

A New Millenium for SOUTHRAM

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When Margaret Flowers contacted me and asked me to write an article about what has happened at Southagri since 2003 my first thought was that in only seven years nothing has happened at all. „What on Earth can I write about?“ I asked myself. So I started do go over what we have been doing since 2003 and surprisingly we actually have managed to do quite a lot.

By reading my article since 2003 „A glimpse of Southram’s history“ you see that at that time we were starting to offer frozen semen intended for vaginal AI on a commercial basis. To my knowledge that has not been done anywhere else in the world except in Norway. We use, as The Norwegians, the method invented by Dr. Thorsteinn Olafsson which many of Icelandic Sheep breeders in North America know better by his nickname, Steini. So, since 2003 Southram has offered frozen semen for vaginal AI and so far the results have been satisfactory though we are always hoping to be able to do better. It turns out that we can expect a conception rate around 50%.

Since 2003 we have exported more than 2,000 doses of frozen semen to the United States, all useable for vaginal AI. In 2006 we exported semen to Canada for the first and only time so far. Total of 207 doses were shipped over to Canada and the buyer was no one else than late Stefania Sveinbjarnardottir which once again was not letting regulation and barriers getting in her way. She wanted to buy semen from Iceland and so she did. Nothing of this would have happened if it wasn’t for Stefania.

In 2009 we exported 540 doses frozen semen to Norway for the first time being able to do so because of a regulation gap. Unfortunately, this gap was closed the same day as we shipped approximately 500 doses to Norway in the autumn 2010 prohibiting us to export semen there without a EU license. We are now working on getting a license to export to EU but it has taken us quite a few years to get veterinarian authorities to recognise our facilities. At the moment we are very optimistic about obtaining the EU license because to our knowledge we fulfill the EU legislation and demands concerning semen collection, handling and storing.

After being able to offer frozen semen for vaginal AI the possibility for each breeder of doing his AI’ing himself became real. This resulted in a demand for seminars instructing and teaching people how to perform AI in the right way. So, in the autumn 2003 we offered a seminar in Selfoss in Iceland getting 12 participants from North America. This was a very interesting seminar ending with an tour to Thingvellir and Hestur experimental farm. I must say that I enjoyed the seminar and the visit of the participants very much. Since then we have held seminars every second year in North America, the first one in Rhinebeck in 2005. Elaine Clarke did the planning in Rhinebeck and what a wonderful job she did. It was a demonstration of how to do things. This was a very good seminar for me and Steini and we met a lot of people we hadn’t seen before. In 2007 we had a seminar in North Branch, Minnesota at David Nelson’s farm. That seminar was very good as well and David had planned everything very carefully. Once again one of our dear friends amongst Icelandic Sheep breeders in North America was present and that’s Tom McDowell. In 2009 the seminar was again held in

Rhinebeck. This time Sue Faunce arranged everything and did a marvellous job but this time Tom was absent for the first time and we kind of missed him. During those seminars me and Steini have met a lot of people and I must say we are grateful for having had the opportunity to do so.

In 2009 we began freezing the semen in 0.5 ml straws instead of the 0.25 ml straws. We did this because the freezing is much easier and takes less time. We also started using a new extender without egg yolk preparing us for semen extenders containing anything of animal origin being banned in the future. The extender we use is bought from Minitüb in Germany and called Andromed®. We did this after having tried it in a field experiment in Iceland resulting in the same conception rate as with the extender we used before. Unfortunately the conception rate with the 0.5 ml straws has not been as good as we hoped. Furthermore the semen takes much more storage place so most likely we will change again into the 0.25 ml straws.

As before the policy of SOUTHRAM is to offer semen from a great selection of both horned and polled rams with emphasis is on meat quality, fertility and milk producing abilities of their daughters. Also, now a days there is more and more concern about the wool quality and rams are selected with that in mind. SOUTHRAM is also eager to offer semen of rams with leading abilities and colored rams, preserving those unique qualities of The Icelandic Sheep.

In 1998 we began color printing of our sire list which still is only printed in Icelandic. For Icelandic Sheep breeders outside Iceland information is available at our website (southram.bssl.is) in English. We would very much like to be able to print the sire list in English as well but it would both be to expensive as well as it would absorb too much labour force. This is something that ofcourse might change if we would have some resources being able to pay the cost or at least subsidies it heavily.

One of the things we are thinking about today is if it would be possible to get all Icelandic Sheep in the world into our sheep recording database here in Iceland. We have a database with all registered Icelandic horses in the world called Worldfengur (www.worldfengur.com) and it it would be great to have a similar database for The Icelandic Sheep as well. The Farmers Association of Iceland owns and runs The Sheep database so it's not for SOUTHRAM to decide but if there was demand from US and Canada I'm sure that registration of Icelandic sheep in America into the database would be possible for a reasonable amount of money. This would open new possibilities for Icelandic sheep breeders in America for obtaining information concerning breeding.

At last I would like to say that it has been a pleasure corresponding with you all. I have got to know a lot of people I didn't know before which has been both exciting and a lot of fun. All those years Barbara Webb has assisted us at your side of The Atlantic, distributing the semen to different places within The US making my work a lot easier. For that I would like to thank her very much and hopefully she will be back.