

Thursday, November 12, 2009

Royal Winter Fair Trip

We just returned from our annual trip to the Royal Winter Fair and tucked in a trip to the Stock Yards at Cookstown for the sheep sale. It is nice to get away from the farm for a few days and nice to get back home.

First we went to the stock yards at Cookstown for the sheep sale. Some of the lamb prices made sense and some didn't. There seemed to be an aversion to black fleeced lamb with their prices being lower than equivalent quality white fleeced lamb. The buyers also didn't like Katahdin sheep. Their prices were low compared to equivalent quality wool breeds. The buyers bidding price was established by the worst lamb in the lot. If there was a lot of 10 lambs, 9 of which were good and 1 which was poor, the poor lamb set the price for the whole lot. Definitely a reason for having consistent quality and type in your lots. Finally the buyers were more focused on length and quality of loin rather than the quality of the hind leg. That would make sense considering there was a number of buyers for restaurants. Restaurant cuts also focus mainly on the loin and the ribs.

We attended the Market Lamb classes at the Royal and the Market Lamb Auction. We wanted to see what both the judge and buyers were looking for. As we have always done at the Royal, we did a bit of ring-side judging to see how our placements of the class compared to the judge. We were pretty consistent in placing the top end of the class, sometimes not in exactly the same order as the judge but we had the top 5 in the top 5 and more often than not within one placement of the judge's. I have been doing this at the Royal and other shows since I was a kid and entered judging competitions when I was in 4 H so I have a pretty good eye for a good animal. Unlike the sale barn the judge was focusing equally on the leg and the loin with even a lean towards leg quality. The Grand Champion market lamb sold for close to what I expected - ~\$10 per pound live weight for a total of about \$1000. A nice price for the owner but it was an excellent market lamb.

The one thing that was obvious with the market lamb classes is how far the purebred breeding stock classes have strayed from that type wanted for market lamb. That is quite a head scratcher for me. Breeding lines especially in Suffolk and Dorset have focused on large, very leggy animals.

Because we want to focus on lamb quality rather than breeding stock, if we show it will be limited to market lamb and carcass classes... the sheep equivalent of performance classes.

We also got a chance to visit Pax in his new digs. Nice place and nice people. He looks great and is doing very well. It is such a relief to know that our horses are well loved and cared for once they leave Hawk Hill.

Time to finish trimming some horses,
Cheers

Laurie