Sheep Software Comparison Survey

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There are many different flock management software programs available and while there are commonalities between them there are also differing features and services. It depends on the needs of the individual user which program offers the best mix of options. OSMA commissioned a survey of software suppliers and producers currently using flock management software. The goal was to provide an unbiased comparison to assist producers choose the software program that best suit their individual farm operation.

The producer input was meant to offer the perspective of the end user as a compliment to the supplier information regarding the software capabilities. However, we noted that some of the challenges or deficits identified by users may have been addressed by the supplier in later versions of the program.

Eight software programs were selected for evaluation: Bergére, bioFlock, Ewebyte, FarmWorks, GenOvis, MeritTrax, Ranch Manager, and TGM Select Sheepware. In addition, we were contacted by the developer of Sheep Tracker who also submitted a survey. The nine software programs surveyed were not ranked; the

Basic Start-up Requirements

	Bergére	bioFlock	Ewebyte	Farmworks	GenOvis	MeritTrax	Ranch Manager	Sheep Tracker	TGM
Initial cost	None	$350 plus $0.50 for each breeding female which also covers the first year of support	$400	700, $3,000 for Stock Recorder (RFID software), Psion handheld and FarmWorks	None	$6,000 which includes handheld computer, RFID reader and three years' support	$124.99 US	$19.95	$300 up to 100 ewes, $600 for 100+ ewes or monthly $11.50 (< 100 ewes) or $23 (100+ ewes)
Current version	1.8	Web-based so always current	3.5, Nov. 7, 2011	1.8.50	Web-based so always current	Beta version	2	Beta V0.9.9	1.77.xx
Ongoing fees for annual maintenace, licensing and upgrades	Free upgrades, annual fee of $135 to $200 according to flock size	$350 plus $0.50 for each breeding female	None	$150 optional to receive upgrades and support	$200	$0 for first three years, $365 thereafter	None	None	None
System requirements	Windows (all versions from 2000 to 8)	Computer, tablet or Smartphone with Internet capability	Any current version of Windows for PC. Will also run on a Mas using a Windows emulator	Windows XP service pack 2 or above, Vista, Windows 7, Windows 8	Any device with Internet capability, best browser is Mozilla Firefox	Windows XP Service Pack 3 or later versions	Windows XP or newer, Mac OS x Leopard or newer	Mac OS x G4 1 GHz or faster processor, 512MB of RAM. Mac OS x 10.4.11 or newer	Windows
Bilingual (English and French)	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes

Features Offered by Software Program

Features Offered	Bergére	bioFlock	Ewebyte	Farmworks	GenOvis	MeritTrax	Ranch Manager	Sheep Tracker	TGM
Breeding/mating information	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Breeding/mating records or reports	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Pregnancy (ultrasound) scanning data	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Genetic evaluation	X	X	X		X	X		X	X
Group/movement information	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Expense information		X		X			X		
Health program information	X	X	X	X		X	X		X
Weights	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Lambing information	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Flock Health: medications, vaccinations, wormings	X	X	X	X		X	X		X
Individual animal ID tracking	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Tracks full RFID number	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Sales information	X	X	X	X	X		X		X
Generates sales report/manifest	X	X		X	X	X	X		X
Input carcass quality data	X	X			X	X			X
Other	Milking data management, growth forecasts, costs forecasts, scheduling				Custom management groups, on-farm locations, death loss, Scrapie status, track feeds	Conformation (Quebec only) registration to CLRC, geno typing info		An unlimited number of notes can be saved for each animal	
Can fields be customized?	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Developing new versions or upgrades?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Limit to flock size?	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

SHEEP SOFTWARE COMPARISON SURVEY

program features, as reported by the suppliers, were merely summarized in chart form to provide cross-comparison. Three of the comparison charts are reproduced in this article: basic start-up requirements, features offered, and reports which can be generated using the software.

In our sample of 35 producer responses, Ewebyte and FarmWorks were the two most cited following by bioFlock.

Software Used by Producer Respondents to Survey	Response Count
bioFlock	5
Cattlepro-sheep version	1
Ewebyte	8
FarmWorks	8
FLOCKFILER	1
Gallagher Animal Performance Systems (APS)	2
MeritTrax	2
MDI Sheep	1
Pedigree Wizard for Lambplan	1
QuickBooks	1
Ranch Manager	4

Reports Generated by the Software

Reports	Bergére	bioFlock	Ewebyte	Farmworks	GenOvis	MeritTrax	Ranch Manager	Sheep Tracker	TGM
Detailed individual animal record	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Lambing report	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Overall flock report	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Flock health report	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
Individual animal health events	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Generates sales report/manifest	X	X		X	X	X	X		X
Expense report		X		X			X		
Pregnancy scanning report	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
Weight report	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Animals on withdrawal	X	X		X		X	X		X
Genetic evaluation reports	X	X	X	X	X			X	X
Other	Flock health analysis, many graphs, and more	Benchmarking (production and financial), sire and dam productivity		Slaughter report, EID retention, dam/sire productivity, death loss and movement reports	Genotyping and classification information				Lambing statistics with four year comparison, ewe/sire performance based on lamb weights, lamb performance comparison based on wean weights, weights over current and previous years

The majority of respondents had been using their program for less than five years however over 17% indicated more than 10 years' experience with the software (Ranch Manager, Ewebyte and one from the generic group).

Roughly 70% had upgraded their software package since their initial purchase primarily because a newer version was available. Only 3.3% indicated the upgrade was due to the original version being unsatisfactory and 16.6% wanted more features or options. Generally the upgrades were free however those wishing extra features paid up to $300 for an enhanced version. Most producers do not pay an annual service or licensing fee, of those who do, the annual fee ranged from less than $50 to over $300.

Most software providers provide some type of initial training with print or some type of hard copy manual being the most common. Of the respondents who were aware that their software provider offers training, 70% had taken advantage of the service. Those who did not take part in any training indicated it was because they did not feel they required the support.

A wide range of flock sizes was represented by the survey respondents with 51 to 100 breeding ewes being the most common answer selected. We asked producers whether there was a limit to the flock size which could be accommodated by their software. Of the producers who knew whether there was a limit (76% of respondents), all indicated that there was no restriction.

When data errors are detected by the software, most just reject a particular record however 88% of respondents noted that they rarely receive error messages. Data can be easily entered manually in most programs (93.8%).

We asked respondents to indicate which features were available in their software program and then asked, of those features, which ones they used. Recording of weights was available in all of the programs covered by the survey. Group movement information and lambing information were the next most commonly available features followed by individual animal movement tracking. Of the functions utilized, weight recording was the most popular followed by individual animal tracking, breeding/mating information, flock health, and group movement information.

Record Keeping Flock Software

Better records, better management, better business decisions

Preg Check   Lambing   50 Day   100 Day

What people are saying about us

Steven A. Ernewein, ON

I am extremely pleased with bioFlock and have gone from being the biggest skeptic to really enjoying the program. I showed my banker and she said if people with identical credit both wanted a loan she would be much more likely to lend to the farmer with production records from a management program like bioFlock.

Ian Spence Katian Farm Limited Windsor, NS

Love using the program! I am entering lambing information on my phone as they lamb and it is excellent. I look forward each week to see the updated indexes. I like to see how my rams and ewes change and what I really have for lambs. My 11 year old daughter even uses it. I've used 3 different programs and this is by far the best one.

Hellan Alexander, SC

We have completed entry of all our animals into bioTrack. Using the iPad to enter this animal and his birthing information onsite when he was tagged simplified record keeping and afforded all our staff current data for that location. Thus your web based system has eliminated the need for data sheets and delayed data entries. Thanks again for all your assistance in setting up our records and with printing of customized reports.

Jerry Hofer, SD

We started using bioTrack in 2009 after sorting our way through a computer crash...All of our herd data is now securely stored in bioTrack. The part that I really feel has a lot of value is we can customize our own Indexing system and evaluate the animals from several angles.

Jonathan Wort Ruminant Specialist, AgraPoint, NS

"Nova Scotia Beef Producers have a great opportunity to show genetic enhancement by using bioTrack to participate in the Genetic Enhancement Program. It is a unique and powerful tool that provides producers with genetic evaluation, and record keeping for management and Traceability. Producers who have enrolled with BIO are continually commenting to me about how helpful and knowledgeable BIO staff are.

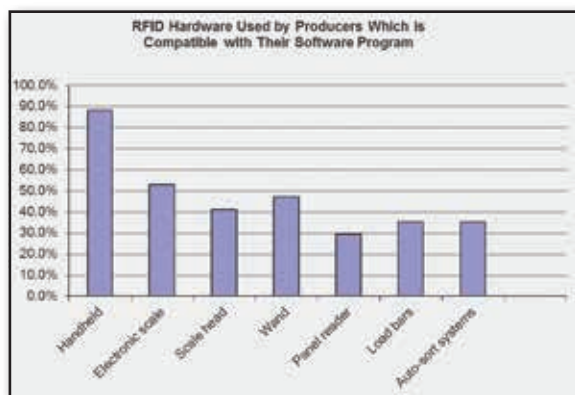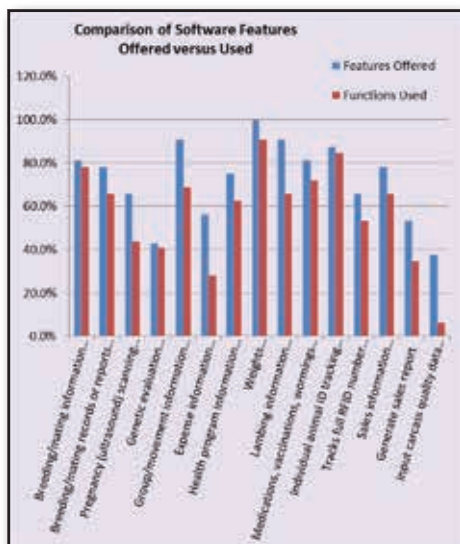**Contact us for regional traceability funding opportunities**

bioTrack

livestock management system

info@bioFlock.ca   www.bioTrack.ca   Working with you since 1993

Comparison of Software Features Offered versus Used

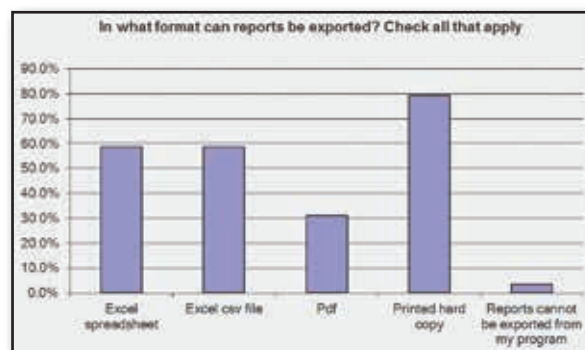RFID Hardware Used by Producers Which is Compatible with Their Software Program

Half of the respondent group indicated that their software was compatible with RFID hardware and that it worked well. An additional 9.4% had software that worked with RFID components but had experienced some challenges. Over 30% however did not know whether their program would work with RFID hardware or had not tried it.

The graph below shows which RFID hardware is being used by the sample group. Handheld scanners were the most frequently cited followed by electronic scales and wands. Psion handhelds and Gallagher and TruTest weighing systems were the most commonly referenced but there was a wide range of brands listed.

Most respondents indicated their reports were customizable. In some cases, there was discrepancy between producers regarding whether or not a particular software program allowed customized reports. This may be a reflection of different software versions being used within the group or that the producers responding in the negative were not aware they could customize their reports.

In what format can reports be exported? Check all that apply

Hard copy reports could be generated by 80% of respondents and Excel files were possible in almost 60% of the cases. Pdf versions were the least common at 30%. One person could not export exports and one was unsure.

The complete summary of the survey results will be available on OSMA's website. **OSN**