

FORUM FORUM

This is FORUM. Forum is designed so the members of the sheep industry can communicate with one another. Through Forum, you can talk to anyone involved in sheep — producers, marketers, researchers, administrators, and advertisers, to name only a few. You don't have to say much — a short note will do — or if you like to ramble on, go ahead, and we'll print the interesting bits. If you want to talk about the magazine, write a Letter to the Editor. But if you want to talk about sheep — Write to FORUM.

ROMANOV! WHO NEEDS THEM?

My first reaction to Mr. Pickard's accusations published in the fall issue of Sheep Canada Magazine was to completely ignore them for the following reasons: 1. I did not write the press release which Mr. Pickard did not like. 2. There will always be conservative breeders who would attack any new and progressive development to protect their own interests. 3. Most of Mr. Pickard's allegations and accusations are either untrue or unfounded. The only concern I had was that silence may be interpreted that he is right and that I have nothing to say. That is why I prepared this reply.

1. Mr. Pickard accused me of being biased. One becomes biased if he stands to gain from being biased. I don't have a farm, I don't raise sheep and I don't get commission for selling these sheep. The Romanov for me is a genetic source which I use in my genetic work. That I put much time and effort this year to promote the Romanov is for the simple reason of giving the sheep industry a chance to examine a new breed which may prove advantageous. The policy of Agriculture Canada a few years ago was to dispose of all research animals good or bad by sending them to slaughter. We fought hard to change that policy because we are convinced that Agriculture Canada stations are doing a good job developing animals and technologies for the industry.

2. Mr. Pickard stated that "birth numbers are of no value whatsoever,...it is weaning percentage only which can have any beneficial effect on income." I can't agree more with Mr. Pickard that weaning rate is more important than birth rate when it comes to assessing a herd or a breed, it is difficult though to wean two lambs when one gets only one lamb at birth, so birth ratio is also important. Unlike prolificacy at birth the number of lambs weaned depends greatly on the amount of time, care and effort a breeder is willing to give to his sheep. By giving birth rate I presented an overall 'potential'. What happens at weaning depends on the individual enterprise and it is seldom that two flocks are similar when it comes to preweaning mortality rate.

3. Mr. Pickard wondered about the case of the missing 9974 Romanovs! First I must commend him for his mathematics. In theory I agree that we should have ended with 9974 Romanovs, that is if:

- a) Sheep production is like cars, through assembly lines with fixed rates per minute.
- b) All the lambs that were born survived and were later mated (lamb mortality does occur!).

c) Yearlings produced at a level similar to older ewes (everyone recognizes that prolificacy increases with age).

d) Fertility rates were continuously 100 percent (some ewes eventually remain open).

e) Summer matings were 100 percent successful.

f) No culling occurred.

g) No females were used for growth and carcass evaluation.

h) Unlimited space to house, budget to feed and manpower to handle were available.

The Romanov had to stay five years in quarantine. The space and feed limits allowed at the station for the Romanovs were 400 heads. When this limit was reached, breeding had to be delayed, animals had to be slaughtered and still-fit ewes had to be disposed of. With all these limitations the Romanov herd numbered 561 from 12 ewes in five years not counting lambs which died before weaning or at birth.

4. I never 'discredited' any other breed. As a geneticist I know that each breed has something to offer. I am convinced that no Romanov can ever come close to Mr. Pickard's Suffolks in growth rate and carcass quality, but when it comes to age at sexual maturity, length of breeding season and prolificacy, a young Romanov yearling can out perform any Suffolk or Hampshire.

5. I know that progressive well informed breeders can make miracles with whatever breed they have. How many breeders of that kind exist in Canada now? If they are numerous, then why did Canada have to import \$30 million worth of lambs and mutton last year?

6. I stand by my statement that Romanovs have the 'potential' of doubling production over any other British breed presently in Canada. When I refer to a breed I count the average of the whole population of that breed, good and bad. My reply to Mr. Pickard's example of his exceptional ewe No. TAG 75 which gave five lambs, is that exceptional Romanov ewes gave up to nine live lambs, still not far from double.

7. The reply to why the Romanovs were not on ROP program is simple, Agriculture Canada stations are not in the market to compete with private breeders. Their mandate is to conduct research. The results of this research are published in scientific journals and presented at scientific meetings, where the audience and judges are the world scientific community. The results of the Romanov experience at Lennoxville were presented at the 3rd World Congress of Genetics Applied to Livestock

Production held in July 1986 in Nebraska and were published in its proceedings Vol. 9, page 559. The performance of Romanovs in ROP programs will be available shortly after the Romanov breeders start subjecting their animals to these programs.

8. Mr. Pickard stated that no documentations on the Romanov were available and my "claims have not been substantiated and perhaps never will be". My reply is did he read Sheep Canada Magazine vol. 1, no. 3, pages 39-41, vol. 6, no. 3, pages 3-7, vol. 9, no. 2, page 17 or vol. 10, no. 1, pages 3-4. Did he read Canada Agriculture vol. 27, no. 2, pages 4-7. In all these articles for English speaking readers I wrote about Romanovs and their performance. If this is not documentation I wonder under what heading do they fall? And what more can one do?

9. Before talking about lowest and highest breeds I think a definition is in order. Is Finnsheep considered a Canadian breed or not? If yes, then I apologize for the error, I can't claim that Romanov would double the performance of Finnsheep. A point which I feel important to mention in this context is that in Canada we have about 400,000 ewes on farms. How many of these are on ROP programs? Twenty percent? Of course the breeders submit their best animals to the test. Promotion, reputation, costs, etc. are some of the reasons why not all the 400,000 ewes are on the test. This means that only the elites are tested. My average of 2.85 for the Romanovs is for ALL animals those which gave one lamb as well as those which gave five. Had I given the average of the best 20 percent of the Romanov herd to compare with other breeds, then I could be called biased and misleading.

10. No one denies that it is the responsibility of the breeders to improve the sheep they raise and many are very successful in doing just that. The duties of a research organization is to demonstrate the techniques and explore the possibilities. If the producers want to make their experience and achievements public, it is their privilege. How come no one ever heard about the super herds of Mr. Pickard and Mr. Trentham before?

11. "Mother Nature" created the pigs and cattle with a short and limited season of sexual activity exactly as it is now with sheep. Through proper breeding and research, these two species can now breed at any time of the year and research within Agriculture Canada is presently trying to do the same with sheep. If we were to be contented with what mother nature gave us we would not use A.I., embryo transfer, synchronization of estrus, cloning etc. Nature gave sheep two teats, yes, but when she found that in prolific breeds (which nature created), these are not sufficient, ewes with 4 teats started emerging. One finds these sheep often within the Finn and Romanov breeds. Likewise, when mother nature found out that in Chinese pigs the number of piglets born is much more than the number of teats, pigs with 20 teats started appearing. In Finland scientists are trying to fix this character, so Finnsheep will all have four functioning teats one day. We are trying to do the same thing here with our Romanov herd. Adopting Mr. Pickard's philosophy of "two teats equals

two lambs, who needs more", means that: one should stick to old traditions, ignore research, forget progress and live in the past.

Finally, I wish to thank Mr. Pickard for referring me to the article on multiple births, I'll reread it again. My vision and methods may differ from those of my colleagues, but we all work for one purpose which is to make Mr. Pickard and other breeders who feel the same way more prosperous and successful. I also suggested that he reads my "biased" articles on the Romanov, who knows, he might change his mind and become a Romanov breeder himself.

As for the Romanov sheep in Canada, my role of promoting and defending it is over, I let the breeders who bought them and are satisfied with their performance, reply to Mr. Pickard's allegations.

*M. H. Fahmy, Geneticist
Agriculture Canada
Lennoxville Research Station*

I read with interest the letter from Mr. Lloyd Pickard - regarding the Romanov, and his comments on what he believes were bias statements by Dr. M. H. Fahmy.

Firstly, he has caught this SHEEP CANADA reader without any knowledge of a 'press release' about the Romanov Sale. Maybe SHEEP CANADA should have printed this particular press release so readers could know exactly what Mr. Pickard found so disturbing.

In defence of the Romanov, I feel it is necessary to show the performance of our own Romanov, which we bought from the Lennoxville Tender.

The five day trip from Quebec took its toll. One ewe had to be destroyed in Regina. So seven ewes and two rams found their way to North Eastern Alberta. These 7 ewes gave birth to 23 lambs, 3 were stillborn. Twenty lambs survived with impressive vitality and vigour. Our 3 year old had quadruplets (2 stillborn), two 2 year olds had quadruplets and triplets. Four yearlings had one set of quadruplets, two had triplets and one had twins. A live lambing and weaning lambing percentage of 285 percent and over half of the flock yearlings.

The lambs were raised with access to creep feed and we did supplement the quadruplets with a bottle. The ewes with triplets had no extra help, they were all fed on a high plane of nutrition.

On the Alberta Agriculture Home Test (ROP) this is how they've grown:

	Range	Average
Birth Weight	1.7 to 2.5 kg. 3.75 to 5.5 lbs.	2.1 kg. 4.6 lbs.
Adjusted 50 day	20.9 to 27.2 kg. 46 to 60 lbs.	24 kg. 53 lbs.
A. D. G. 0 - 50 days	210 to 314 gr. 0.46 to 0.69 lbs.	277 gr. 0.61 lbs.
Adjusted 100 day	30.9 to 40.5 kg. 68 to 89 lbs.	35 kg. 77 lbs.
A. D. G. 50 - 100 days	225 to 387 gr. 0.5 to 0.85 lbs.	270 gr. 0.60 lbs.

Comparing our results with the National 1984 summary; our lambing percentage of 328 percent is more than 100 better than any breed listed, and 150 more than all breeds except Finns. Our mortality rate of

13 percent seems to be average and we feel with their move so late in pregnancy, this was higher than it should be. Our 100 day weights compare favourably with most breeds, only Suffolk and Hampshire are significantly higher. Our ADG of 0.27 kg (.6 lb.) is also equal the average of all breeds listed. Our top ram grew as well as the average Suffolk on ROP. We're proud and impressed with all that they've shown us.

We are not about to challenge any breeds for growth rate, but that is not the Romanov's strength. Rather a combination of prolificacy, vitality, early maturity, motherability and out of season breeding. The Romanov and its crosses are an excellent maternal type for meat production.

We think that for our 120 pound ewes to produce nearly double their own weight of lamb in 100 days is truly amazing.

Lastly, I cannot help but comment on Mr. Pickard's reference to an article on artificial rearing (SHEEP CANADA Winter 1984). It appears Mr. Pickard was trying to imply that rearing lambs artificially was uneconomical and not worth the time or effort. The article he referred to was in fact stating the complete opposite. Mr. Pickard's entire quotation was misleading and taken completely out of context. The authors of that article were referring to weaning ages of artificially reared lambs. Weaning at 28 days as opposed to 35 days, was in their estimation recommended. The entire article, in fact, refers to the benefits and methods of rearing lambs artificially.

It has been said before that these extra lambs make the mortgage payments. I couldn't agree more.

*Tom Makowecki
Hi Lo Hills Romanov
St. Paul, A.B.*

As the Romanov is a new breed on Canadian farms I thought your readers would be interested in their performance to date on our farm.

We purchased 16 ewes in the spring of 1986 from Agriculture Canada. Eleven of the 16 were less than one year of age and all of them have lambed since their arrival at our farm.

They gave us a 2.69 lambing percentage without any lambing difficulty. The ewes mothering ability was very impressive as was the hardiness of their lambs. Some of the ewes were bred back and we are expecting more lambs in November.

The lambs on ROP gained at an average of rate .67 lbs. per day and at 100 days, each ewe had produced an average of 180 lbs. of lamb.

They proved to us to have many important characteristics of a maternal breed and the excellent rate of gain they've demonstrated is certainly a bonus.

As there is a trend in the sheep business today of developing a productive maternal line of sheep to cross with a sire line to produce market lambs, I am confident that there is a valuable place for the Romanov in the sheep industry in North America.

*Dana Vader
Cherry Valley, Ont.*

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