



© Morgan Farms, Frankfort, KY

SELLING YOUR FIBER TO NICHE MARKETS

by Sarabeth Parido

Have you any wool? Yes sir, yes sire many bags full! Shearing day has come and gone and you've got bags of fluff lined up, so now what do you do with it? What's it worth? How much work do you need to do to get it out of your barn and to your potential customers? It can seem overwhelming at first, but there are many avenues to get your wool out to the world.

As we see more in person markets reopen, you may find that fiber events, festivals and markets are a great way to get customers to touch and feel (and even smell) your fiber. Your local farmers market is a wonderful way to meet your local community and let them see the value in local wool and fiber. Your local farmer's market is another place to take your fiber. You can set up with your fleeces, with roving, with yarns and sell direct to customers who may be pleasantly surprised to find more than just their seasonal vegetables. Bringing fiber to the market is sought after among market managers. Having a few finished items, yarns, wool dyer balls etc. would be a great addition for those who wouldn't know what to do with a raw fleece.

Local fiber festivals, such as The Kentucky Sheep and Fiber Festival or The Kentucky Wool Festival or your local county festival

are wonderful ways to get started selling your fiber. The market is very specific at fiber and craft fairs to local wool and fiber. Customers come with projects in mind and wallets to back them up. Fleece sales at these festivals are a great way to sell your fleeces with very little work on your part to reach your customer. Don't miss the fleece competitions either; many new producers overlook the fleece competitions thinking that they don't know enough or aren't experienced enough to enter. Nothing could be further from the truth! Most competitions are in place to offer feedback and constructive criticism to producers. They are a great way to learn what you are doing right and helpful to find new ways to improve your wool and fiber production.

Selling your wool, fiber and yarn directly from your farm or at a fiber-related event is a great way to bring more profits to your farm business, but marketing and selling online widens your outreach to potential customers across the country and around the world. Online marketing has become not only a lifeline to many producers, but a necessity as more people shop via the internet than ever before. No matter how you plan to sell your wool— a few small details can increase the value and marketability of your fiber.

Now is the time to start looking into building a web presence

for yourself. There are many ways to get connected online, through building your own website, managing a social media account for your business and/or farm or even just letting your Facebook friends know about your fiber can be a great way to get started. Research your breed or run a search for other wool and fiber producers in your area to see what they are doing online to market themselves. You don't have to be a computer saavy person anymore to have an online presence; many web builders and social media can all be done through your phone using mediums you may already have at your disposal.

Details matter! When buying wool, many handspinners and fiber artisans like to know the back story of your sheep and your farm. Tell your story- give a little picture of your flock or farm. Attach a picture of your lambs, everyone loves lambs! Attach a small farm story on where you are located or how you got started. Any little bit of personal "extras" can increase the value of your yarn and will gain you return customers.

How you package, prepare and sell your product says a lot about your farm to your customer. You are your own sales and customer service departments. Treat your customers with the golden rule-treating them as you would want to be treated. Many times, its the little details you add to your items that will remind a customer of you the next time they are shopping for fiber. Pay close attention to how you photograph and describe your fiber. If your fiber is heavier in vegetable matter, be accurate in your description of it, tell your customer they are getting a piece of your farm at no extra charge. If you have a fleece with unique coloring, make sure to get pictures in natural light from different angles so that your customer can see how special and unique the fleece is. Each sheep spends a year growing that fleece and it will never be exactly the same year to year- make sure they can appreciate that.

Raw wool should be skirted well and have as much of the vegetable matter (VM) as possible picked out of it. Washed wool can be sold by the fleece or by smaller amounts. Roving can be made by hand or commercially prepared and can be sold by the ounce or pound. Yarn can be hand-spun or commercially spun in an assortment of thicknesses and is sold in skeins, hanks, and pre-wound balls or hanks.

Lastly, make sure you are utilizing all your networks! Are you a part of a producer or breed association? If not, look into it! Often times, the annual membership fees are low and the networking opportunities can be priceless. Breed specific associations as well as Most associations keep directories and customers can use these to find your farm information. The Kentucky Fiber Trail is a localized membership for Kentucky Fiber producers, retail location, agritourism locations and artisans. A interactive map lets customers see where producers are located. The Kentucky Fiber Trail has given weekend tours of some locations, taking "tourists" around to different farms and retail spots so that they can see first hand where their fiber is coming from. Patrons can collect farm stamps and signature in their Fiber Trail Passport and turn it in for incentive items upon completion. More information on the Kentucky Fiber Trail can be found at www.kentuckyfibertrail.com

The more invested time and effort you put into your wool and fiber marketing, the more value can truly be added to your farm. There are customers out there looking for the fiber you have growing in your fields. Be curious, begin looking for ways to expand your customer base today.

Sarabeth Parido, is the Director of the Kentucky Sheep and Fiber Festival and The Kentucky Fiber Trail. She raises her own small flock of sheep in CLark County, Kentucky along with her husband and four sons.

KENTUCKY
SHEEP & GOAT
2021 Management Calendar

2020
KENTUCKY
SHEEP
& GOAT
Calendar

Coming Soon!
**THE 2022
KY SHEEP & GOAT
MANAGEMENT
CALENDAR**

sale dates • moon signs • due dates & more

**KGPA & KSWPA members
will receive a
calendar with new memberships
and renewals for 2022.
Additional calendars will be
available for purchase at
KYSHEEPANDGOAT.ORG**

Kentucky
SHEEP & GOAT
DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

**Kentucky
Proud.**