

California[®]

FARMER

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BRINGING IN MORE: These lambs are being raised at the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center in Clay Center, Neb. Lamb prices have shot up to \$2 per pound.

New ewes

Key Points

- California's green hills are about to come alive again with sheep.
- Producers should increase the average birthrate per ewe to two lambs.
- The "Let's Grow" initiative was rolled out at McCormack Ranch, near Rio Vista.

By **LEN RICHARDSON**

THE green, green hills of California are about to come alive again with sheep because of a campaign launched in 2011 called "2+2= Rebuild: Let's Grow." The campaign asks that all sheep producers increase the size of their operations by two ewes per operation or by two ewes per 100 by 2014; increase the average birthrate per ewe to two lambs per year; and increase the harvested lamb-crop rate by 2%.

The new goal gets a real boost from sky-high lamb prices that have shot up to \$2 per pound, a 70% increase. Such prices not only have sheep producers smiling, but also scrambling to meet demand.

Realistic goal

"I think these goals are not only realistic in that they are achievable, but they are also realistic in that the industry needs to achieve them," says Clint Krebs, American Sheep Industry Association, or ASI, vice

president, Oregon. He adds that the industry, regardless of market prices, may be in real danger of losing its infrastructure if it can't provide enough lambs to keep traditional processors and wool companies afloat.

"We need to fill the traditional market channel to keep American lamb in the largest grocery store chains and in the restaurant chains. Additionally, we need our wool companies to fill the pipeline for U.S. military use of our wool. Combining the growing ethnic market with the need to keep traditional companies operating means we need to produce more," says Krebs.

Customer demand

"The amazing thing is our customers [for lamb, wool, etc.] are coming to us and asking for more, and they are putting the money up front to get us started," he adds.

This Let's Grow initiative was rolled out at the McCormack Ranch outside of Rio Vista, in the rolling hills dotted with sheep and giant wind turbines.

McCormack Ranch is operated by Jeanne McCormack and her husband, Al Medvitz. Medvitz says he agrees with Margaret Soulen Hansen, Idaho, ASI president who has told the group, "We need more production out there."

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