The U.S. Sheep Industry
Today, there are about 6 million sheep in the country and approximately 82,000 sheep ranches in the United States. Sheep are raised in every state in the country. The vast majority of sheep operations are family owned and operated. In the eastern and midwestern United States, there are a greater number of small flock operations while most large commercial operations are found in the west. Leading lamb producing states are California, Texas, Colorado, Wyoming and South Dakota.

American Sheep Production
Sheep operations are diverse because sheep are adaptable to a wide range of climates and management systems. One thing that all American sheep producers have in common is a commitment to quality and conservation.

Sheep producers care for their sheep by making sure they have quality natural grazing, clean water, care and assistance during lambing, and protection from predators. Approximately 275,000 sheep are killed each year by predators (coyotes, dogs, mountain lions/cougars/pumas).

American sheep are reared on high quality, natural forage diets. Their pastures can include an array of grasses as well as other forage such as legumes, weeds and woody, brushy plants.

Depending on the quality of range, some lambs are marketed directly from the range or pasture while others are grain-finished for a short period of time. Specialty formulated grain is often used to supplement the natural forage diet of sheep and adds to the marbling and mild flavor of the meat. It also allows for year-round availability.

No growth hormones are used in lamb production in the United States*.

Sheep and the Environment
Sheep work like self-propelled lawnmowers as they graze. The result is controlled vegetation without the use of herbicides and gas-powered equipment. Sheep promote healthy forests by grazing the vegetation that crowds out and competes with trees. In addition, sheep grazing helps to reduce the risk of forest fires and wildfires.

Diverse businesses including ski resorts, Christmas tree farms and wineries use sheep for their natural gazing benefits.
American Lamb Breeds
Prior to World War II (and the development of synthetic fabrics), many producers raised sheep primarily for wool, delaying slaughter of their sheep so that they could be sheared more often. This resulted in less tender meat with a stronger flavor.

Today’s sheep producers are most focused on raising lamb. Wool is still a focus for some, but lamb meat is the most important product the American Lamb producer sells. As a result the American Lamb producers have focused on raising meat breeds of sheep. In general, these breeds are larger in size as compared to smaller lambs raised for wool. The most popular breeds of sheep in the United States are Suffolk, Dorset and Hampshire.

American Lamb Sales
As a result of the superior breeding and nutritional programs, sheep in the United States tend to be bigger and meatier. That’s why the rib eye on an American Lamb rack tends to be larger than those on imported racks.

Lamb, by definition, is meat from sheep less than one year of age. Meat from sheep older than one year of age is considered mutton. Lamb has a milder flavor than mutton.

Approximately 200 million pounds of lamb are sold each year in the United States. These sales split between retail (60 percent) and foodservice (40 percent).

Inspection of American Lamb
All American Lamb is either USDA inspected for wholesomeness or inspected by state systems equal to the Federal government.

American Lamb Grades
USDA Meat Graders also grade lamb. There are five quality grades for American Lamb – Prime, Choice, Good, Utility and Cull. These grades are based on maturity/age, conformation and other lean quality factors. The vast majority – more than 90 percent of American Lamb – will grade USDA Prime or Choice.

The U.S. Lamb Market
In the United States, the per capita consumption of lamb is about one pound per person – a small percentage of red meat consumption in the United States. Beef per capita consumption is approximately 61 pounds per year.
(USDA Economic Service- Retail 2008)

Lamb consumption in other countries is much higher than in the United States. Here consumption of lamb increases in the winter and spring, which can often be associated with religious holidays and celebrations.
THE AMERICAN LAMB CONSUMER

About one-third of consumers have never eaten lamb; many report that they have never had a chance to try it.

Many consumers try lamb for the first time in a restaurant. It is also often linked to special occasions.

Lamb consumption is heaviest on the west and east coasts. Men are more likely to eat lamb than women and income plays a role in consumption.

AMERICAN LAMB PRIMALS

The lamb carcass is generally broken down into four major primal cuts: Shoulder, Rack, Loin and Leg. In addition, there is the neck, foreshank and the breast or brisket section.

AMERICAN LAMB SHOULDER CUTS

American Lamb shoulder provides the most economical cuts of lamb including the square cut shoulder roast, the boneless shoulder and shoulder chops (arm and blade).

AMERICAN LAMB RACK CUTS

The most common lamb cut on restaurant menus is rack of lamb. Rack of lamb is easy to prepare at home as well. Rack of lamb may be cut into single or double chops and is often sold frenched. Frenching is the removal of at least 1.5 inches of meat and fat from the bone ends of the lamb rack. Two lamb racks are sometimes tied together to create a crown roast.

AMERICAN LAMB LOIN CUTS

Meaty and tender cuts from the loin are a delicious alternative to rack of lamb. Loin chops (also referred to as lamb t-bones) can be sliced from the loin roast. The loin also yields a boneless loin and tenderloin.
American Lamb Leg Cuts
The leg of lamb is the most diverse lamb primal. The whole leg can be roasted and served at holiday parties. The boneless leg can be butterflied and grilled or stuffed and roasted. Individual muscles from the leg, such as sirloins and top rounds, are also available. Lamb leg meat is also frequently cubed for kabob or stew meat. Ground lamb may be used in place of other ground meat in most recipes.

Other American Lamb Cuts
Other cuts of lamb include lamb spareribs (often called Denver ribs), the foreshank and neck.

American Lamb Nutrition
Lamb is naturally nutrient rich. On average, a three-ounce serving has 175 calories and meets the FSIS definition for lean. According to FSIS, lean meat has less than 10 grams of fat, less than 4.5 grams of saturated fat, and less than 95 milligrams of cholesterol per 100 grams or 3.5 ounces. The leanest cuts of lamb include those from the leg, loin and shank. On average, cooked lean lamb is an excellent source of protein, vitamin B12, Niacin, Selenium and Zinc. (Source: USDA's National Nutrient Database based on a composite average of all lamb cuts.)

Recommended Flavor Pairings with American Lamb
Because it is mild in flavor, American Lamb blends well with a variety of herbs, spices and marinades. Herbs that are commonly paired with lamb include rosemary, mint and tarragon. Common spices paired with lamb include curry, cumin and coriander. Wines are often used in braising and stewing liquids as well as sauces for lamb.

The American Lamb Difference
Due to superior breeding and nutrition, American Lamb has a delicate flavor and a larger, meatier size. American Lamb is available year round. Best of all, American Lamb is available fresh – up to 10,000 miles fresher than imported lamb.

For more information and recipes with American Lamb, visit www.americanlamb.com

*Although growth hormones are not used in lamb production within the United States, they are legal to use.