the website from educators, producers, and industry advocates. Preliminary feedback shows reviewers “agree” and “strongly agree” the video content is valuable and beneficial to their application. Reviewers “agree” and “strongly agree” the website is easy to navigate. Based on this, we conclude the educational website will be a useful tool for agricultural and extension educators, producers, and industry advocates.

The content created aligns with a majority of the National ANFR Agribusiness Systems Career Pathway Content Standards (The National Council for Agricultural Education, 2015). The videos and handouts could be utilized by Career and Technical Education (CTE) educators to teach business content using sheep industry examples. The content could also be utilized by Extension educators to help sheep producers and possibly other livestock producers build their businesses as well as help 4-H youth market their projects.

### **Future Plans/Advice to Others**

Future plans are to review the website annually for content updates. Future plans may include exploring an alternative website platform to improve mobile accessibility of the website. To disseminate the information to producers and educators, collaboration with state and national sheep associations and programs and Extension events or journals will be explored. Even though the content targets sheep producers, the marketing content could be applied in other contexts. Industries interested in developing content should conduct a needs assessment for direction.

### **Costs/Resources Needed**

Costs associated with this project included \$25 for a video editing subscription. The website platform, Google Sites, was free to use and create; the creator had to have a Google account. Upkeep is the responsibility of the website owner. Participants needed access to the internet and a connected device. Human resources, time, were a cost associated with the development of the website content (approximately 100 hours for the developer) and the completion of the needs assessment and review assessment (15 minutes and one hour, respectively, for participants). Website users will need access to a device and the internet. Users may also need access to a printer and office supplies if they choose to print the handouts. The resources and content shared with participants are open access.

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