



#### Western SARE

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## ADDING VALUE TO LAMB AND WOOL

**Project Title:** Imperial Stock Ranch Heritage Lamb/Fiber Marketing

**Amount Funded:** \$7,000

**Project Coordinator:** Jeanne Carver, Maupin, Oregon

**Technical Advisor:** Stephen Riese, NRCS

**Cooperators:** Dan Carver, Brian Tuck, Wasco County Extension

In late 1999, when cheap imports and limited processing crimped the markets for lamb and wool, Jeanne and Dan Carver decided to try direct marketing from their Oregon ranch.

The Carvers began exploring sales options in restaurants and retail, and then set out to develop marketing materials like packaging and displays to promote the products from their 140-year-old operation, Imperial Stock Ranch, near Maupin, Oregon. In 2002 they received a \$7,000 Western SARE Farmer/Rancher grant to assist with the marketing effort. From there, says Jeanne Carver, things "simply exploded," and the



Columbia lambs at six weeks of age.

Carvers haven't looked back.

Today, they sell all of their lamb directly to local restaurants. The wool and hides from their sheep are fabricated into yarn, hand-knit kits and custom-ordered ready-to-wear garments.

"We have more predictable, stable markets for lamb and wool and increased profits," says Carver. "The SARE grant is a fabulous tool. It gave us confidence that our ideas had real potential."

Imperial Stock Ranch, 120 miles east of Portland, emphasizes sustainability in all phases of its operations. It covers 32,000 deeded acres, including 3,000 in no-till dryland grain production and 300 acres of hay. The Carvers raise 800 head of Angus-based mother cows and 250 Columbia ewes. Given the ranch's 140-year heritage raising sheep, the Carvers wanted to secure their own markets, set their own prices and assure that sheep remained profitable and sustainable.

Direct marketing lamb required a processor close enough to keep transportation costs low and minimize transport stress on the lambs. The Carvers tried two processors, one 60 miles away and the other 160, until a plant 80 miles from the ranch became USDA certified. This processor delivers the kind of yield and



Jeanne and Dan Carver of Imperial Stock Ranch in Maupin, Oregon.

uniformity of portion cuts required for their direct sales to restaurants, which have purchased their entire lamb crop for the past three years. Indeed, the increased demand outstripped Imperial Stock Ranch's production. Rather than increasing its own production, the ranch turned to two producers, who had been buying breeding stock from the Imperial Stock Ranch for 10 years, and who have similar standards of production and care to theirs. These producers lamb earlier than does Imperial, which stretches the "fresh" lamb season.

"We pass on the positives of the program to them in year-to-

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*Western SARE, a USDA organization, funds grants for research and education that develop or promote some aspect of agricultural sustainability, which embraces*

- *profitable farms and ranches*
- *a healthy environment*
- *strong families and communities.*

*The Western Region, one of four SARE regions nationwide, is administered through Utah State University.*

**Western SARE:**  
<http://wsare.usu.edu>

**National SARE**  
[www.sare.org](http://www.sare.org)

## ADDING VALUE TO LAMB AND WOOL

year marketing predictability and increased profits, paying a premium price for their lambs," says Carver.

Chef satisfaction with the lamb has led to a demand for Imperial Stock Ranch beef. The

While their marketing efforts have led them to more predictable, stable markets, increasing ranch profitability, they have also had a ripple impact on the local community. As many as a dozen women in the region work from their homes doing all

phases of garment design and production, and the fiber marketing has added to the work opportunities available to ranch wives at Imperial Stock.

"Our ranch wives do everything – operate equipment,

cowboy, drive truck, crochet. They work in yarn preparation at ranch headquarters, finishing, packaging and shipping garments," says Carver. "We have a lot more people working because of our direct marketing of meat and fiber."

What advice would Carver offer to others attempting to

take a similar marketing path: First, clearly define what you want your life to look like, a holistic outlook. Remember that whatever level of work you anticipate, it will be more. You need to love what you're doing. Passion will be your greatest asset. And, you must be adaptable without compromising your values. Changing conditions, circumstances, consumer interests and needs will require creativity and adaptability. As with the Carvers, it may require looking at the operation from a different angle.

"Instead of raising cows and sheep, we raise beef and lamb for the table. Instead of harvesting wool, we raise fibers that are the basis of our fabrics, garments and product line – subtle yet critical mindset changes," says Carver.

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For more information, email [info@imperialstockranch.com](mailto:info@imperialstockranch.com), visit the ranch website at [www.imperialstockranch.com](http://www.imperialstockranch.com) or go to [www.sare.org](http://www.sare.org), click on "Project Reports," then "Search the Database," then enter FW02-206 under "Search Terms."



Because of Imperial's meat and fiber marketing program, Carver spends much of her time working with world class photographers and chefs.

ranch is now working toward the goal of marketing its entire beef production, similar to its lamb program.

Entering the textile business required finding a wool processor and learning what types of yarns and garments sell best. In response to these lessons, the Carvers have expanded their yarns, colors and hand-knit kits, which include the pattern and fiber to make a garment or accessory. The biggest surprise for the Carvers was the response to custom orders for ready-to-wear garments.

"The demand led to our ready-to-wear line," she says. "We are more economically profitable in making 200 of one item than one each of 200 items. Contracts for these larger orders make all phases of wool sales better, more sustainable."



A fall 2006 hand knit kit product, Shepherdess felted purse (left); a fall 2006 ready-to-wear design sold through a national retailer (center); and a 2006 lambskin vest made from pelts of market lambs (right).