

The Face of Agriculture

Ulf Kintzel

White Clover Sheep Farm Yates County Farm Bureau

How did you become involved in agriculture?

I worked as a teenager during summer recess at a sheep farm after having seen a sheep barn with sheep at age 13 and being fascinated by it. I then did an apprenticeship as a shepherd for two years and then worked many years as a shepherd at different sheep farms.

What is the background of your farm?

I came in 1995 to the U.S. at a tender age of 28, seeking adventure and wanting to make money. I did sheep herding training in New Jersey at first and created White Clover Sheep Farm. Over the years I wanted to get more and more back to my roots and ended up in the Finger Lakes area, buying a larger farm to raise more sheep.

Can you describe your operation?

I raise 200 White Dorper ewes and a couple of dozen Kiko goats on 100 acres of pasture. My flock is one hundred percent grass-fed. I sell freezer lamb and supply a vendor (Finger Lakes Farms) with grass-fed lambs. In addition, my sheep shed and don't need shearing. I sell breeding stock (ewe and ram lambs) to those who don't want to feed grain and want to pasture instead and who don't want to be burdened with shearing. There is a huge demand for both grass-fed and shedding sheep. I don't keep up with demand. I also still do some herding dog training.

How has your industry changed since you started?

It has changed a lot over the last 20 years. I don't remember a better time being in the sheep business here in this part of the country (not counting the 1850s since I wasn't around back



then). Demand is high, prices are high, supply does not meet demand, not even close. I am now getting twice as much money for my lamb as I did 20 years ago.

What is the biggest challenge facing the sheep farming industry?

Too many people wanting to hold on to the status quo and complaining about competitors from elsewhere, wanting government protection instead of seeking innovation. Fact is, I can't compete against lamb from New Zealand and

Australia. So I don't try. I fill two different niches that my colleagues from down under cannot fill, so we all get to live and make money.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

"The thing I like the most about my job is that I like my job," to quote Chris Matthews. It would be hard for me to single anything out that I enjoy the most. I like having animals. I always liked sheep more than any other domestic animal. I enjoy working with dogs. I like being out in nature. It is indoors that I don't like much. My job has little to do with indoors. Perhaps I like that the most?

With so many young people interested in farming—what advice would you give to them?

Be willing to learn any craft the hard way. Don't start by jumping from conference to conference or from pasture walk to pasture walk. Don't start by going from farm visit to farm visit. Instead, start at the bottom working for somebody. Do all the lousy chores so that one day you have an appreciation of the good ones. Understand that it takes years or even decades to master a craft. Don't think for a moment this is easy. The rewards can be tremendous one day.

Why is farm bureau important to you?

Like it or not, the political reality is such that in this day and age one needs to have a lobby to be heard. Yet, I have my share of disagreements with Farm Bureau. I turned to a longtime active Farm Bureau member and told him all about my grievances. He agreed with all of them but then pointed out the cases where Farm Bureau has been and can be of help for small farmers like me. I suppose he is right. With suburban folks moving in on all of us but not all of them always being fair to farmers I have the feeling I may need Farm Bureau one day myself.