

"The graphics and story development were the reasons this entry was selected as the winner as they really stood out."

- 2019 Iowa Newspaper Association Better Newspaper Contest

Northeast Iowa Farmer



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Megan Bierschenk and family work to provide quality lambs for area 4-H and FFA members

When people think of agriculture and farming in Iowa, crops like corn and soybeans and livestock like cattle and pigs come to mind. Near Nashua Megan Bierschenk and her family have been raising and selling club lambs since 2019. The family has been very involved in 4-H and FFA, and Megan explained the family raised sheep as she grew up that her siblings and herself showed along with cattle, hogs and horses.

The club lamb operation started with less than 10 ewes and one ram, and now they are on their fourth year and up to 46 ewes and two rams. In 2020, Megan had the opportunity to take over as the Chickasaw County 4-H and FFA sheep and meat goat superintendent position for the Chickasaw County 4-H and FFA Achievement Show. This was when they decided to expand the club lamb operation in hopes of growing the program with the county by being a local source for high quality, affordable show stock which would do well at the county fair for exhibitors. The sheep are all crossbred and are primarily crosses between Hampshire and Suffolk.

"We have had numerous county fair winners and are now not only selling lambs in Chickasaw County but around the state and neighboring states," commented Megan. "Education is also a big part of my goal with the business especially for new exhibitors. We have put on a sheep and goat show-

ing clinic for the past two years in the fall for exhibitors, not only in Chickasaw County but other counties, [who] can come and learn about what all goes into these projects and how they can be successful.

"I also implemented a livestock lending program in our county for sheep where exhibitors that might want to see what it's like to have lambs but might not have the means to keep them yet. They can come out to the farm, work with them and learn about them throughout the summer and then get the opportunity to show them at the fair. This has been successful with our Clover Kids."

A typical day caring for and working with the sheep depends upon the time of year and helping care of the sheep is a family affair with Megan, her fiancé, son and parents all helping especially during lambing season. The months of December and January are busy as lambing for all the Bierschenk Club Lamb ewes is during those two months. Megan explained they CIDR their ewes so they will all lamb close together in a certain timeframe and they will also artificially inseminate (AI) a handful every year to outside rams to help improve the genetics in the flock.

"During lambing, we have a heated barn so when the ewes are close we will move them into the heat so we won't have to worry about the lambs freezing," she stated. "We have cameras in all our barns to monitor when they go into labor so we can move them into the lambing jugs to bond with their lambs for a day or two. Once they are a few days old we will tag, band and vaccinate and kick them out to the big barn. The lambs will be on creep feed and hay within a few weeks. The ewes are on feed and alfalfa hay during lambing and lactation."

Megan described the lambing jug as a 4x5 pen to promote bonding between the lambs and the ewes, and they will strip the mother's teats to ensure they have adequate milk and help get the lambs started nursing. If the mothers fail to produce milk, they will then start the lambs on a bottle and sell them as bottle lambs if needed.

After eight weeks the lambs are on full feed and are old enough to be weaned, and February and March is the selling time period. Megan explained they will have open houses during this time for exhibitors to come and pick out their lambs, and all lambs are sold by private treaty each year. The lambs will be handled a little bit as well as having pictures taken for advertising purposes.

The April through June timeframe consists of shearing and working with any lambs which might stay on the farm for the lending program. A professional sheep shearer is hired to shear all the ewes and rams in early April before it becomes too hot and the animals go out to pasture. Once the ewes are on pasture, Megan stated they don't receive any grain for a while but will still get mineral and fat tubs to keep their condition at an acceptable level.

"I will shear any lambs we have myself and if any of our customers need help learning how to I will also provide that service to them. The lambs that are in the lending program will get broke to lead, exercise to build muscle, leg wool worked with to enhance wool growth and work with on bracing and setting up," she added.

The months of July and August consists of breeding and



Megan Bierschenk (right) works with a Clover Kid and his family as she teaches them how to prepare the lamb for show. (Photo submitted)

county fair and state fair time. Preparing the ewes for breeding includes some vaccinations, inserting CIDRs and giving shots along with increasing feed ration in addition to the pasture grass they are on to make sure the animals are in good condition. Megan will also help shear and fit lambs for any exhibitors who might need some help or the Clover Kids lambs they have on the farm for the summer. They will also try to attend not only the Chickasaw County 4-H and FFA Achievement Show but any fair they can in which their lambs are showing in.

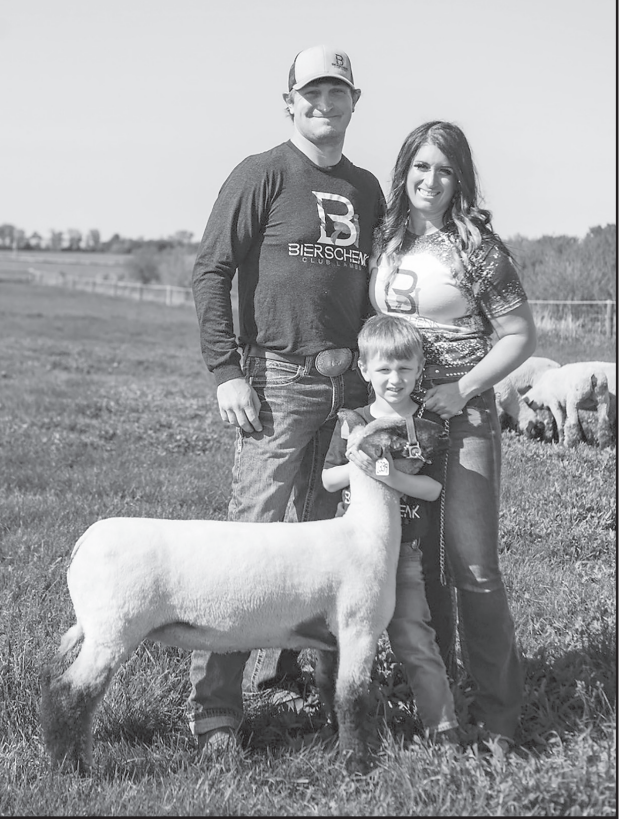
"We will breed from the middle of July through August. Starting with our AI group and then turning in our rams to cover any which didn't take plus our live cover ewes," explained Megan. "A sheep gestation period is around 150 days so they will start lambing in the beginning of December. We CIDR all our ewes so they will lamb in groups all around the same time periods."

When breeding for club lambs, Bierschenk Club Lambs looks for ewes and rams which will give a complete show lamb look. Megan commented this means lambs which are flashy looking, have a powerful wide rear and adequate leg wool, are thick shallow chested, big bones and have an extended front.

There have been achievements Bierschenk Club Lambs has experienced including grand champion market lamb and breeding ewe in Chickasaw County with both animals participating in the Northeast Iowa Showdown and the Butler County grand champion breeding ewe which was a participant in the Central Iowa Showdown. Their lambs have also been named grand champion blackface market lamb, reserve champion breeding ewe and reserve champion breeding ram in Chickasaw County, reserve champion breeding ewe in Floyd County and reserve champion breeding ewe in Washington County, Neb.

Along with achievements, there have also been challenges Megan and her family have faced in raising club lambs. She stated as with any livestock disease and keeping all animals healthy is always a challenge and each year they come up with new ways to make the operation more efficient and less manual labor on themselves. This has included setting up working chutes and getting a square bale hay grapple.

(Continued on page 8)



Megan Bierschenk (right), her fiancé Tj Kofron and son Ashton Olson, along with her family, work together to provide quality show lambs to area 4-H and FFA members and have been doing so since 2019. (Photo submitted)

A Look at Agricultural Law...

By Patrick B. Dillon, Attorney

The government stops here

Okay, that would be a fun place to find. Realistically, government is all around us and we are subject to a dizzying array of rules, regulations, codes and taxing schemes. It is unescapable. We can only seek to have less government, the nil state is a nirvana which just isn't likely to happen, no matter how many motions some litigants file.

One thing which can be done is chip away at the breadth and scope of what we agree government can do. That is the heart of the issue in the Sackett case regarding the reach and depth of the EPA's ability to regulate conduct of landowners when water is involved.

That water the EPA seeks to regulate has come to be known as WOTUS (Whoa TU US), short for Waters of the United States. The federal government, seeing everything from a federal point of view, took the position if the water touches the water they clearly have control over then they get to have control over that water too. The landowners disagreed. The U.S. supreme court, in another ruling which reminds me of middle schoolers forced to work together on a group project, gave some guidance on the issue, which was, hey Feds, it isn't as far as you think it is. But we are still not going to say exactly what because one of our group members had an orthodontist appointment and she had that paragraph. (Okay, the last part is hyperbole, all of middle schoolers...er Supreme Court Justices... participated and still puked out a murky, muddy ruling).

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Why isn't it clear on where the federal government stops and where state, county and local governments get to say what is what? Easy, because our representatives passed vague laws with no clear guidance to any agency. Why would they do that? Simply because they wanted to get something passed and specifics mean other voting members of the body might stop and actually consider what it might do to the rubes which send them to Congress. Better to pass a broadly worded bill and leave it to an agency (whose heads and leaderships are routinely swapped like Lego figurine heads with the changing of administrations) to issue rules on what they think the law is. Then when actual stakeholders (people who own land and want to use it for example) try to do something within those rules we will all collectively see if the outcome is anything we all like. Inevitably, we don't, so we sue and then we let a series of largely unelected and not subject to recall decisionmakers review limited materials, apply broad political (yes, they are political, stop fooling yourself) and philosophical principles to the matter and decide who is right, the agency or the individual.

If this system was pitched on one of those entrepreneur shows, I don't think it would get funded, but it is the system we use and it seems to be doing pretty well by comparison to the tin pot dictatorships, ruling juntas and ancestry-based governments past and current. So do your part, find a federal regulation and attempt to interpret it, federal lawyers are standing by.

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