

## **The use of herding dogs on a sheep farm**

By Ulf Kintzel

The use of herding dogs puts me in an advantageous position in many different situations. Sheep respect a dog more than a person. What sheep farmer hasn't been annoyed by sheep that wanted to run them over when putting out hay or opening the fence? What sheep owner hasn't become angry because the sheep absolutely didn't go in the pen they were supposed to? All these problems are easier to manage with a well-trained dog. However, my use of herding dogs goes further.

I used to tend sheep in Germany for about 11 years. Tending means grazing sheep on pasture without any fencing, using dogs instead. These pastures are often side by side with fields with crops. In order to get to the next pasture one has to lead the flock on public roads and farm roads.

The dogs of choice for me are German Shepherd Dogs – a different kind of German Shepherd Dog than one sees at dog shows. When I moved to the US I brought this kind of dogs with me. I use my dogs to move my flock at times along the road in order to utilize other farmers' fields. German Shepherd Dogs (GSDs) work differently than the familiar Border Collie (BC). BCs tend to want to encircle sheep, moving in an arch shaped pattern. GSDs move in straight lines along the flock. This enables the GSD to guard a neighbor's field or lawn by patrolling up and down the edge of same field or lawn when moving sheep on a road.

Since there is no tradition in the Eastern US in moving a flock of sheep not just across but also along the road I tackled this task a little different than I used to. If the road is well traveled I have one vehicle in front of me and one vehicle behind me while moving the sheep. The vehicles are equipped with revolving lights and the drivers use red flags from the power company, courtesy of a retired employee, to warn approaching traffic.

Before I did this the first time I checked with the State Police if this is permitted. I got no real answer. They were too baffled by my question. On one occasion I passed a police car sitting along the roadside. The officers seemed to enjoy it and asked no question. In one township it was put on the agenda of a meeting. The folks who had moved in from the city wanted me to stop moving along the road. The local officials voted this motion down. So, I continue "living on the edge", taking advantage of this apparent gray zone, and this lack of regulation.

I rent additional fields particularly in late summer through early winter. At times in late summer I have a farmer seed cereal rye at three bushels per acre in a harvested small grain field. I pay for seed and labor and get to pasture the rye, sometimes even twice. The farmer keeps the soil from eroding and gets to fertilize the field that way or uses the straw the following year. This is a win-win situation for both parties.

During fall and early winter I use harvested hayfields. This is particularly good for the next year's hay crop when all the old hay has been grazed off the field. Horse hay customers have one less reason to complain then. I pay for the use of these hayfield.

Once I arrive at the new pasture I usually have it fenced with electric netting, a kind of electric fencing specifically developed for sheep. If water is needed I bring the water with a homemade water trailer that I pull by truck.

Utilizing these kinds of pasture allows me to extend my grazing season and reduce the amount of hay needed in the winter. I find it impossible to do without the use of herding dogs.



*German Shepherd Dog Bea (far right) is moving a group of sheep with lambs to the next pasture. The guard dog Gertrude is following the flock.*