

# A Personal Note

—Ulf Kintzel

September 13th of this year marks my 30th anniversary of coming to the United States. A lot has happened since then in my life, farming or otherwise. This spring, I facilitated another change and what I believe will be my “last act” in farming. Don’t worry, the melodramatic tone may mislead you. I hope to raise sheep for another 15 to 20 years if my health permits it.

I am approaching 60 years of age and the desire as well the ability to take on large projects has diminished. Gone are the days when I, all by myself, farmed well over 100 acres during the summer, grazed many acres off the farm in the fall and early winter, lambled well over 200 ewes in the winter and spring, and bought in many more market lambs to finish during grazing season. At its peak, I once grazed 770 sheep on my farm and adjacent pastures.

Mind you, I have always been a one-man show. That’s okay when the sun is shining and the birds are singing, but it takes its toll when the weather conditions are challenging or when you are ill and must do your work anyway, no matter how achy the body or how high the fever is.

How did I do all of this? I ask myself that very question at times. I do not know. I feel a little worn by now. Since the need to make money has decreased after all debt and mortgages have been paid off, I no longer feel the need that I have to hustle the same way. The cost of making money has become, well, too costly.

That is why my wife and I decided to sell half of the farmland we own to a young Mennonite farmer and his wife. We closed in April. They will raise beef, taking full advantage of the well-established pasture and fencing. I will continue farming the other half. Since I will have fewer acres, the flock will be reduced in size. I will retain just under 100 breeding ewes of my grassfed White Dorper ewes.

Aside from less workload, there are a few additional benefits to downsizing. The biggest advantage is this: as I reduce the size of the flock, I get to do a lot of choice culling. Ewes that have one small flaw or another, e.g. not the best hoof structure, can be culled. I will be able to exclusively retain excellent stud ewes, which are able to produce high quality ewe and ram lambs worthy of being sold as breeding stock. In anticipation of the decision to downsize, I had started marking young breeding ewes with an additional blue tag, which indicates the “perfect” trifecta: twinning (or triplets), fully shedding, and correct hoof structure. Pair these traits with the traits I already have in all my ewes such as meatiness, good mothering, calm disposition, ease of lambing, a high degree of parasite resistance, and, of course, the ability to thrive and excel on pasture. I can now say I have reached my breeding goals. Of course, improvements are always possible. However, any improvement will be on the margins. In short: I am where I wanted to be. That is a pretty good feeling.

What else is of benefit? I still must work my fair share, but it no longer will be the hustle day after day from the start of lambing season in late winter and all the way to the fall to get the daily chores done before I run out of daylight. I hope to get to linger a bit, having more time now to stop and think more often about how to move forward, what bloodlines to retain, which ewes to breed to what ram, and so forth. These are the parts of sheep farming I enjoy most. Aside from that, I get to enjoy some side interests like my small orchard and gardening. It was always about getting it done—pruning, spraying, tilling—you name it. Now I hope I will have time to enjoy all of it a bit more and do it in a timelier fashion. Just picking strawberries will still be up to my wife and youngest son. These berries are far too close to the ground for my stiff body. 🐑

*Raising grass-fed White Dorper sheep is the most enjoyable part of farming for me.*

