

R & R Ranch, Walton County

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Mr. Ron Prokop and his wife Rosemary own and operate R & R Ranch located in north Walton County. They raise hair sheep on their 41 acres, with Katahdins and Dorpers being the main breeds produced on the farm. The Prokops sell all natural grass-fed lambs. You can purchase the live animal or they will deliver it to a USDA inspected slaughter facility so it can be shipped to individuals throughout the southeastern United States. Mr. Prokop was a cattleman but when he retired, he looked for ways to continue farming on a smaller scale. What he found was a market for goats and sheep. After several years of raising both, he decided that hair sheep were more economical to raise and brought a higher return.

Mr. Prokop incorporates a variety of warm season and cool season forages on his farm. Words do not do his forage plan justice. Most producers grow a monoculture field or a small blend of like varieties, but not Mr. Prokop; this is his real innovation! For example in one field, Mr. Prokop planted bulldog 805 alfalfa, southern belle and barenbrough red clover, AU ball clover, turnips, oats, triticale, two different varieties of ryegrass, max fescue, and Persian white clover. Mr. Prokop has a Brillion seeder that allows him to mix a large variety of seeds to plant at one time. He uses a rototiller in front of his Brillion seeder. Mr. Prokop has developed an all you can eat buffet for his animals. Mr. Prokop has his farm divided up into small pastures that allows him to plant different blends and mixtures together. Since Mr. Prokop is a natural forage based meat producer, he has to keep high quality forage available at all times to produce high average daily gains on



his sheep. A liquid foliar blend fertilizer program is used on the farm. The blend is a mixture of complex carbohydrates, plant essential macro and micro-nutrients, a proprietary blend of beneficial enzymes, amino acid, and a host of naturally occurring plant and soil stimulants which are not found in ordinary fertilizers. Mr. Prokop also puts up high quality hay from his forage blends.

By having small fields, Mr. Prokop utilizes intense rotational grazing through several paddocks to efficiently put weight on his sheep. He sells his lambs at 6 to 8 months of age. Each sheep dresses out to around 70 to 90 pounds which requires a lamb to weigh from 140 to 180 pounds. You might think this is not impressive, but Mr. Prokop does this before the sheep reach one year of age and still are considered lamb instead of mutton. The weights and age of his sheep sold are based on customer demand. Mr. Prokop's



ability to meet these demands has increased his customer base. His forage program allows him to have extremely high average daily gains without added hormones or other weight enhancement medications. All sheep on the farm are kept intact which also helps increase meat production.

Mr. Prokop has built up a diverse customer base over the last several years, along with several CSA (Community Supported Association) groups. He even has individuals that drive by his farm and come back to purchase animals on the spot. He does most of his sale transactions through email from the purchaser to the slaughter facilities. Transportation of the meat product had been a problem, but he finally has a custom USDA inspected slaughter facility that will ship his meat for him.

The demand for Mr. Prokop's sheep has increased so much in the last few years that he can no longer raise enough of his own sheep so he has to purchase weaned lambs for his farm and finish them out on his forage diet. With few producers of hair sheep in the area and none with his forage program, Mr. Prokop has created a niche market for his product. Recently the selling of young breeding rams has become a new market for the Prokops to help improve the genetics of other producers of hair sheep in the region. They have been experimenting with crossing different breeds of hair sheep to improve vigor and parasite resistance. Mr. Prokop's sheep are not registered but they are proven. Word has spread about his success and quality of sheep.

Any animals that are not productive are sold to a meat processor to be made into lamb burger or jerky. That way all of the animals have a place to be marketed.

Improving Agriculture through Extension Involvement

The Prokops often use the services of the Extension office. This includes soil testing, forage testing, and frequent visits from Extension agents and specialists from the North Florida Research & Education Center. Mr. Prokop has entered the Southeast Forage Contest several times and won the contest in 2010 for legume baleage. Mr. Prokop also makes his farm available for wildlife and forage research plots, with Dr. Ann Blount providing seed and recommendations for demonstration plots. Mr. Prokop is in the development stages of a research project for meat quality and production research on his sheep. The Prokops are a big supporter of the Walton County Extension Service. They have attended a wide range of educational programming which has enabled them to adopt new practices to make their farm more profitable.

Impacting Agriculture in Northwest Florida

The Prokops are producing a product that was previously unavailable in northwest Florida. Not only are they raising forage-fed hair sheep for meat, but they are also providing rams to other hair sheep producers. Other sheep producers in the Florida Panhandle and Southern Alabama are now following Mr. Prokop's forage plans and selection of certain genetic traits in the sheep.

Mr. and Mrs. Prokop are members of Farm Bureau, Meat Sheep Alliance of Florida, Katahdin Hair Sheep International, and the American Sheep Industry. They also interface with ALFA, David Garcia, Marketing Director for Alabama USDA, and the Alabama Goat and Sheep Association. ■



Ron Prokop
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