

UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL TRADE COMMISSION

Lamb Meat

Investigation No. TA-201-80

Written Testimony of Michael Randolph Bardsley

Representative, John Espil Sheep Company

Testifying on behalf of R-CALF USA

Hearing on Injury

October 16, 2026

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Good morning, Chairman Doyle and Commissioners. I'm Michael Bardsley, representing John Espil Sheep Company. Our family raises sheep and cattle near Lovelock and Gerlach, Nevada, and Alturas, California. My family and I belong to R-CALF USA, I am a member of the R-CALF USA Sheep Committee and we support its prehearing brief.

My wife's great-grandfather immigrated from Baigorri, a small community in the Basque region of southwestern France, and began raising sheep in northern California in 1903. Our company originated in 1960 and our three children, God willing, will be the fifth generation ranching here.

Our open-range operation winters near Lovelock and summers above Alturas. More than 5,000 sheep trail and graze over 300 miles annually across over one million acres of Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, and private grazing rights. We harvest wool in March and market lambs in September. Lambs provide the majority of our sheep income.

We invest in present and future generations, raising top-quality feeder lambs, fine wool for high-end textiles, and replacement breeding stock. Three generations of our family work alongside approximately 15 H-2A shepherders. Our employees have been overwhelmingly loyal; one has worked for us over 30 years. This work has enabled them to build homes, buy land, and send their children to college, greatly improving their families' opportunities.

Our annual sheep operating costs exceed \$1 million, supporting grocery stores, veterinarians, equipment dealers, repair shops, trucking companies, shearing crews, and countless other businesses. Losing ranches unable to compete with imports sends damaging effects throughout the domestic economy.

In the late 1990s, concern grew among domestic lamb producers about the influx of imported lamb meat. These discussions combined with a sudden and complete lack of interest by domestic packers on purchasing our lambs were the first warning signs of what was to come.

The volatile prices caused by imports has devastated our industry. Financing has been difficult to obtain for many and markets have disappeared. In 2020, we received a feeder-lamb offer of \$1.20 per pound. In 2021, with shipping disruptions tightening supply, our offer more than doubled to \$2.60 per pound for a similar crop of lambs.

In 2022, the market turned. Feeders who had bought lambs at near-record prices faced heavy import pressure. The results were catastrophic. One longtime buyer stopped buying lambs entirely. Others could not offer on our lambs after devastating losses on the previous crop. They had no choice but to permanently change their businesses in order to salvage their livelihoods.

Prices plummeted to levels not seen in years. Fortunately, an established relationship with a family-run feeder allowed us to sell half our lamb crop that fall. For the lambs we did sell, we received less than half the price per pound we received the previous year. Despite that setback, we considered ourselves fortunate: many producers and feeders suffered worse losses.

We later witnessed the consequences firsthand. In 2024, we sought several hundred young ewes to offset our aging herd. Following our tradition, we went to Montana, a state historically known for large range sheep operations. Many producers were liquidating their flocks. We went to a family ranch in Garfield County.

A local agricultural banker told us the county once had over 60,000 sheep; fewer than 10,000 remained in 2024. We spent the day working sheep with the owners, a young couple and their children, and learning their ranch's history.

Founded as a sheep operation, the ranch had diversified into cattle and hay to offset the volatile lamb market. The couple explained that the inconsistent market and its continuing downward trend finally drove them to sell their remaining sheep.

Standing together at the corral, with the deal completed and trucks lined up, we realized this hundred-year-old ranch might never again see the animals fundamental to its foundation. This is one example of sheep ranchers disappearing across the West. We saw it firsthand. We were there.

Our family desperately wants to continue producing American lamb and contributing to our community. We have invested five generations and nearly 125 years in this work. We want the next generation to be able to continue that legacy.

Based on our experience and R-CALF USA's prehearing brief, I respectfully ask the Commission to save America's family ranches.

Thank you.

CERTIFICATION

This statement is made in accordance with 28 U.S.C. § 1746. I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States of America that the foregoing statements are true and correct to the best of my information and belief.

Dated: October 15, 2026

/s/ Michael Randolph Bardsley

Michael Randolph Bardsley

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on October 15, 2026, a true and correct copy of the Public Version of R-CALF USA's foregoing Prehearing Brief, including Attachment A and Exhibits B–U, was served by electronic mail on the following, constituting all other parties on the Secretary's public service list generated October 8, 2026, pursuant to 19 C.F.R. § 201.16(f):

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