Marketing Lamb and Goat for Holidays

Throughout the year, lamb and goat is often the main course at holiday celebrations for many people.

Because lamb and goat are served for holidays, this creates an excellent opportunity for sheep and meat goat producers to plan their breeding seasons so that they can market their lambs or kids at the proper size for these holidays. The American Sheep Industry has worked with the Department of Agricultural Economics at Texas A & M University and Agribusiness Food and Consumer Economics Research Center to study the non-traditional lamb market in the United States, which includes ethnic consumers. These researchers estimate that "minority populations account for about 58% of the total US lamb consumption and nearly three quarters of minority lamb consumers prepare lamb at home." The Lamb Resource Center now prices information on marketing to ethnic consumers on their website.

If you want to sell lambs to ethnic markets, important considerations include the weight and sex of the animal and the method in which the meat is harvested. For Islamic markets, the meat must be harvested according to halal dietary laws. For Jewish markets, the meat must be harvested according to kosher dietary laws. For both traditions, the animals must be well cared for and treated with respect.

Lambs designated for the ethnic market can be sold at auction or they can be sold directly to the consumer. Keep in mind that state laws prohibit a producer from selling meat unless the animal was processed in a USDA inspected facility. Therefore, the producers should sell lambs live and the customer would make cutting arrangements with the processing facility. Many producers also provide the service of delivering the lambs to a local processing facility. Some buyers may request halal- or kosher-certified processing facilities for their lambs.

Producers who choose to sell for ethnic holidays should plan to sell “intact” lambs in order to garner the highest prices. Intact refers to lambs that have not been altered. The lambs are marketed with tails and males should have their testicles.

Holidays

The dates on which many religious holidays occur vary each year, often depending on the calendar they follow.

- The Gregorian calendar is internationally the most widely used civil calendar. Western Christian holidays follow this calendar.
- Orthodox Christians follow the Julian calendar, which is slightly different than the Gregorian calendar.
- Muslim holidays follow a lunar calendar, which is dictated by the moon. This calendar is about 11 days shorter than the Gregorian calendar.
- Jewish holidays occur at the same time each year on a Jewish calendar. This calendar is also of a different length than the Julian calendar.

The following information discusses some of the holidays that feature lamb and points out the sizes and sexes that should be sold for these markets. A table with holiday dates can be found after the holiday descriptions.
Christian Holidays

Western or Roman Easter
This holiday is a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ three days after his death from crucifixion. Lambs marketed for this holiday should be milk fed and weigh between 30 and 45 pounds. They should also be nicely conditioned, but not excessively fat. The preferred size of goat for this holiday is a milk fed kid that weighs between 20 and 40 pounds: 30 pounds is considered optimum. These kids should carry some condition or fat to reach the prime price categories. Kids that weigh 40 to 50 pounds are often acceptable, but may have a price discount for their larger size. Kids that weigh less than 20 pounds are often thin and are not as acceptable to buyers.

Eastern or Greek (Orthodox) Easter
This holiday also celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but the time is calculated a bit differently and so the holiday often occurs about one to two weeks following the Western Easter celebration. Ideal size for lambs and goats is slightly heavier than the Western Easter at 40 to 55 pounds for lambs and 25 to 50 pounds for kids. Both should also be milk fed.

Thanksgiving
Many religions give thanks after the harvest through special ceremonies. Thanksgiving began in the New England area of United States with the Protestants praying and giving thanks after the fall harvest. Today, Thanksgiving is now observed as a public holiday that features ham or turkey. However, some families prefer a leg or rack of lamb as an alternative meat option. Finished weight lambs, 110 lbs. and heavier, are appropriate to market for this holiday.

Christmas
Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. Lambs and kids should both be milk fed. At this time of year, milk fed lambs and kids are at a premium because ewes and does must breed outside of the typical breeding season. Ideal weights for lambs are 40 to 60 pounds and under 50 pounds for kids.
Islamic Holidays

Eid ul Adha - The Festival of Sacrifice

Eid ul Adha is a celebration that commemorates the Prophet Ibrahim (renamed Abraham) who was willing to sacrifice his son Ismail for Allah. Animals that are sacrificed for this celebration must be Halal. The sacrificed animal is often shared with extended family members and some may be given away to the needy.

Many Muslims will look for an animal that is blemish free. In other words, the animal should not have been docked or castrated and if the animal has horns, the horns should not be broken. In addition, the animal should not have open wounds, torn ears, or be lame. Some Muslims find animals acceptable if they have been castrated with a burdizzo or if the castration wound has completely healed.

Heavier lambs and goats are preferred for this holiday since the meat is shared. Yearling lambs and goats are preferred, but older sheep and goats are also acceptable. Weights of lambs and goats should be heavier than 60 pounds.

Muharram: Islamic New Year

The Islamic New Year is the first day of the Muslim calendar. Mutton is often served as the main course for this holiday meal. There is no preferred weight for this holiday, although animals should appear healthy.

Mawlid al Nabi

Mawlid al Nabi celebrates the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam. There is no specific recommended size for lambs and goats for this holiday.
Ramadan

Ramadan is the start of a month of fasting. It occurs in the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. During this holy month, Muslims will fast (do not eat or drink) from sunrise to sunset. This holiday is in celebration of the revealing of the Qu’ran. It is based on the sighting of the new moon and occurs when the “White Thread Becomes Distinct From the Black Thread,” a poetic description of the coming of a new moon. Based on the lunar calendar, this holiday moves backward 11 or 12 days each Julian calendar year. Ramadan is a time for Muslims to renew themselves spiritually, devote time to Allah, and practice self control. The ideal lamb and goat should be weaned and have all their milk teeth. Lambs should weigh 60 to 80 pounds while goats have an ideal weight of 60 pounds, but weights of 45 to 120 pounds are acceptable. It does not matter if male goats have been castrated. Animals should not be too fat for this holiday.

This holiday is also an excellent time to cull older animals. Both sheep and goats may bring very good prices at this time. However, these animals need to be unblemished.

Eid al Fitr - The Breaking of the Ramadan Fast

The end of the Ramadan fasting period occurs when the next new moon is sighted. For the next three days, Muslims celebrate Eid al Fitr. The celebration is a time for families to be thankful for their many joys and blessings. Consistent with the month of Ramadan, lambs should weigh 60 to 80 pounds and goats should weigh 60 pounds.

Jewish Holidays

Lamb shanks are often served as part of the Seder meal during the Passover celebration. Photo courtesy of American Lamb Board

Pesach - Passover

Pesach or Passover occurs on the 14th day of Nissan, which is the first month of the Jewish calendar. The holiday represents God passing over the houses of the Jews when the firstborn Egyptian sons were killed. Pesach also refers to the lamb that was sacrificed in the Temple. Therefore, lamb is often served for this holiday. Lambs should be milk fed, fat, and weigh between 30 and 55 pounds.
Rosh Hashanah - Jewish New Year

Rosh Hashanah means head of the year in Hebrew and occurs on the first and second days of Tishri. Tishri is the seventh month of the Jewish calendar. During Rosh Hashanah, Jews will review their past year and make plans for changes in the coming year. This would be similar to how Americans make New Year’s resolutions. The front quarters of lambs weighing 60 to 100 pounds are preferred for this holiday celebration.

Chanukkah

Chanukkah (also spelled Hanukkah) is an eight-day festival that is often known as the festival of the lights. It begins on the 25th day of the Jewish month of Kislev. It is known as a celebration that marks the rededication of the Temple when it was taken back from the Greeks. Tradition says that at that time there was very little oil left to burn in the candelabrum known as the menorah. Most of the oil had been defiled and was not usable. Only enough oil was available to burn for one day, although the menorah burned for eight days, the length of time that it took to produce new oil for the menorah. Therefore, the eight-day festival of Chanukkah commemorates this miracle.

Meat consumed during this festival should be prepared through Kosher slaughtering. Young milk-fed lambs and kids are preferred.

Information Sources

Many sources are available to find information on holidays as well as holiday dates. Knowing these dates from year to year is very helpful in planning for breeding times so that you can sell the appropriate size animal for a particular market. The table below lists the dates of various holidays from 2016 through 2019.

Resources

Information was taken from the following resources:

- Sheep and Goat Marketing Information
- Interfaith Calendar Definitions
- Religion Facts - website
- Ethnic Holiday Demand for Lamb and Goat Meat - document
## Holiday Calendar for Marketing Sheep and Goats

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<tr>
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<td>December 25</td>
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