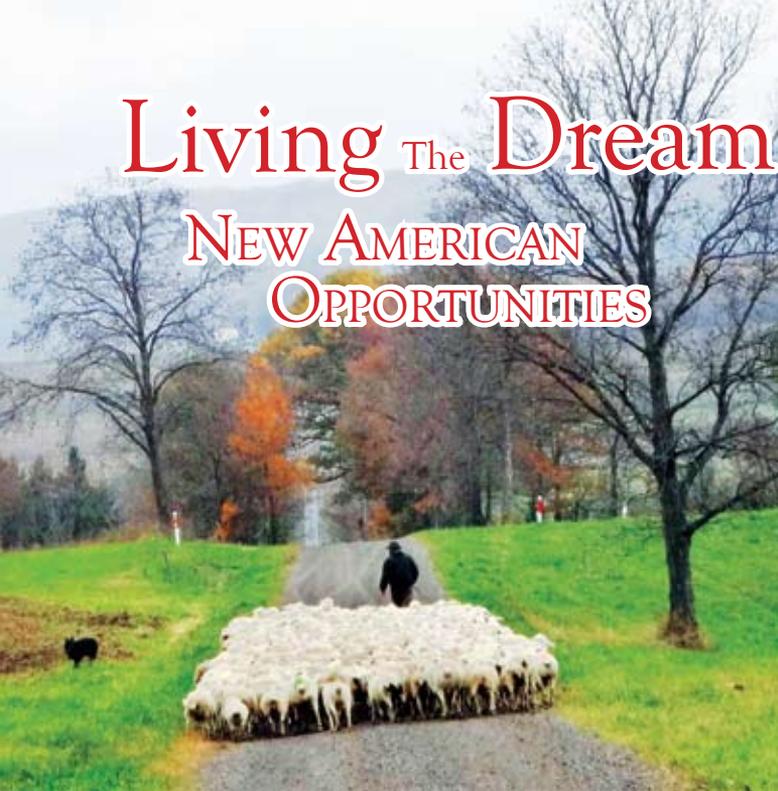


**Living The Dream:
New American Opportunities
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Living The Dream

NEW AMERICAN OPPORTUNITIES



Moving the sheep is “a walk in the park” with proper “tending” dogs.

BY ALAN HARMAN

Nestled in the gently rolling countryside of upstate New York’s western Finger Lakes region is a sheep farm combining German efficiency with American ingenuity to create a successful business model based on Dorper meat and livestock production and sheep dog training.

Here at White Clover Sheep Farm, outside Rushville, 105 miles east of Buffalo, Ulf Kintzel concluded his long educational and philosophical journey that started three decades ago in East Germany.

His attraction to sheep farming began behind the Iron Curtain when as a 13-year-old he saw his first sheep barn and subsequently talked his way into a summer recess job at that farm.

Getting Into Sheep

In 1984, Kintzel began a two-year apprenticeship to become a shepherd and then worked full-time as a government-registered professional, working on a farm until 1989.

A year after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, he moved to West Germany where he worked on several sheep farms. In all, Kintzel spent 11 years tending flocks with 1,000 sheep on average in places such as the legendary Black Forest area under the transhumance farming system—the seasonal movement of people with their livestock between fixed summer and winter pastures.

Kintzel then went to college, graduating with an agricultural engineering degree.

He moved to the U.S. in 1995, and today all that work is paying off—he is living the American rural dream.

He and his family have a successful 126-acre farm, a flock of 250 quality White Dorper ewes and a mortgage that keeps the local bank manager happy.

Kintzel lives in a tourism mecca, complete with pristine lakes, gorgeous waterfalls, magnificent parks and charming villages that is home to more than 100 wineries and a range of award-winning wines.



White Clover Farm is located in New York’s picturesque Finger Lakes region.

His sheep graze on pasture from spring through fall and are fed with hay in the winter. The ewes are a mix of purebred and percentage ewes, and Kintzel is gradually upgrading the stock as he aims for a fully purebred White Dorper flock.

The sheep are tended by German Shepherd dogs and guarded by a Great Pyrenees and a recently added Akbash, a Turkish breed well-known as a livestock guardian dog.

Kintzel’s advice for people seeking to get into the sheep business?

“Get experience. Work hard. Work for a good sheep farmer. Don’t look for a silver bullet. There isn’t any. Don’t think you can learn it by hopping from one conference to another.”

Experience, he says, must be made; it cannot be learned vicariously. “Expect to have to work hard for many years before you get good at a thing or two.”

Kintzel also is working to see new entrants get an educated start. He is a prolific writer on sheep-farming methods.

“I write from my own experience, although I may at times make a reference to research results,” he says.

In Germany, Kintzel worked mostly with Merino Landrace sheep, as well as German Blackfaced mutton sheep.

He says the differences between sheep farming in Germany and the U.S. are too many to enumerate. “The one thing they have in common is this—they are both hooked on grain.”

But Americans can learn from the German system.

“I believe in the use of winter forage, using residue from other farmers’ fields after harvesting—whether it is hay fields, sugar beets, corn, or regrowth of small grain after harvest,” he says. “All that and more is utilized by sheep farmers in Germany by using dogs and electric netting. It extends the grazing season enormously.”

Breeding For Profit

Kintzel opted for White Dorsers for his U.S. farm because he saw a market for farmers wanting sheep that don’t need shearing.

“I sheared sheep in New Jersey, and for almost all sheep owners it was an unwelcome expense,” he says. “I thought, ‘What if I can sell them sheep that don’t need shearing?’ But I also wanted meaty sheep, and I wanted sheep that can thrive on pasture without grain feeding.”



Trained dogs of “tending” bloodlines in the German Shepherd breed are expected to herd, protect and keep sheep within the confines of even unfenced grazing paddocks.

“I came to realize the many other benefits of Dorper sheep only after I already had them.”

Kintzel’s first property, also called White Clover Sheep Farm, was in Sussex County, New Jersey, but in 2006, family and sheep in hand, he moved north.

“We moved farm and flock to Upstate New York since we saw no future in New Jersey.

“New Jersey became too urban, farm land too expensive, the infrastructure for farming became worse and worse, and last but not least, people started being annoyed by various farm practices.”

Kintzel operates to green principles but is not certified organic.

“Certified organic brings me more paperwork and higher costs—it does not seem to bring a higher price for my product,” he says. “I am grass-fed and I have grazing genetics.

“This is why people seek me out. Grazing genetics that shed are in short supply. I have them. Organic is not something that would enhance my sales, although most of my practices are organic.”

White Clover Sheep Farm sheep, on the hoof or off the hook, are very much in demand,” Kintzel says.

“I sell a lot of breeding stock, ewe lambs and ram lambs alike. This amounts to almost half of all my sales.”

Market lambs are sold mostly directly, but he also sells to a vendor, Finger Lakes Family Farms, and food company Dole & Bailey.

“Both re-sell my lamb in areas such as New York City and Boston at stores and restaurants,” Kintzel says. “Restaurants use my product, but they buy through a vendor.

“My specialty is growing and finishing lambs on pasture and pasture alone for custom butchering. Eating grass, legumes and herbs is the natural way for sheep. It creates a truly superior eating experience and produces a healthy meat as well.”

Meat from pastured lambs has less total fat, less saturated fat, less cholesterol and fewer calories, he adds. It has more vitamin E, more beta-carotene, more vitamin C and even more importantly, two health-promoting fats: omega-3 fatty acids and conjugated linoleic acid (CLA).

“The sheep are specifically selected to thrive on forage. In addition, many favor the mildly flavored meat that doesn’t even remotely remind you of mutton,” Kintzel says.

His lambs are also guaranteed to be antibiotic and hormone free.

The farm does have Internet sales through its WhiteClover-SheepFarm.com website.

“It is hard to pinpoint the percentage since people don’t hear from you from just a single source,” he says.” But I would say that I sell less than 10 percent on the website. My articles in various magazines and word-of-mouth lead most people to me.”

Sharing Knowledge

Kintzel’s on-farm research and knowledgeable reputation has spread throughout the country.

“On occasion I am invited to speak at a conference or at a school or college,” he says. “I myself don’t offer any courses. I write articles.”

Kintzel’s flock was born on the farm, and he continues to work on its genetics, including its shedding ability.

“It would be rather arrogant to say that I don’t seek to improve anything,” he says. “However, I am very happy with the genetics I have. For the most part, I am trying to get that quality across the board and throughout the entire flock.

“I produce meaty sheep without any grain feeding. Grass-fed and grazing genetics are in high demand. That these sheep shed is an extra plus.

Kintzel purchases rams that suit his needs.

“That is no easy task,” he says.” I am in need of new rams now. The next rams will be coming from Lewis White Dorsers bred at Black Canyon Ranch near Bonanza, Oregon.



White Clover Sheep Farm is a sole-operator venture.

Ask how many people he employs and the reply is standard: “Me, myself, and I,” he says.” I needed somebody stupid enough who doesn’t mind working weekends, after hours, and who doesn’t ask for overtime pay.”

Kintzel says everybody makes mistakes when starting up their first farm.

“I surely made my fair share. I believe my biggest mistake was to graze initially too short in order to ‘clean things up.’ I learned later that residual is very important.”



Move sheep while there's still enough pasture residue to encourage rapid regrowth and rebuilding of plants. Sheep need to look—and be—full, never empty, on all-grass diets.

Sheep that lamb in the winter are put in the barn, the rest stay outdoors but have a shed available when the weather is nasty.

“I don't have predator problems because I have guard dogs running with the sheep,” he says. “Coyotes are around, but stay away from my sheep.”

It helps that Kintzel has a thriving German Shepherd dog-training operation on his property.

Training Dogs and Dog Owners

He trains dogs in the U.S. to the “tending” style called HGH, which was developed in Germany and other European countries. Basically, “tending” means the dogs not only help move the sheep when a change of pasture is needed, but also continually patrol the perimeter of the area where sheep are temporarily grazing, keeping the flock out of roads and crops, while in

addition guarding them from predator threats.

HGH is the abbreviation for herdengebrauchshund or Herding Utility Dog.

He started teaching the HGH tending style in 1995 after first competing in events in 1987. Since 1997, Kintzel has held an annual HGH herding competition and in 2000, he helped found the first U.S. HGH Herding Club, a member of the United Schutzhund Clubs of America, now the hosting club for his competition.

Kintzel breeds German Shepherds under the kennel name vom Quasliner Moor.

His popular training program is designed for the committed handler who wants to have a dog gain an HGH herding title. The dogs must be from designated tending breeds that (in addition to German Shepherds) include all varieties of Belgian sheep dogs, Briards and Beaucerons.

Border Collies and breeds working in a similar style are not suitable.

“I myself train no more than one at a time, but I have five or six students at any given time who train their dog with me as their instructor,” Kintzel says. “These students do it to work with their dogs. They are not sheep farmers.”

He also does instinct tests to help owners decide if a dog is suitable to work with sheep and then watches how things develop during training. Some dogs wash out. Training is done individually.

“It takes a year or two to train a dog, depending on the handler,” Kintzel says, adding that the qualities a sheep-handing dog needs are good nerves and a desire to work for its handler.

Kintzel's sheep-dog herding trial is patterned after those in Central Europe and is held at the farm once a year in October.

“The trial is public and we welcome spectators,” he says. “It's a German herding trial with 200 or more sheep. The judge is flown in from Germany.”

Getting There From Here

Kintzel credits his farming success to good mentors, friends and other people who helped him along the line, including one who died 11 years ago after helping him move to the U.S.

“I had farmers giving me a break,” he remembers. “The first winter I got hay from one farmer and was not able to pay until later that following year as I had just



Ulf Kintzel and wife Barbara. Front row from left to right: daughter Sarah and sons Lech and Johann.

started my business. He took the risk and let me have the hay.

“The point is that you can never make it just yourself with just hard labor and will and skill and determination. The notion of the ‘self-made man’ who does it all himself is bogus. There are always people along your way who help you and without those you don't make it.

“I also have a lot of experience, worked on many different farms and have been doing so for 30 years now,” he says. “And I always think first before I do anything.”

On the other hand, Kintzel twice took substantial risks, first when he left East Germany and then when he moved to the U.S.

“I came with all my belongings: three dogs and two suitcases,” he says. “I must mention my wife, Barbara, who also took that risk when she came all by herself as a young girl from Poland.

“She too knows that success only comes with hard work and some risk taking. Together, we live the American dream which we find alive and well; working hard, not spending much money, and being able to live the life we want to live.”

The next big step forward with his business plan?

“Paying off our mortgage for our peace of mind,” Kintzel says. “Every extra dollar goes towards that.”

And this, too, is part of the American dream. ♪



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