Family business builds brand, then markets to high-end grocers

MAINE can be a forbidding place for agriculture. The farmers who call it home are hardy and self-reliant.

For Lisa Webster and North Star Sheep Farm, producing top-grade lamb is worth it all. It’s as much a way of life as it is a profession. As she says: “Family farming means sustainable farming.”

Lisa and husband Phil, fourth- and fifth-generation Maine sheep farmers, respectively, know their land, the local market and today’s discerning buyers. They acknowledge that the challenges and opportunities of farming in New England may be a lot different than farming corn and soybeans in the Midwest, but the values they share with their brethren across the U.S. are very similar.

FAMILY OPERATION

North Star Sheep Farm is the quintessential family farming operation. It is considered one of Maine’s oldest continuously operating sustainable sheep farms. “My goal is to replicate the beauty of low-impact sheep farming,” Lisa says, “and see more emphasis on life on the farm, as opposed to just saving farmland.”

Just over a third of U.S. lamb consumption is concentrated in the cities surrounding Boston and New York. However, most of the meat produced to satisfy that demand comes from the western United States, Australia, New Zealand and Iceland.

“Since our area is the No. 1 lamb-consuming
Family business builds brand and then markets directly to high-end grocers and restaurants across the Northeast

MAINE can be a forbidding place for agriculture. The farmers who call it home are hardy and self-reliant. They’ve learned to adapt, survive hostile weather, and work through strict regulations, limited spaces, excessive input costs and discriminating buyers.

For Lisa Webster and North Star Sheep Farm, producing a top grade of lamb is worth it all. In fact, it’s as much a way of life as it is a profession. As she says: “Family farming means sustainable farming.”

That pithy statement speaks as much to her heart as it does to her head. Lisa and husband Phil, fourth- and fifth-generation Maine sheep farmers, respectively, know their land, the local market and today’s discerning buyers. They acknowledge that the challenges and opportunities of farming in New England may be a lot different than farming corn and soybeans in the Midwest, but the values they share with their brethren across the U.S. are very similar.

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North Star Sheep Farm is the quintessential family farming operation. It is considered one of Maine’s oldest continuously operating sustainable sheep farms, and Lisa intends to maintain their farms as “a working part of the rural landscape.”

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“Since our area is the No. 1 lamb-consuming region in the nation,” Webster says, “Maine is well-suited to fill that need, without bringing lamb in from elsewhere.” As sheep farmers, Lisa and Phil are leading the way with diversified farming practices. They source locally grown healthy foods and profitably provide sheep products to restaurants and markets throughout the Northeast.

Lisa works tirelessly to remain a leader in the industry, too. She knows adaptability is vital to their long-term survival. For Lisa and Phil, beyond a lot of hard work, the keys to lasting success include:

▪ producing a commodity or specializing in a crop that is compatible with the limited resources available in the local farming environment
▪ serving the demands of consumers while working to understand buyers’ concerns about sustainable farming

“Sheep that grazed these fields provided wool for blankets that kept the patriots warm during the winter months of the American Revolution.” —Lisa Webster

“Family farming means sustainable farming,” says Lisa Webster, who raises sheep with husband Phil in Maine.