

Commercial flock profitable for vet

By Judy Brown

Regional Editor

BEAR CREEK — Robert Leder, who operates a commercial sheep farm with his wife, Penny, wastes no time getting to the bottom line.

“Our goal is to make money with as little work as possible,” he said. “We want to maximize the productivity of the ewe.”

Dr. Leder, a veterinarian with Clintonville Vet Service, serves clients in Outagamie, Shawano and Waupaca counties. On the job he works mainly with dairy producers, but his home-grown flock of commercial ewes affords him a balance and another perspective in animal agriculture production.

Over the past 16 years, the

Leders have developed a profitable commercial ewe flock that meets their goals of labor efficiency, producing a product demanded by the buyer, living and working in a sustainable environment — and making money.

Their production system based on intensive rotational grazing includes 80 ewes. Last year 21 of those ewes each produced more than 200 pounds of lambs sold as feeders.

Based on his experiences, Dr. Leder thinks there is potential for raising feeder lambs on pasture, especially since the requirements for a lactating ewe are the same as those for a dairy cow.

“We can produce the forages and quality feed that ewes

need. We have the environment to do that. The big question is whether or not there are enough people to do it,” he said.

Dr. Leder will discuss how he and his wife developed a commercial flock this Sunday, April 9, in an afternoon presentation at the Wisconsin Sheep Industry Conference.

“I’m frustrated that the commercial industry can’t seem to get going,” Dr. Leder said. “I think there is a lot of potential for sheep producers for more than just 4-H projects. You can make money with sheep. You have to put a little effort into it but it can be a very viable enterprise.”

Even though Dr. Leder, a native of Gleason, showed sheep in Lincoln County as a

youth, his mission is advocating more commercial sheep production.

“We need more commercial mentors and promotion of commercial sheep farming rather than hobby farming,” he said.

He sees the commercial feeder lamb industry, for example, as one aimed at developing critical mass to foster a competitive market.

“A competitive market is one when there is more than one buyer for your lambs,” he said.

The concept of critical mass describes large lots of high-quality feeder lambs, Dr. Leder said.

“I’m not sure how big a lot of lambs has to be to generate special interest, but it’s proba-

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