

Ranchers turn to bigger dogs to protect livestock

BY KRISTIAN FODEN-VENCIL
Oregon Public Broadcasting
BAKER CITY — For the last few weeks, rancher Kim Kerns has been living in a 1970s trailer, up on a high meadow, with 550 sheep as they fatten up on spring grass.

Her family has used livestock protection dogs up here since the 1980s when she first got a Maremma guard dog from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

But that was before wolves returned.

“We’ve actually kind of changed the type and size of dog we use,” she said. “We’re using a bigger and more aggressive guard dog now than we did in the ‘80s and even the ‘90s.”

Now, her dogs are a mix of Akbash, Kangal and Anatolian, three massive, ancient breeds out of Turkey. All of them can be 100 pounds or more and have a bite pressure of 740 pounds per square inch. Statistics vary, but a wolf’s bite force is between 400 psi and 1,500 psi.

Kerns runs eight guard dogs at a cost of \$500 a month in feed. But she said the animals pay their ways by reducing the labor of controlling sheep and reducing predator kills.

Over the last couple of decades, Oregon and much of the West has been conducting an enormous ecological experiment by allowing wolves to once more roam the landscape.

For ranchers, wolves are another predator to guard against. But unlike coyotes, bears, bobcats or mountain lions, wolves hunt in packs and can be very persistent. They’re also smart. So they learn quickly that a sound cannon, a bunch of flags, or even gunfire into the air aren’t a real danger. And they return.

Kerns remembers a two-week period last year when wolves were picking off her sheep, one by one. Even her dogs weren’t a match.

“We weren’t getting any sleep, the guard dogs weren’t getting any sleep, everybody was run ragged,” she said. “And it was terrifying. Like it was flat scary.”

She tried everything, from spotlights and electrical fences at night, but the wolves kept coming.

“Finally we just decided that we couldn’t take it anymore. We moved the sheep a couple of miles,” she said. “It seemed to be outside of where the wolves were.”

Now, Kerns relies on the dogs to alert her to wolves. They can smell or see a wolf well before she can, and they start to bark and get agitated.

Kerns surrounds her sheep with a sturdy electric fence at night or moves them to another pasture. She is permitted to shoot a wolf if it’s actively attacking. But since they’re federally protected, she needs



Rancher Shirley Shold breeds Akbash Kangal dogs for ranchers who want bigger livestock protection animals, now that wolves are in Eastern Oregon.

Kristian Foden-Vencil/Oregon Public Broadcasting



One of Kim Kerns’ favorite livestock protection dogs, Opal, places herself firmly between the photographer and the herd.

Kristian Foden-Vencil/Oregon Public Broadcasting

really good proof. Also, shooting a wolf in a herd would just as likely result in the death of a sheep.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture has a compensation program to reimburse ranchers. But Kerns said it pays little and the loss of just one ewe can cause real damage, even though it might only fetch \$200 at market.

“There are some 5- or 6-year-old ewes in there that know every single camp we go to. Every single waterhole,” Kerns said. “That ewe is really irreplaceable in my flock.”

Kerns thinks the compensation program just gives the public permission to turn a blind eye to the problem.

Unlike many ranchers, Kerns doesn’t want to see wolves eliminated again. But



Shirley Shold greets her livestock protection dogs out on her ranch just east of Baker City.

Kristian Foden-Vencil/Oregon Public Broadcasting

she’d like a quicker response from the government when she sends in a kill request.

Another rancher in the Baker City area, Shirley Shold, agrees: “I think it

would be better for everyone, and the packs, if they were spread out more.”

She started breeding dogs that are suitable for herds after finding freshly killed calves and lambs.

“Seeing the loss of a newborn life was very hard,” said Shold, who moved from Portland 12 years ago.

“So I started thinking, we’ve got to do something different. And I was talking to a fellow rancher and she said, ‘If you’ve got wolves, you want Kangal dogs.’”

So Shold got a Kangal and Akbash pair and now breeds them for other ranchers at about \$800 a head.

How good the dogs turn out to be depends largely on their nature, said Shold. Some dogs are more nurturing and remain in the middle of their herds. While other dogs become perimeter dogs, scouting outside the herd for predators.

Watching them is like watching a sheep dog trial. Except that instead of a human issuing orders, these dogs follow their inner natures.

But many traditional ranchers aren’t convinced the dogs can keep wolves away and, they point out, the dogs are expensive to feed.

But Shold thinks attitudes are changing as more wolves appear and ranchers see others in the business using large dogs to protect their livestock.

Shold’s ranch can be seen from the road.

“Everybody started paying attention,” she said. “People really started ... watching the dogs because they can observe them from the highway, and I know it’s making an impact. They’re seeing that this can help.”

The dogs’ ability to manage a sheep herd is well recognized. But Shold wants to integrate them into cattle herds as well.

Others aren’t so sure. They point out that cows don’t herd together like sheep. That means the dogs have to patrol much larger areas. But on Shold’s ranch, the cattle do seem tolerant of the dogs.

Brian Ratliff, with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, said some ranchers are seeing success with the large dog breeds.

“Livestock protection dogs will work or have some noticeable benefits on certain operations. So, sheep and goats. Also in confined areas, smaller pastures, with cattle,” he said.

But it’s not about having the dogs fight the wolves.

“The most important thing I think that livestock protection dogs do ... is they alert the producer to what’s going on,” he said.

Back on the slopes of Kim Kerns’ ranch, she watches her dogs move the herd to greener pastures. She said yes, the dogs are useful. “They’re another tool in the tool box.”

But they’re not a silver bullet.

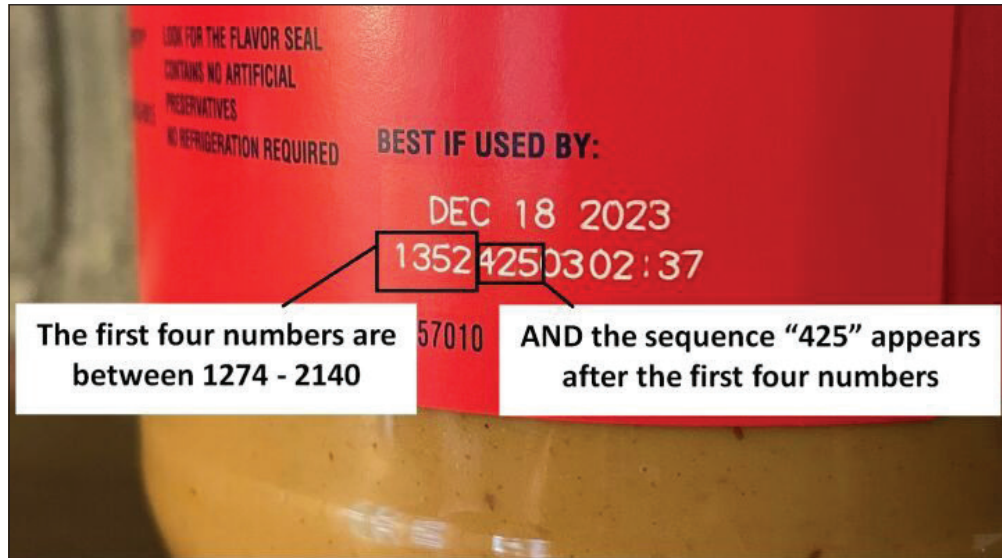
Oregon warns recipients of food boxes about recall of Jif peanut butter

East Oregonian
PORTLAND — Oregon Health Authority is warning the people of Oregon to be on the lookout for Jif brand peanut butter that may be contaminated with salmonella bacteria.

J.M. Smucker Co., the parent company for the peanut butter brand, issued a voluntary recall Friday, May 20. The Food and Drug Administration, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and local partners are investigating this outbreak.

The recalled peanut butter was distributed in retail stores and other outlets throughout the country. It includes creamy, crunchy and natural varieties.

Jif peanut butter was included in food boxes distributed through OHA’s food box program. OHA has investigated further and determined the recall lot does include the Jif peanut butter that was distributed in the food boxes. This only impacts the peanut butter product inside the food box,



A recall is underway for Jif peanut butter due to possible contamination of salmonella bacteria. J.M. Smucker Co., the parent company of Jif, issued a recall Friday, May 20, 2022. The recall applies to products with lot codes 1274425 – 2140425, with the digits 425 in the fifth to seventh position.

Food and Drug Administration/Contributed Photo

which can be exchanged for a replacement or refunded.

Starting May 24, staff with the Oregon Health Authority began visiting all OHA food hubs and inspecting respective food boxes to substitute

any recall product for new. This work will require the remainder of this week to accomplish.

“All warehoused Jif products that are waiting to be distributed have been thoroughly in-

spected and replaced,” according to the announcement.

To see if a jar of Jif peanut butter is being recalled, check the lot number that is printed below the “Best if Used by” date on the label.

The recall applies to products with lot codes 1274425 – 2140425, with the digits 425 in

the fifth to seventh position. This information is printed on the back label of the jar.

The Nurses and Techs at Saint Alphonus Baker City would like to say THANK YOU and show our support to the Baker City Fire Department’s First Responders for the work they do 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in our community. Thank you from the Oregon Nurses Association of Saint Alphonus Baker City.

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