

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Meeting producer needs through a virtual sheep and goat webinar program

AT A GLANCE

A multistate sheep and goat webinar series delivers relevant, research-based information to an industry that felt underserved, resulting in high-satisfaction and intended practice adoption among participants.

The Situation

In 2019, during the Western Central States Woolgrowers Annual Meeting — comprised of sheep producers from Idaho, Utah, Wyoming and Nevada — producers discussed the importance of Extension outreach and its role in supporting the sheep industry. Several Idaho sheep producers expressed concern about a lack of sheep-specific programming available through University of Idaho Extension. This gap limited access to timely, research-based information for producers managing increasingly complex production, health and marketing challenges across the Intermountain West.

Our Response

In response to this expressed need, University of Idaho Extension Range Livestock Specialist Melinda Ellison, who has a professional background in sheep production, worked with University of Idaho leadership to establish a dedicated sheep Extension role. This request was approved, and in 2020 — amid COVID-related restrictions — Ellison partnered with Carmen Willmore, University of Idaho Extension educator in Bingham County, to launch a virtual sheep and goat webinar series.



Extension offers research-based sheep and goat webinar series reaches a global audience. Photo by Melinda Ellison.

The program was intentionally designed as a regional collaboration to leverage expertise across land-grant institutions. Initially, Whit Stewart, Extension sheep specialist at the University of Wyoming, served as a cohost. He was later joined by Chad Page, Extension small ruminant specialist at Utah State University. As Stewart's responsibilities grew, Jaelyn Whaley, Extension regional sheep specialist with South Dakota State University, replaced him on the team.

Since January 2023, the program has operated as the UI-USU-SDSU Extension Sheep and Goat Webinar Series, offering consistent, high-quality educational programming to sheep and goat producers throughout the region and has even reached a global audience.

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The webinar series is delivered monthly on the second Wednesday of each month at noon (Mountain Time). Each session features a professional speaker whose expertise aligns with a seasonally relevant topic for sheep and goat production. Webinars are conducted live, allowing participants to interact directly with presenters and Extension specialists.

To extend the program's reach and long-term value, each webinar is recorded and uploaded to the University of Idaho Extension Livestock YouTube channel, allowing producers to access information on demand.

Indicators of program quality include:

- Multistate collaboration among Extension specialists with complementary expertise
- Consistent scheduling and predictable delivery
- Use of subject-matter experts for each topic
- Evaluation through post-webinar surveys
- On-demand access to recorded content

Program Outcomes

The first webinar offered in 2020 reached over 150 live attendees and the average participation has grown over time. In 2025, average live participation was 206 per month. Additionally, there have been 113,824 views of webinar videos uploaded to the University of Idaho Extension Livestock YouTube channel.

Since 2020, 1,377 participants have completed post-webinar evaluations. Survey respondents included sheep and goat producers with operations ranging from small-scale to large commercial enterprises. Among respondents who reported herd size, 491 sheep producers reported flock sizes ranging from zero to 3,000 plus head, with an average flock size of 164 sheep and 356 goat producers reported herd sizes ranging from zero to 3,000 plus head, with an average herd size of 105 goats.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Melinda Ellison, Ph.D., Extension Range Livestock & Sheep Specialist • Nancy M. Cumming Research, Extension and Education Center • 208-885-8823 • ellison@uidaho.edu

Carmen Willmore, Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Bingham County • 208-785-8060 • cwillmore@uidaho.edu

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Post-webinar survey data demonstrated strong participant satisfaction and learning outcomes. Of the 1,377 survey respondents, 66% rated the webinars as excellent and 29% rated them as good. Additionally, 89% of survey respondents felt the webinar length was just right. When asked if they would implement information from the webinar in their operations, 85% of respondents planned to implement or had already implemented practices learned, while 8% of respondents either did not own sheep or goats or felt the information did not apply to their operation.

Survey participants also clearly communicated how they prefer to receive Extension education. Of the 1,377 respondents, 62% preferred to receive information from Extension through live webinars with recordings available on YouTube or Facebook and 27% preferred social media and electronic newsletters; however, only 11% prefer in-person classes or workshops.

The UI-USU-SDSU Extension Sheep and Goat Webinar Series successfully addressed a documented gap in sheep-specific Extension programming for Idaho producers while simultaneously serving a broader regional and global audience. The program increased access to timely, research-based information, aligned delivery methods with producer preferences and supported informed decision-making across a wide range of operation sizes.

By providing consistent, high-quality virtual education, the program enabled producers to adopt improved management practices related to animal health, nutrition, reproduction and overall production efficiency. As a result, participants reported increased confidence in applying new knowledge and making operational changes that support the long-term sustainability and profitability of their sheep and goat enterprises.