

Ag Professor Helps Revive Nearly Extinct Churro Sheep

Lyle McNeal was a young ag professor at California Polytechnic State University more than 40 years ago when he noticed a small flock of unusual looking sheep on a ranch during a student field trip. Some of the rams had 4 long horns and extremely long coats. "The rancher told me they were Churro sheep, a breed that I'd heard of but had never seen before," says McNeal. He was intrigued by the animals and learned from a census taken by the Navajo Nation chief veterinarian that only 435 Churro existed in the U.S. at that time.

"That seemed like a critically small number to me," says McNeal, so I decided to see if I could help the breed grow." A few years later, he obtained a small flock of 8 ewes and two rams for breeding. In 1977, he established the Navajo Sheep Project (NSP), dedicated to protecting the breed and creating a plan to grow its numbers. By 1986, he helped set up the Navajo-Churro Sheep Association (N-CSA), a national breed organization. There were about 3,500 Churro registered at the time. Now there are about 6,000 registered and another 2,000

not registered. Flocks exist across the U.S. and in Canada. Today it's a growing niche-market breed known for its unique wool and tasty meat that's very low in fat.

"Churros are an ideal breed for small farms and hobbyists who are interested in sustainable agriculture," McNeal says. "This is heritage breed that continues to grow in popularity. The Navajo Churro have some outstanding traits that need to be preserved."

Churros have a strong maternal instinct, abundant milk production, hardiness, and produce strong lambs. They have parasite and contagious foot root resistance and the ability to survive on marginal feed. Those lambs that aren't desirable as breeding stock produce exceptionally low fat meat and their wooly hides can be tanned to provide long lavish pelts.

The wool, which contains an inner coat 2 to 4 in. long and a protective outer coat that's 4 to 14 in. long, is ideal for hand rug weaving because it grows in an array of natural colors. It has a low amount of grease and yolk, few crimps per inch, and long staple length.

"For more than 300 years the Churro



Churros are a heritage breed that continues to grow in popularity. The wool is ideal for hand rug weaving because it grows in an array of natural colors.

were spiritually and materially important to the Navajo just as the bison were to the Plains Indians," McNeal says. Then in the 1860's, thousands of them were slaughtered. The breed rebuilt, but more than a million Churro sheep and goats were exterminated by the U.S. government during the "stock reduction" era of the 1930's. McNeal says, "those were traumatic events for the Navajo people, and by the late 1960's only

a few hundred animals from native flocks remained."

"The breed is well dispersed in the U.S. and Canada. If anyone wants information on where to find seed animals, I can help."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Dr. Lyle McNeal, 4815 Old Main Hill, Utah State University, Logan, Utah 84322 (ph 435 797-2154; lyle.mcneal@usu.edu)



Handheld net launcher is designed to catch birds and small animals for animal control. Farmers use it to catch everything from sparrows to Canadian geese.

Net-Shooter Catches Pest Animals

If you've ever thought about starting an animal control business, the handheld NET-ZOOKA net launcher could be a great place to start.

It's perfect for safe catches of birds, small animals, and stray dogs. Insert a 16-gram CO2 canister (the same ones used to inflate bike tires), let the chamber fill with air, flip off the safety, and push the release button. The smallest net (5 by 5-ft.) shoots up to 60 ft. and is large enough for most animals. Larger nets, 6, 7 and 8-ft. square are available, but have shorter ranges.

"It was designed to catch birds and small animals for animal control. But farmers can use it to catch everything from sparrows to Canadian geese," says Cory Gellerstedt, co-president of Nixalite of America Inc., manufacturer of animal and bird control products since 1950. The handy net launcher also works well in garden centers, warehouses and other facilities to humanely capture and relocate pest birds and animals.

The 2-lb. launcher is made out of high alloy aluminum, and the net is 3/4-in. nylon mesh. It only takes a couple of minutes to repack the net but Gellerstedt says many customers buy additional heads to use more than one net if necessary.

One advantage of the NET-ZOOKA is that it doesn't require proprietary canisters; the 16-gram CO2 canisters can be found at



Net packs into a head that's launched by a CO2 canister and shoots up to 60 ft.

bike shops and sporting good stores.

Nixalite sells the launcher through its website for \$1,495 retail and offers wholesale rates for professionals.

"It's just a fun little tool to use and a neat gadget that works well. It's fast enough to catch flying birds," Gellerstedt says.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Nixalite of America Inc., 1025 16th Ave., East Moline, Ill. 61244 (ph 800 624-1189; www.nixalite.com).



Handle at end of shaft is used to a washing machine wringer that's hidden inside a foam "rock", where it tightly grips the sword.

"Sword In Stone" Attracts Crowds At Festival

Mark Nelson and his sons conjured up a little medieval magic with a "sword in a rock" trick that allowed 10-year-olds to revel in King Arthur glory pulling Excalibur out of the rock, while the sword wouldn't budge for husky high school jocks.

"We've joked about how fun it would be to have a sword stuck into a stone," Nelson explains about the project that had him and his four sons, ages 5 to 15, burning the midnight oil before last fall's Medieval Festival in Steubenville, Ohio.

His oldest son, Gabe, sells wooden swords at the annual event with help from his father and brothers. A sword in a rock seemed like a good way to attract crowds. They came up with the idea of using an old washing machine wringer to grip the sword inside the "rock".

Nelson and his sons built a box and lag bolted the wringer into it sideways so it can tightly grip a sword. They connected the wringer to an 8-ft. shaft with a handle that manually opens and closes the wringer. The setup is hidden under a table with a cloth used to display and sell swords.

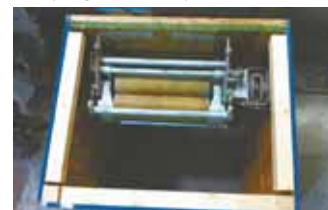
The Nelsons sprayed foam over the box to look like rocks, leaving a small slit to insert the sword.

With a 10-year-old son cranking the wringer at the other end of the table, no one figured out the source of the sword's magic.

"Many folks think someone is in the box,"



Young boys can pull Excalibur out of the rock, but the sword won't budge for husky high school boys or adults.



Nelson laughs. "It was a lot of fun, and very entertaining for the boys to make it and run all by themselves."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Mark Nelson, 272 Co. Rd. 26, Steubenville, Ohio 43952 (ph 740 283-3118; www.nelsongifts.com).