

# Garlic and Sheep?

by Heather Bryant, Extension Educator, Agricultural Resources

I went on a farm visit the other day. It was an organic, diversified livestock farm, which is to say they raise dairy and beef cattle, pigs, chickens and sheep. I was actually there to talk about soils, a subject I am more familiar with than livestock, but as generally happens when you visit a farm, the conversation expanded beyond the original topic and I ended up walking away better informed than when I got there.

The farmer was talking about some of the challenges he faced when he transitioned his sheep flock to organic. Specifically, when his sheep got sick he was no longer able to use some of the tried and true deworming medications he relied on in his days as a conventional farmer. Transitioning to organic is a pretty complex undertaking and one of the many steps is removing from the tool kit certain medications approved by the vet but not by organic certification regulations. There are excellent points on both sides of this issue and I won't get into them here except to say that going organic is not for everyone. I have heard conventional farmers describe the stress associated with trying an approved but unfamiliar medication when an animal is sick, when they know of a conventional option that will make it feel better.

But the farmer I was speaking with hung in and did his research and found an option that worked on the worms that were making his sheep sick – a common issue particularly in late summer early fall. It was a mixture of garlic and molasses. The idea of plants and foods as medicines fascinates me, so I did a little research when I got back to the office.

I didn't find an avalanche of information on the topic but I did find a couple interesting sources. An article from the University of Aberdeen in Scotland pointed out that garlic is commonly used as a dewormer in many parts the world and cited research from 1969 that indicates the garlic prevents the eggs of some parasites from hatching. I also found a report written by a sheep farmer in Maine who got a grant in 2003 from SARE (the USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program) to test 3 different types of organic deworming medications for sheep. The one she found to be the most effective and least expensive was made from garlic juice. A 2010 factsheet on MOFGA (Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association) approved products for livestock suggested adding molasses to cover the garlic taste.

I will admit to being a little doubtful that molasses can cover the taste of garlic, but I am convinced that this medicine has become a useful new tool for the farm I visited. To learn more about the study in Maine go to

<http://www.mofga.org/Publications/MaineOrganicFarmerGardener/Winter20042005/GarlicJuice/tabid/1280/Default.aspx>

*The University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension is an equal opportunity educator and employer. University of New Hampshire, U.S. Department of Agriculture and N.H. counties cooperating.*