

# Livestock Guardian Dog Case Study

## Rafter O Ranch, Kimble County



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# Livestock Guard Dog Case Study

Clint Smith , Kimble County

## Ranch Scenario -

The ranch is 1756 acres and is in Kimble County off Interstate 10. Pastures on the ranch range in size from 300-400 acres. The ranch is rocky with hills dotted with oak trees and is clear of brush. A seasonal stream runs through the lower portion of the ranch and is a favorite place for feral hogs to cool off. The ranch has good high fencing on all perimeters and good low fencing across the pastures. The ranch runs 160 head of Dorper sheep, 300 head of Angora goats, 145 head of meat goats and 10 head of cattle. The ranch also has a group of Black Buck Antelope for hunters that lease the ranch. The ranch has good cell service which allowed the use of traditional Oyster 3 GPS trackers that used a cellular signal to transmit data on the dogs locations every 4 hours.

## Overall Management Plan -

The ranch generally lambs each fall in November to keep heat stress off of the sheep and lambs. The ranch is maintaining its overall livestock numbers currently. Livestock species are not mixed and are rotated through pastures to help maintain brush control. Angora goats are sheared annually, and the mohair is sold.

## General Observations -

The producer received two dogs for the project both females. Both dogs were pure Akbash. The dogs were always observed with the sheep unless they were chasing predators. Dogs were supplemental fed daily when livestock are checked but also have a self-feeder to use. The dog that was producer bonded was more difficult to catch than the AgriLife bonded dog. When the dogs were initially released with the sheep, they chased the ranch black bucks, whitetail deer and feral hogs. By the end of the project black buck and whitetail deer were frequently seen in the herd of sheep and were not chased away by the dogs. The dogs continued to chase feral hogs off of the property.



## LGD Bonding Protocol:

All puppies were purchased from breeders across Texas for this project at 8 weeks of age. This ranch received one puppy that the producer bonded with sheep in a bonding pen from 8 weeks of age until the dogs were 8 months old. The dog's pen gradually increased in size over time and the number of animals were increased as well. The dog was socialized during the bonding period. The producer attempted to use an in-



visible fence system on the pup but it was not set up properly and traumatized the pup when it broke through the barrier once. The system was only used the first week the pup was moved to a larger pen at 6 months of age. The pup was released from the bonding pen at 8 months of age and placed in a small trap for 2 months. At 10 months of age, in September of 2022 the producer bonded pup and the AgriLife pup were placed with sheep and tracked with GPS trackers.

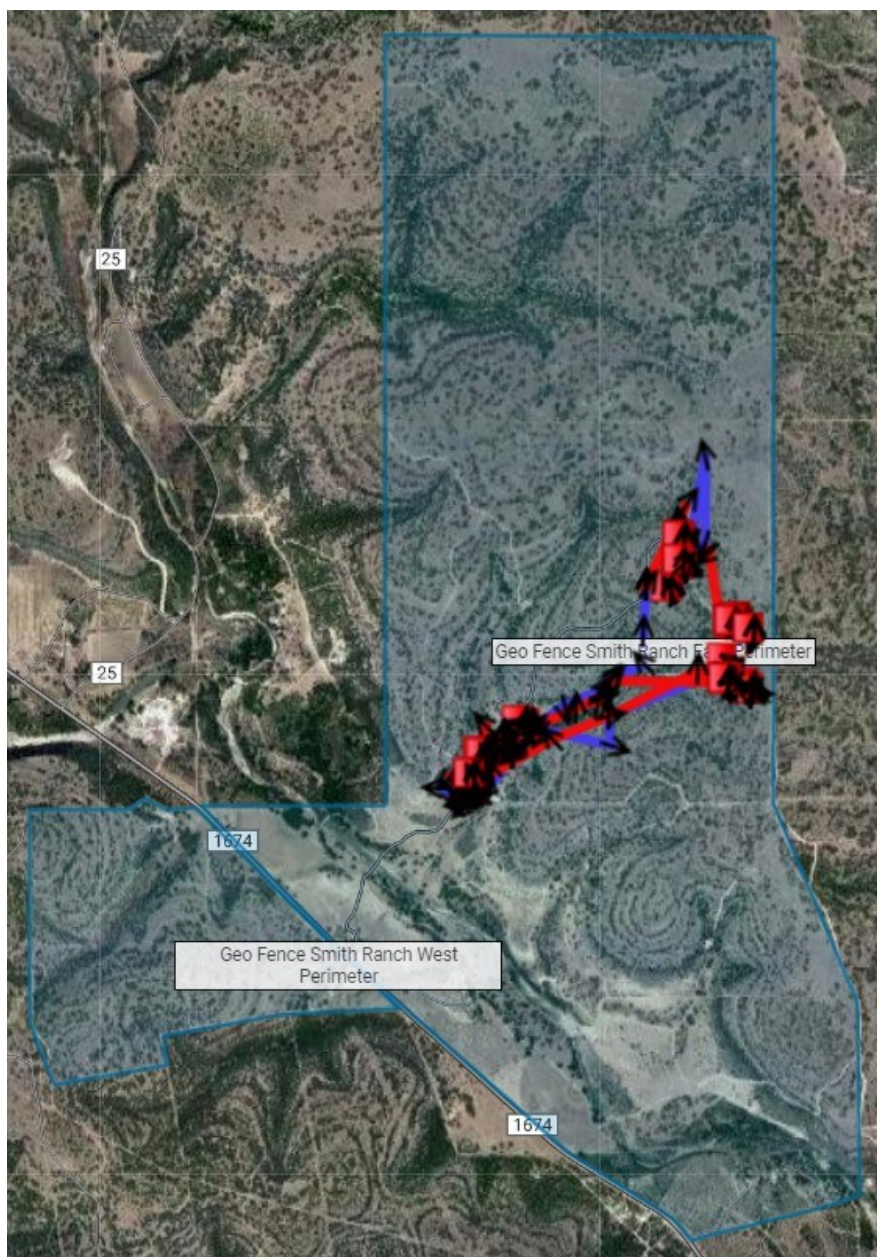
The other dog the ranch received was bonded by AgriLife personnel for 30 days in a 60x60 enclosure and then moved to a 1 acre pen until it was 6 months old. At 6 months of age the dog was released into a 100 acre pasture with more livestock and other pups until it was 10 months old. The dog was bonded in a pen without hot wire as a pair and received socialization, leash training, tether training and truck rides each week. Livestock were rotated in the pens every three weeks. All dogs were tracked until they were 18 months of age.

### **LGD Movement -**

Both dogs regularly traveled the entire area of the pastures they were in. Several times when the dogs were first released with the sheep, they chased feral hogs off the property and onto a neighbor's ranch based on GPS data and producer accounts. They also crossed the road that separates the ranch several times. Based on GPS data speed they were chasing something. The dogs always returned on their own to the appropriate pasture. Once the dogs had established their territory the incidents of patrolling outside of their pastures stopped. The dogs were regularly seen chasing aerial predators, across the pastures.

### **Predation -**

The main predators on the ranch are feral hogs, coyotes, bobcats, eagles, Cara Cara and Black Headed Buzzards. No sign of predation was found in the sheep herd after the dogs had been released on the ranch.



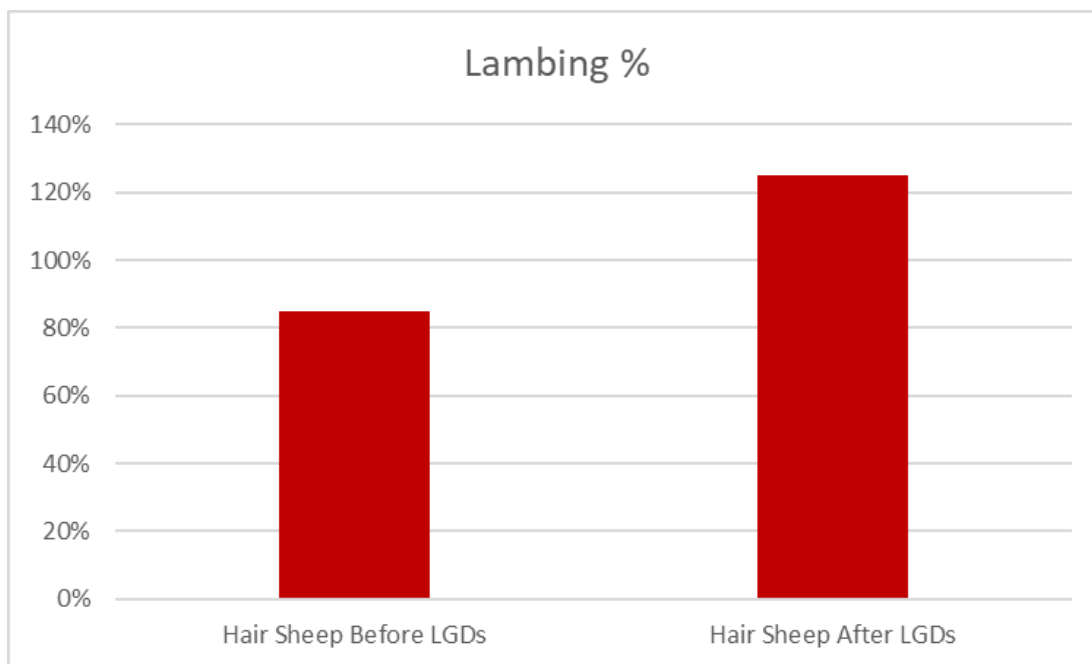
## Lamb Crop Information and Herd Size -

### Before LGDs – October 2022

Before the dogs were placed on the ranch, the 160 head herd of Dorper ewes, raised a 85% lamb crop

### After LGDs—Jun 2023

After the project was completed, the Dorper ewes raised a 125% lamb crop.



## Q&A – Clint Smith

### What were the most positive benefits of the program?

The most positive benefits of the program were getting to work with AgriLife personnel and using their expertise to bond and train the dogs. The increased lamb crop and learning about LGDs was also beneficial to our ranch.

### What was the greatest challenge with the program?

The biggest challenge was getting the dogs to stop chasing livestock and Black Buck during adolescence. They killed one ewe and frequently chased the deer out of the pastures. A dangle stick was recommended but didn't seem to work well for our dogs.

### What are your future ranch plans related to LGDs?

We are definitely keeping LGDs on the ranch and have already added more to protect our Angora herd. We are planning on adding more dogs to protect the meat goats also.

### What would you have done differently?

We should have used invisible fence in our bonding and training pen to teach respect for fences. We lost one of our dogs just after the project ended to a snare. It was heartbreaking because she was a great dog.