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Analysis of Nonpredator Sheep Loss

Predators remain the number one single cause of sheep loss in the United States, followed by old age. This was reinforced in a report released this week by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) titled Sheep and Lamb Nonpredator Death-Loss Report, 2004.

The report provides a breakdown of sheep and lamb death losses in 2004 for all causes by operation size and region, particularly causes of death losses other than predators.

According to numbers released by USDA's National Agricultural Statistical Services, a total of 600,300 sheep and lambs were lost in 2004 due to predator and nonpredator causes. Nonpredator deaths were 63 percent of the total in all classes of sheep reported.

The 376,100 sheep and lambs lost to nonpredator causes in 2004 is further broken down by disease or health condition. In adult sheep, lambing problems and digestive problems (parasites, bloat, etc.) were high; in lambs, digestive problems were also a major cause of loss as was respiratory problems (pneumonia, etc.).

An area of discussion presented in the NAHMS report indicates the difference in how NASS reports lamb crops in various regions of the country. In the Western states, only lamb losses that occur after marking, docking or branding are reported. All other states count all lambs born as part of their lamb crop numbers. NAHMS indicates that this difference in reporting methods leads to the exclusion of a large number of lamb losses in the NASS report from both predator and nonpredator causes.

The American Sheep Industry Association estimates that as much as 30 percent of predation in lambs occurs prior to docking.

The full Sheep and Lamb Nonpredator Death Loss Report, as well as other sheep health reports, is available at the NAHMS Web site at <http://nahms.aphis.usda.gov>.