



## HERE'S A BIT OF TASTY INFORMATION...



MARCH—MAY 2012

### WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH LAMB?

Supply of imported lamb in the US should improve moderately during mid-2012 as both New Zealand and Australia move through their peak production seasons. Both countries reported good lambing numbers during their Spring (our Fall here in the USA), and great Spring and Summer pasture growth in both countries means lambs are in excellent condition. Because of the good pasture and as both countries are rebuilding their national flocks from historically low numbers, some lamb availability is being offset by farmers "Down Under" keeping ewe lambs to increase their breeding stock.

The mid-season update from Beef & Lamb New Zealand estimates that export lamb numbers this season will be approximately 19.7 million animals, down from earlier estimates of about 20.1 million though still slightly higher than last season. In Australia, Meat & Livestock Australia forecasts lamb numbers to be about 19.3 million, down on earlier estimates of appx 20.1 million but still up 7.4% from just under 18 million last season. The lower estimates are due to farmers in both countries holding on to lambs to increase breeding flocks. It is worth noting that while almost all of New Zealand's lamb production is sold around the world, only about half of Australian lamb is exported as the rest is consumed domestically.

Due to these bountiful pastures, available lambs are flourishing and growing to heavier weights. In Australia the expectation is that lambs will average 48.5 lb (22.0 kg) carcass weight, slightly less than last years record of 48.9 lb (22.2 kg), while in New Zealand it's estimated that lambs will average 40.5 lb (18.4 kg), a record average lamb weight. Keeping in mind that in 2008 the Australian average was 45.0 lb (20.4 kg) and in New Zealand it was 36.4 lb (16.5 kg) these are quite large increases and as a result cuts of lamb will be proportionately heavier than what we've been used to seeing. As an example, the average frenched rack of lamb out of New Zealand will weigh 15½ oz in 2012 compared with 14 oz in 2008, so lighter racks will be harder to find.



In the longer term, the international supply of lamb from both countries remains at historically low levels despite the slight rebound from last year's lows. Moving into the later part of this year, as seasonal production levels ease we anticipate that supply may tighten again. Economic conditions, international interest and exchange rates and weather all come in to play, of course, so a lot can happen and we'll provide a closer look at where we see the Fall and pre-Holidays supply later in the year.



**WHAT TYPES OF GRASS DO THEY EAT?** Our Pasture Perfect™ grass-fed lambs and cattle graze freely on a variety of nutritious grasses, predominantly rye grass with clover and other broad leaf grasses. If needed in winter when grass growth slows down, animals can graze on leafy feed crops such as chicory or brassicas, or hay harvested during the summer. Because of the temperate climate Down Under, they are always at pasture and never confined.