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Assessing perceptions to digital records and supply-chain traceability in the US wool industry

A new study in Applied Animal Science examines awareness of and willingness to use technology available for wool supply-chain traceability

Champaign, IL, April 22, 2024—Consumers have indicated a willingness to pay a premium for US-sourced and US-manufactured wool products; however, once wool producers sell to intermediaries (e.g., warehouses, processors, spinners, weavers, and garment makers), source of origin information often is not maintained. The results of a survey on supply-chain traceability are presented in a new article in Applied Animal Science.

“This research assesses awareness and perceptions of US sheep producers and wool warehousers and processors for blockchain technology,” explained David K. Beede, PhD, editor in chief of the journal. “The article describes important considerations for future implementation of blockchain-based traceability systems that might benefit segments of the US wool industry.”

A survey of 61 producers and wool warehousers and processors found that respondents are somewhat familiar with using digital record keeping (e.g., blockchain) technology for tracking records of importance. “Regional tracing of agricultural products is increasingly important for intermediaries and consumers and, in many instances, requires the use of digital records and willingness to report and share data across industry sectors,” said lead researcher W. C. Stewart, Department of Animal Science, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming, USA.

“The objectives of this research were to assess awareness and perceptions of technology currently used in the US sheep industry, to assess how each industry segment prioritizes data records differently, to determine what level of premiums are needed and can be given, and to see how they change by industry segment and operation size,” said Stewart.
Implementation of viable traceability systems for the US wool industry will be contingent on the various segments’ willingness and economic incentives to enable baseline data collection and information sharing across the entire wool supply chain. Results indicate that most US sheep producers are using some form of digital record keeping, although use of electronic identification systems is limited.

Stewart said further work should be conducted to determine the largest barriers to adoption. The current technologies need to be more widely adopted before blockchain technology can be used to its full potential in the sheep industry.

The article appears in the April issue of *Applied Animal Science*.
Notes for editors

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