

## Marketing your lambs and goat at the Auction

When you sell animals at the auction you should assume you are selling them to the end market or for slaughter. If you want to sell breeding stock or pets, you should advertise them as such on Craig's List or on posters at the feed store or through your breed association. There will be some people at the auction looking to bring home a sheep or goat but most will be buying for the meat market.

There are several types of auctions. Your local weekly auction is most likely geared to selling cull dairy cows. There are sometimes buyers there looking for a few sheep or goats but not much competition to bring up the price. Our local auction in Gouverneur, Empire Livestock, is holding a special graded sale for sheep, lambs, goats and kids. There are several of these types of sales around the state in the fall or at least specific sheep, lamb and goat sales at the appropriate holidays and especially in the fall when most farmers are selling their spring crop of lambs. These special sales are advertised to lamb buyers and can produce some good prices for good animals (the right type for the holiday or time of year and generally good healthy, well fed animals).

There is also a terminal market – a large auction where slaughterhouses and procurement come to buy lambs and goats. Often lambs and goats bought at the local sales are trucked to the terminal market and sold again. Our northeast terminal market is the auction in New Holland, Pennsylvania. They hold lamb sales on Monday and Thursday. You can check the prices at the Cornell Sheep Website ([www.sheep.cornell.edu](http://www.sheep.cornell.edu) – click on “Links” and then on New Holland Monday sale prices). It is also interesting to follow the numbers of animals at the sale.

At the [sheepgoatmarketing.info](http://sheepgoatmarketing.info) (also a link at the Cornell Website) you can look at the ethnic calendar and see what types of lambs and kids are required at which holidays. Plan to send your animals about ten days before the holiday. Just keep in mind that sometimes there are too many animals sent on the holidays and the price can drop or there are so many animals there that it is kind of a zoo to unload.

Another strategy is to hold your lambs until January or February. If your lambs are born later in the year and you have the barn space, this strategy could pay off for you. The supply of lambs is much lower in January, February and March and you can get premium prices for nice lambs at that time of year. Of course, the weather can affect your trucking abilities but if you can't make it one Saturday you might be able to go the next. You could also hold just your smaller lambs that look like they need a little more feed assuming you can come up with enough numbers to make the trucking efficient when it comes time to move them. Trucks/trailers can hold between 50 and 250 lambs depending on the size of the vehicle.

In the past, we have organized some large truckloads of sheep and goats to go to New Holland at various times during the year. Now many producers go ahead and organize the trucking themselves and share trucking with other producers. I am happy to publicize the truckloads to help you recruit if you are setting up trucking or trucking your own and want to fill the trailer. It doesn't hurt to call ahead to either the local auction or the terminal market if you are bringing more than a few head and see if they think it is a good week to do so. They can also recruit buyers if they know what is coming in each week.

Our group normally trucked the animals on Saturday for the Monday sale at New Holland. The animals are more likely to get into good pens with water and hay if they are there before the sale. They will also get graded and sorted ahead of time when the staff is less tired.

There are costs to auction marketing. In direct marketing the cost is usually your time. In the case of the auction it is trucking, yardage, commission and shrink. Trucking will range from 9-18 dollars depending on the size of the truck and how full it is. Yardage is the feed and care for your animals while they are at the sale barn and is usually less than a dollar. Commission runs from 5-9 dollars per head depending on the location. The commission goes to support the staff and buildings at the sale barn. They are handling many lambs and it takes a lot of work to run a good lamb and goat sale.

For most graded sales it is important to deliver your animals the day before the sale with their scrapie tags in place. The scrapie tags are unique to each farm and are free to you. I have the forms you need to fill out and send in to get them from the USDA. It takes a couple weeks so plan ahead! Getting your animals to the sale a day ahead allows the staff to get the grading and grouping done before the sale starts.

Auctions can be a convenient way to sell your lambs and goats if you are too busy or have too many to sell directly to consumers. Using some common sense on timing and the types of animals you send will help you get the most return at the auction. To sum it up, here's a quote from Tatiana Stanton from Cornell University, "There is always a risk with timing, of course, and a lot of how successful you are at marketing at an auction has to do with how many serious buyers the auction has drawn, what supply is like versus demand, and how well your animals fit the market demand."