

# Livestock Efficiency

Improving New Mexico Sheep Industry

Can SAMM's Help?

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South African Meat Merino's (SAMM) were originally the German Mutton Merino. The breed was imported into South Africa in 1932 after which the breed was extensively selected for wool production. The result was a dual purpose breed noted for its heavy muscle and acceptable wool qualities. Cloete and Durand (2000) reported that SAMM lambs were 9 pounds heavier at weaning than their Merino counterparts and 24 pounds heavier at 18 months of age. These same scientists reported that SAMM fleeces were lighter in weight, lower yielding, shorter in staple length compared to Merino. Also the average fiber diameter was 21.8 microns for SAMM vs. 20.3 microns for Merinos. So, under New Mexico range conditions, will the increased lamb weight offset the decreased value of the wool making SAMM an effective alternative for New Mexico sheep producers? Ewes from the NMSU Corona Range and Livestock Research Center (CRLRC) were selected for an AI program involving SAMM ram semen. Selected ewes were estrually synchronized with progesterone pessaries. At 54 h post pessary removal, ewes were either artificially inseminated (intrauterine) with SAMM semen or were placed in a natural mating program using the grade Rambouillet rams from the CRLRC flock. Prior to the expected date of the onset of lambing, ewes were brought into a trap close to headquarters to facilitate identification and data collection. As ewes lambed, lambs were identified with their dams and individually eartagged, birth weight and

gender recorded. After all ewes had lambed and data recorded, ewes and lambs were moved back to their original pastures. Lambs were marked in early July and weaned in early October. Following weaning, SAMM cross and control lambs were taken to the NMSU campus where they were housed and fed together. Lambs were shorn in January and wool samples were collected and sent to Texas AgriLife Research Center, San Angelo for analysis. Yearling weights were recorded in May. Since the numbers are very small, statistical analyses were not conducted. SAMM cross lambs were 4% heavier at weaning and 16% heavier as yearlings. SAMM cross fleeces were 20% heavier, 5% lower yield and similar in length. The average fiber diameter was greater (6 microns) for SAMM cross than the control rams. In conclusion, SAMM offers a viable alternative for New Mexico sheep producers. SAMM should produce heavier lambs with minimal impact on the wool length, weight and diameter. However, before recommending SAMM to the NM sheep industry, more SAMM rams need to be tested over a larger number of ewes.