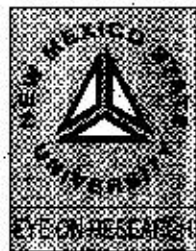


# Sheep scientists boost producers' profits

NEW MEXICO STATE UNIVERSITY

**C**an a mix of hardy range ewes and meaty mutton rams from Texas help



boost New Mexico ranchers' bottom line? That's the question researchers at New Mexico State Uni-

versity are trying to answer. It's part of an effort to raise lamb weight at weaning. So far, scientists have increased sale weight by about 10 percent.

Sheep producers in New Mexico derive their income from two primary sources. One is selling lambs shortly after weaning, which provides more than three-quarters of annual income. The second is selling fine wool to a worldwide market, primarily in April and May.

"We saw an interesting opportunity to improve income on the lamb side by increasing weight at the time of sale," said Tim Ross, an NMSU animal science professor. "I want to stress that we're not creating a new breed. We're simply applying an alternative management strategy to increase profit margins."

Ross' study began two years

ago in Corona using 240 of the university's highly developed Rambouillet ewes. Known for their fine wool, the white-faced Rambouillets are known as the largest and among the strongest of the nation's fine-wool sheep lines.

Selected Rambouillets were used to boost income and meat production by crossing them with a mutton breed. NMSU's choice was Suffolk, a relatively large breed developed in England and well-known for high quality meat. Suffolks have black faces and legs.

Ultimately, 150 of the tough range ewes were bred, half by the lumbering Suffolk rams.

The remainder were mated to a Rambouillet control group. NMSU researchers then gauged lamb weight at birth, marking (when lambs are tagged, tails docked, and castrated), and finally, at weaning.

In the study's first year, lamb weight at sale jumped 8.5 percent. During the second year, it climbed 10 percent over the control group. Lambs are sold when they're about six months old.

"The bottom line is that we had more pounds of lamb to sell," Ross said.

"Eye on Research" is provided by New Mexico State University. Today's feature was written by Norman Martin.