



February 2021

Sheep Industry

Volume 25, Issue 2

NEWS

Shearing in a Pandemic

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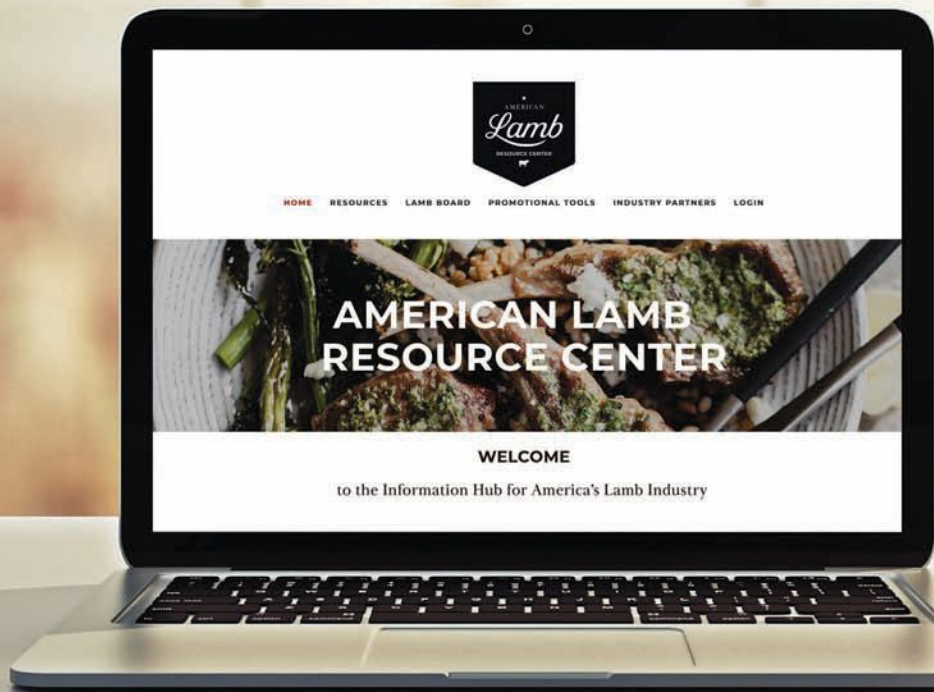
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Shearing in a Pandemic

Shearing is a busy time with enough challenges of its own for producers, their shearers and anyone else who might get roped into the process of helping. Shearing in a pandemic, however, doesn't appear to be all that different.

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Meet the Exec. Board: Laurie Hubbard

A regular attendee at the ASI Annual Convention since graduating from Penn State, Laurie Hubbard sees the industry as extended family. Having served with ALB and NSIIC, Hubbard is now leading the industry as an ASI director.

ON THE COVER:



California photographer Ashley Carreiro-Loyd submitted this up close look at shearing in the 2020 ASI Photo Contest.



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President's Notes



BENNY COX
ASI President

It's Been A Busy Two Years As ASI President

Lots of things have happened in the last two years.

IN 2019:

- ASI initiated development of the Secure Sheep & Wool Supply Program, which has now been completed.
- ASI secured \$1.5 million from the Trump Administration for export assistance on raw wool and pelts, due to issues with China.
- Worked hard on the Farm Bill, which brought an increase of \$500,000 – for a total of \$2 million – for reauthorization of the National Sheep Industry Improvement Center.
- The American Wool Council held a tour for military procurement officials.
- We paid off the Super Wash loan.
- We began working on alternative wool testing capabilities.
- We worked on specific language for H-2A workers.
- Secured use of the M-44 after 1½ years of government scrutiny, and made it available in 10 states.
- Completed a strategic plan for ASI.
- Worked on pharmaceutical availability for sheep health.
- Began work on the VOLUNTARY Wool Assurance Program, which is nearing completion.
- After many years of work and persistence by ASI, the U.S. Sheep Experiment Station in Idaho was removed from the closure list in March of 2019.

IN 2020:

- Started the year off quite well with the ASI Annual Convention in Scottsdale, Ariz.
- The ASI Spring Trip was the largest in 25 years with 80 in attendance in Washington, D.C.
- ASI helped created a committee for an Electronic Identification taskforce – which Erica Sanko (now a full-time employee of ASI) and I are a part of.
- With the COVID-19 pandemic, financial support was critical and worked to secure support that would allow our industry to survive. Support was accomplished. Through insistence of the industry, both wool and sold lambs were in the first Coronavirus Food Assistance Program agreement initially. All totaled, the two rounds of CFAP support have put more than \$150 million directly into our industry.
- Worked on a partnership with Texas A&M University for the wool testing lab in San Angelo, Texas – which will be the test site for American wool starting in 2022.
- ASI brought in Paul Rosenthal and his firm to assist in research for a trade case on excessive imported lamb from Australia and New Zealand.
- ASI hired a production crew to document American wool warehouses in new videos in place of reverse trade missions that were cancelled during the pandemic.
- Assisted the U.S. Department of Agriculture with guidance on a lamb purchase, which included high-dollar racks.
- Worked with USDA and the wool industry to update the wool loan program, which has paid millions for wool and unshorn lambs.

It has been a privilege to have the opportunity to be in a position to give back to the industry that has been a big portion of my life's work. It has given both Elaine and I the opportunity to meet lots of people from all across the United States to form relationships – friendships that will last the rest of our lives. I have found a great deal of enjoyment in being a part of ASI's officer ship and working closely with numerous past presidents. Glen Fisher, Clint Krebs, Burton Pfliger and Mike Corn are all men with a passion for our industry.

I now will join that list of past presidents with pride in having been there and done that. I cannot finish without giving thanks to Peter Orwick and all the staff – some of which are no longer there – for helping to make my experience a pleasurable one by being ready at the drop of a hat to assist me with any issues any time. THANKS TO ALL OF YOU WHO TRUSTED IN ME AND HELPED LEAD ME ALONG THE WAY. Susan Shultz & Brad Boner are knowledgeable. They are thinkers and doers. They will go forward in a very fine fashion.

Y'all keep on doing what you do best and I will see you on down the road. 🍷

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"Odie and I will be tuning in from Roswell to network with all of you and learn the latest news and information. We might travel less, but we are looking forward to seeing everyone as much as always, and supporting this great industry!"

- Mike Corn

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AMERICAN SHEEP INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION INC.

9785 Maroon Circle, Suite 360

Englewood, CO 80112-2692

Phone: 303-771-3500 • Fax: 303-771-8200

info@sheepusa.org • Sheepusa.org

EDITOR/ADVERTISING DIRECTOR: Kyle Partain

CONTRIBUTING WRITER:

Julie Stepanek Shiflett, Ph.D., Juniper Economic Consulting

ASI Office Staff:

Peter Orwick, Executive Director

Rita Kourlis Samuelson, Deputy Director/Wool Marketing

Larry Kincaid, Chief Financial Officer

Chase Adams, Senior Policy and Information Director

Erica Sanko, Director of Analytics & Production Programs

Christa Rochford, International Wool Marketing Coordinator

Zahrah Khan, Project Manager - Accounting & Convention

Angela Ayala, Executive Assistant

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Market Report



JULIE STEPANEK SHIFLETT, PH.D.
Juniper Economic Consulting

This Year Could See Slow Recovery in Lamb Market

In 2021, we are likely to see reduced lamb demand drag on the industry, constraining the live lamb market and hobbling the feeder lamb market.

Rabobank reported that casual and fine dining sales were down 20 percent and 30 percent, respectively, last year, which directly translated into increased retail and home consumption. As COVID-19 continues to place safer-at-home restrictions on consumers, they are spending less on eating out and on entertainment and thus have more disposable income to eat better at home, which likely helped lamb sales last year.

Rabobank forecasted that while bars and pubs could see a 100 percent jump in 2021 sales annually, full service and limited service and quick-service restaurants will see about 5 to 20 percent growth in 2021 sales.

This Easter, the lamb industry could see COVID-heightened retail sales, but record-high fresh lamb prices might see some backlash, prompting greater featuring, and fire sales of frozen product.

In 2021, it is anticipated that stronger demand from sheep producers will help support feeder lamb prices; however, constrained demand from processors might hold back a rapid recovery in live slaughter lamb prices. Although the meat market remains strong in early 2021, there is ample supply of lamb in the freezers that will likely see some release in the next few months, depressing prices.

In early December, the Livestock Marketing Information Center

anticipated that American slaughter lamb prices will continue to rebound from pre-COVID values, but it will take some time. During the past three years, slaughter lamb prices on a carcass basis averaged roughly \$287 per cwt. (about \$143 per cwt. live weight), but are expected to average \$243 to \$253 per cwt. in 2021 (\$122 to \$127 per cwt. live weight).

According to LMIC, feeder lamb prices could steady – not strengthen – in 2021, an indicator that a slaughter lamb market rebound might be more than a year out. Feeder lambs are priced today on what producers and processors expect the market will look like in four to six months. In 2017 to 2019, 60- to 90-lb. feeders averaged \$183 per cwt., prices edged higher to \$189 per cwt. in 2020, and are expected to stabilize in 2021.

In this uncertain time, an enterprise budget can help producers estimate profitability. Producers can customize enterprise budgets offered on the internet by land grant universities by entering their own costs and projected revenue. Susan Schoenian with the University of Maryland Extension provides a list of enterprise budgets offered by various institutions on her website at Sheep101.info/201/budget.html.

LIVE LAMB MARKET GAINED LATE-2020 MOMENTUM

Live, negotiated slaughter lamb prices averaged \$161.23 per cwt. in December, down 4 percent monthly and up 6 percent year-on-

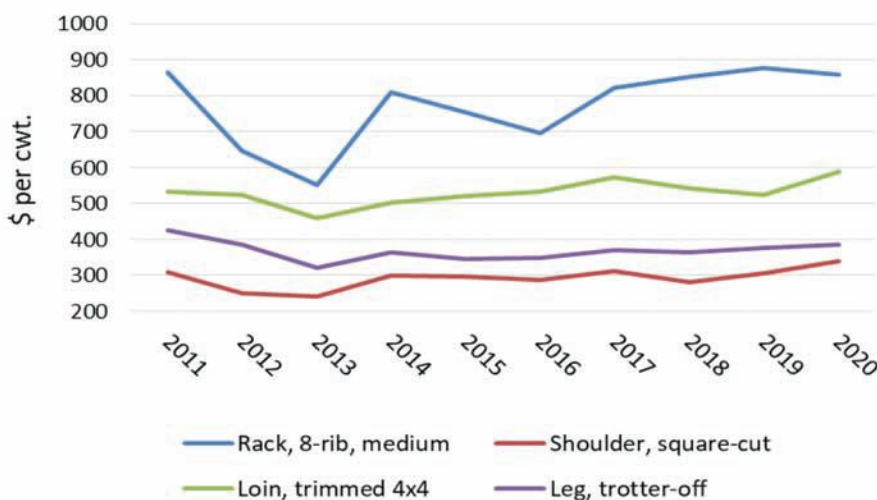
year. Average live weights were 135 lbs., steady with November and down 7 percent year-on-year. Slaughter lamb prices in direct trade were not reported for one-half of 2020 due to confidentiality concerns.

In December, Equity Cooperative Livestock Sales Association sold 310 lambs at 180 lbs. for \$77.50 per cwt. It also sold 282 head of lambs at 110 lbs. for \$157 per cwt.

At the New Holland (Penn.) Sales Stable auction, 80- to 90-lb. hair lambs brought \$215 per cwt. in December, up 8 percent monthly and up 16 percent year-on-year; 90- to 100-lb. lambs averaged \$184 per cwt. in December, up 1 percent monthly and up 2 percent from December 2019; 100- to 150-lb. lambs averaged \$181 per cwt., up 7 percent monthly and up 5 percent year-on-year.

Lamb remains an important protein of choice for

Wholesale Primal Prices
Source: USDA/AMS, ASI



cultural celebrations across the United States. The Chinese New Year on Feb. 12 will support lamb sales, as will Easter and the contemporaneous date of the Muslim Ramadan. The month of fasting is April 12 to May 11 with the festival of breaking the fast – Eid ul-Fitr – falling on May 12. The Western Easter falls on April 4 and the Eastern Orthodox (Greek) Easter falls on May 2. Planning ahead, Eid ul-Adha – the Festival of Sacrifice on July 20-23 – is also a significant celebration.

Feeder lambs in San Angelo, Texas, Fort Collins, Colo., and Sioux Falls, S.D., auction markets (60- to 90-lbs.) averaged \$231.23 per cwt. in December, up 8 percent monthly and up 16 percent year-on-year. In 2020, the three-market feeder lamb average at auction was \$191.84 per cwt., up 8 percent annually.

LAMB PRODUCTION DOWN

Estimated lamb harvest in federally inspected plants was 1.76 million head in 2020, down 7 percent year-on-year. Lamb production was an estimated 83.2 million lbs., down 9 percent year-on-year.

The sharp contraction in federally inspected slaughter does not necessarily reflect lower industry inventory numbers for many lambs are harvested outside of federally inspected facilities, such as in state-inspected plants. Industry inventory was down, but a share of the reductions were captured by state-inspected harvest and many more were likely harvested in facilities that do not report harvest numbers. COVID-19 promoted a surge in locally processed meats and many livestock plants found that their kill slots were booked for months.

There has been a rise in the number of lambs that are harvested in state-inspected slaughter facilities, which are not captured in FI plant reports. In 2016 to 2020, the number of lambs and sheep harvested in non-federally inspected plants jumped 42 percent to 323,000 head. Total commercial sheep and lamb harvest was an estimated 2.2 million head in 2020, down 5 percent year-on-year. Within this volume, FI harvest was 1.9 million head, down 7 percent, and non-federally inspected harvest was 323,000 head, up 7.2 percent. This is a testament to the local and regional importance of the American lamb industry.

PREMIUM PELTS SEE POSITIVE TERRITORY

Since late last fall, premium American pelts have seen a gradual lift into positive territory. Select pelts that are better quality, including finer wool and whiter wool, have seen a lift. However, shorter length coarse wooled-pelts have seen no improvement. Within the fashion world, there has been a lambskin revival.

Clothing and home designers are incorporating shearling into this year's lineup. In early January, *The Wall Street Journal* published an article, *Fashion's New Shearling Obsession – From Phone Cases to Fanny Packs*. The article comments that "shearling's calming texture" is "soothing and reassuringly soft in these pandemic times." Home designers are also expected to promote soft-textured products such as shearling into their plans.

Pelts are priced very selectively and only the highest quality pelts see top dollar. As producers prepare for shearing and lambing season,

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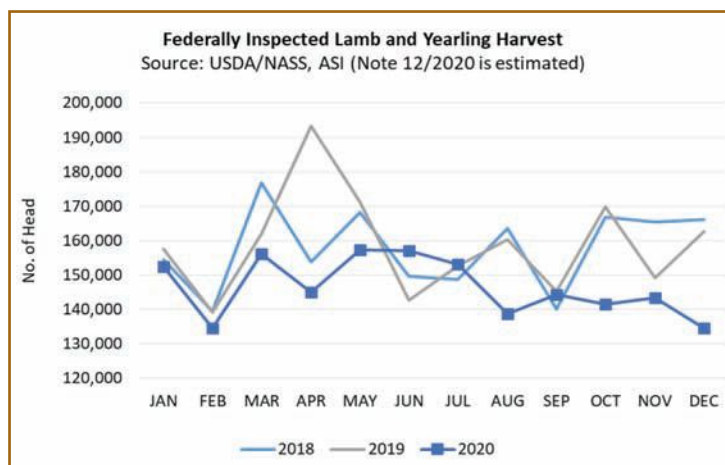
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consider the value of the pelt versus the net value of shearing, wool and the sheared pelt at processing. The United States has an advantage over some of its competitors because its pelts have a lot of unique uses. Not only is the larger size of American pelts notable, but the fineness and brightness of its wool.

Pelt prices have not been reported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service since July 2020. As lambskins find expanded markets, available price reporting will be critical to securing and expanding pelt demand. There are currently not enough participants in the voluntary pelt report to protect confidentiality. It is uncertain whether the inclusion of two new lamb processing plants in Colorado and Texas will allow USDA/AMS to report pelt values.

MEAT MARKET REMAINED STRONG

High lamb wholesale prices in 2020 suggests lamb has a loyal following. Consumers spent their restaurant savings on buying lamb at grocery stores. After hitting a record high in November, the wholesale lamb composite weakened marginally in December by 2 percent to \$451.06 per cwt. The lower average reflected softening in the 8-rib, medium, rack, by 1 percent to \$891.37 per cwt. and a 2 percent loss in the loin, trimmed 4x4 to \$698.47 per cwt. The leg, trotter-off, and the shoulder, square-cut, held mostly steady at \$397.92 and \$366.96 per cwt., respectively.

For the year, the wholesale composite gained 9 percent in 2020 to \$427.48 per cwt. The average was supported mostly by the 12-percent gain in the loin, trimmed 4x4, at \$587.31 per cwt. in 2020 and by the 11-percent gain in the shoulder, square-cut, at \$339.37 per cwt.

AUSTRALIAN LAMB IMPORTS MAINTAINED IN 2020

Australian lamb imports remained mostly steady in 2020 despite food service demand collapsing and spikes in unemployment. Robust imports reflect the strong position Australian lamb already has at retail. It also reminds us that lamb has a loyal following and remains a premium protein among more competitive offerings. Lamb imports January to November totaled 191.2 million lbs., down 4 percent year-on-year. Australian lamb imports were steady year-to-year at 145.8 million lbs. and New Zealand lamb imports were down 16 percent to 42.5 million lbs.

Lamb exports totaled 474,000 lbs. in January to November 2020, down 5 percent year-on-year. Mutton exports jumped 315 percent in the year to 18.2 million lbs. Total lamb and mutton exports was 18.6 million lbs. in January to November 2020, up 282 percent from a year ago.

The depreciation of the Australian dollar against the U.S. dollar could potentially be a headwind for Australian lamb imports this year, making lamb imports less competitive in the United States market. The Australian dollar averaged U.S. 0.75 cents in 2019 and depreciated by 7 percent to U.S. 0.69 cents in 2020.

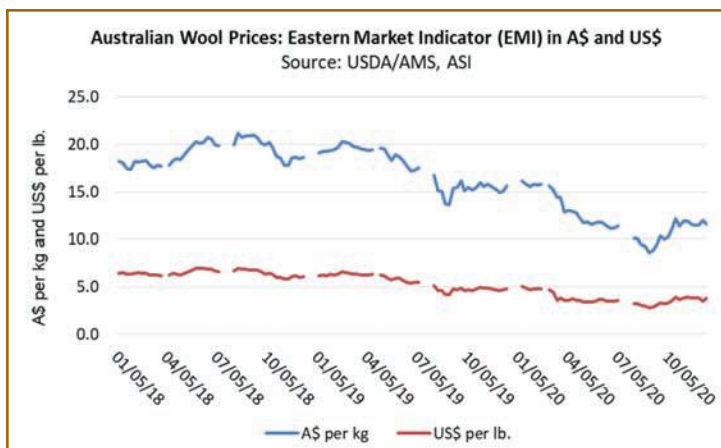
WOOL MARKET SLOW TO REBOUND

The American and Australian wool markets were mostly quiet in December and January while the Australian market held its three-week holiday recess. Before the recess, the Australian market saw prices move lower week-to-week, but sharply higher than the start of its season last summer.

During the week of Dec. 25, the Australian Eastern Market Indicator averaged Australian 1,157 cents per kg clean, down 3 percent monthly and up 15 percent since early August, the beginning of its 2020-21 season. In U.S. dollars, the EMI averaged U.S. \$8.74 per kg clean, or U.S. \$3.87 per lb. clean, down 2 percent monthly and up 21 percent from the season's start.

A relative strong Australian dollar means that Australian wool prices moved lower in late December in Australia dollars, but in U.S. dollars Australian wool prices strengthened. For example, while the Australian dollar strengthened by 1 percent in the Dec. 25 week, the EMI averaged Australian \$11.57 per kg clean, down 3 percent, while the EMI in U.S. gained 9 percent to U.S. \$3.87 per lb. clean. A higher EMI in terms of U.S. dollars does not necessarily mean that wool demand is strengthening. International wool apparel sales remain depressed, and it will be some time before consumer spending rebounds.

The American wool industry will keep a watchful eye upon exchange rates this year as some forecasts predict the Australian dollar will see further strengthening in coming months. This strengthening can give American wool exports a competitive advantage this coming season. However, significant wool stocks are held in the United States from both the 2019 and 2020 seasons. Release of this wool could potentially dampen American wool prices this spring.



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Connecticut Sheep Breeders Association
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Meat Sheep Alliance of Florida
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ASI, APHIS Preparing For Use Of Electronic Identification

Technology is beating on the American sheep industry's door, and this time the industry must answer.

In many places worldwide – such as the United Kingdom and in some parts of Australia – the sheep industry has moved to the use of electronic identification as the only form of official animal ID. The United States Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has recently proposed to only allow electronic ID tags as official identification for domestic cattle and bison.

This has led to ASI beginning to think about how the sheep industry would transition to electronic ID. At the 2020 ASI Annual Convention, the Animal Health Committee put plans in place for a small working group to develop a proposed transition plan from the traditional visual scrapie tags to electronic ones.

"This isn't an easy task," said Animal Health Committee Co-Chair Dr. Cindy Wolf of Minnesota. "When we first began to consider it, the industry said no. But it's become clear that we need to consider our own industry-guided plan for a transition to electronic ID.

"The main hurdle we're facing right now is convincing people that there is a way for this technology to operate at the speed of commerce," said Wolf, who also stressed the entire system needs to be affordable for producers and other users, and for markets and processing facilities, as well. "This will be the only way it will be accepted as part of regular business."

The working group has learned that electronic ID is already used in sheep in many countries. For example, the United Kingdom currently requires electronic ID in all sheep and goats. When the UK was implementing mandatory electronic ID, it had several hurdles, but has since found ways to iron out those issues. Australia has also moved toward mandatory electronic ID in sheep, but rather than implementing a nationwide mandatory system it started first in one state – Victoria – which is a major sheep state.

Wolf said getting the industry to switch to using electronic ID is somewhat akin to the struggles of getting producers to use visual scrapie tags when first required in the early 2000s.

Yet there are plenty of reasons to make the switch.

"It will lead to improved and more rapid traceability in the event of an animal disease outbreak. COVID-19 has shown us just how quickly a disease can disrupt business," she said. "If a human disease can cause such disruption for our industry, imagine what an animal disease like FMD could do."

Electronic ID might have benefits in the production arena, as well.

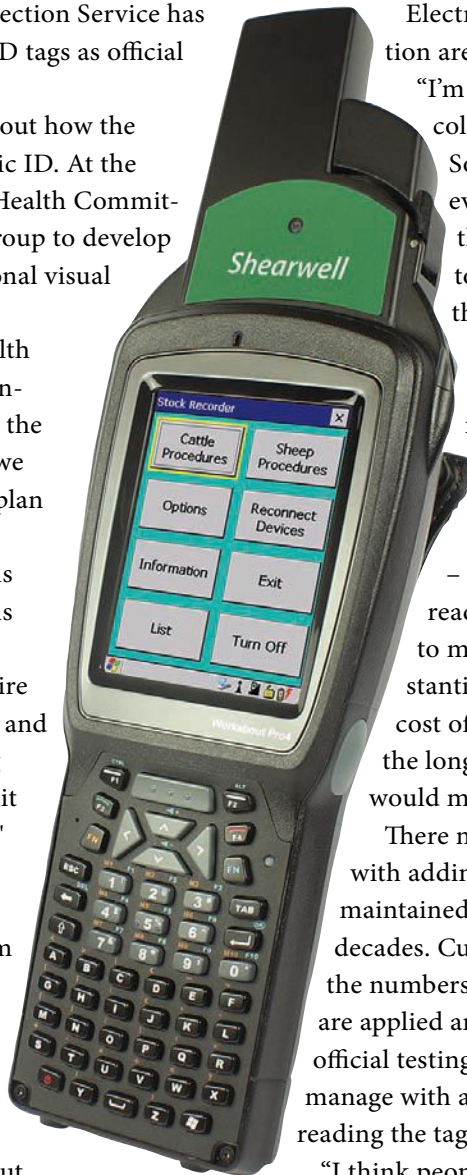
"I'm in a part of the country where it's often cold and dark when we're working with sheep. Sometimes those tags can be hard to read, even if you have young eyes. It's so easy to get the numbers mixed up," she said. "Switching to the electronic tags and a reader alleviates those problems and can speed up everything when you're working sheep."

In cases where inadequate labor is an issue, the use of electronic ID might have some benefits, including reducing the need to handle sheep to read tags. The cost of the tags – less than \$1 per tag in most cases – isn't prohibitive, but an electronic wand reader that will read the tags and send the data to management software can amount to a substantial up-front investment. Still, the short-term cost of the initial investment could be offset by the long-term reduction in employee costs, which would make the change worthwhile for some.

There might also be a learning curve that comes with adding technology to an operation that has maintained specific management practices for several decades. Currently, the federal regulations only require the numbers on official tags to be recorded when they are applied and when a health certificate is issued or official testing is conducted, so many producers could manage with an inexpensive paddle reader or by visually reading the tags to meet these requirements.

"I think people in our industry are beginning to realize the importance of this improved technology," Wolf said. "We really need a much better tracking system – for a lot of reasons – and this technology offers the best route."

Is USDA serious about moving to electronic ID for official identification purposes? It appears so. USDA recently sought input on a proposal to require electronic ID as the only al-





lowed official ID for cattle and bison.

“USDA did receive support for the proposed change,” Wolf said. “There is growing acceptance in the cattle industry for moving toward electronic ID. If they move in this direction, we expect there will be more pressure for other classes of livestock to utilize electronic ID.”

This is the reason for establishing the Electronic ID Transition Plan working group within ASI. The group’s purpose is to develop a transition plan that will guide producers who move in this direction.

“We hope to have a preliminary group report in the first quarter of 2021,” Wolf said. “We’ll follow up with another report in October of 2021. At that point, we should have a proposed plan in place to transition to the electronic ID tags.”

The sheep industry utilizes official USDA ID tags to comply with the National Scrapie Eradication Program. ASI and APHIS have worked together for 20 years to provide information and education to the sheep industry about the National Scrapie Eradication Program through APHIS-funded cooperative agreements.

This cooperative work includes scrapie newsletters from ASI and a comprehensive scrapie outreach program that supports education at the state level.

For the current cooperative agreement, ASI proposed to allocate some money toward quantifying the feasibility and benefits of using electronic ID in sheep to meet official ID re-

quirements, especially the functionality of electronic ID in the “real world” setting of a sale barn. USDA approved adding the targeted focus on animal ID as part of the ASI scrapie outreach and education agreement.

As far as ASI representatives have been able to determine, there isn’t a sheep or goat auction market in the United States that currently utilizes electronic ID technology. Through the cooperative agreement, ASI will work in collaboration with a few small and midsize sheep and goat markets to study the use of electronic ID tags in sheep in a fast-paced point-of-sale environment.

ASI will gather information about how data can be captured and transferred in a manner that meets the speed of commerce needs of the markets and the producers. In addition, ASI will gather information from producers, market operators and others on utilization of electronic ID to understand their expectations of this technology.

The agreement makes it possible for ASI to partner with a few markets and provide them with the necessary equipment, including tags, tag readers and system software to carry out this project. Planning for the pilot project is underway and is expected to begin in the coming weeks.

“The goal,” Wolf said, “is to develop an industry-friendly system that protects producers from major business interruptions, ensures their continuity and provides value for producers and markets alike.” 🐾

Shearing In A Pandemic: How to Tackle the Job in 2021

Shearing is a busy time with enough challenges of its own for producers, their shearers and anyone else who might get roped into the process of helping. Shearing in a pandemic, however, doesn't appear to be all that different.

The biggest problem large shearing crews might face in 2021 is just getting all of their shearers into the country. There's always a lot of paperwork and invariably holdups in bringing foreign shearers into the United States. Those problems haven't gone away this year, and in fact, will be multiplied by travel restrictions that can vary greatly from one country to the next.

"I've got guys coming from Uruguay and I've got them all approved to come into the country," said Bernie Fairchild, whose Idaho-based Fairchild Shearing handles large-scale jobs all across the Western United States. "We had some flights cancelled with the first crew that came in, but they are here now and I've got more coming at the end of January and in early February.

"But those guys who contract with shearers from Australia and New Zealand are pretty worried about getting their guys here," Fairchild continued. "I have a guy from New Zealand who has worked for me for years, but he's not coming this year. When he went home last year, he had to quarantine in a hotel for two weeks, but the government paid for it. This year, he'd still have to quarantine for two weeks, but the government won't pay for it this year. So, he's staying home."

Wyoming's Cliff Hoopes said he's concerned about a crew he's got coming from the United Kingdom, as well.

Getting shearers home after the season might be a concern, as well, for United States-based companies. With thousands of flights cancelled during the COVID-19 shutdowns in 2020, Fairchild found his guys without flights home to go with the round trip tickets he had purchased. He ended up buying new one-way tickets at his own expense to send them home and eventual

refunds on the original tickets only covered a portion of the extra expense.

While most shearers can't wear a mask during the course of their job, Fairchild said they are often very conscious of keeping themselves and those around them healthy.

"They want to work and they want to get paid, and that won't happen if they get sick," he said. "When I picked up my first crew at the airport in Salt Lake City, they were all wearing masks."

Of the shearers interviewed, not a single one had received any special requests from the producers they work for regarding COVID-19 regulations or restrictions.

"Most people, when they want their sheep shorn, they'll figure out a way to get it done no matter what," said Iowa's Alex Moser, who serves as the shearer's representative on ASI's Wool Council. "It really hasn't been a problem so far. We had some places where they usually serve us lunch, but they'd bring it out to us instead of us going in the house."

California shearer Stephany Wilkes usually works alone on small, farm flocks and said she generally requests that producers and their helpers stay off the board she's shearing on for the sake of keeping a safe distance.

"I'm super careful anyway because I have lots of elderly customers and I live in state that's really bad numbers wise," she said. "The biggest challenge for me is that I don't pull my own shearing trailer like a lot of the big crews. Every site I go to is a little different, so there's always a learning curve not only for me, but also for the producer."

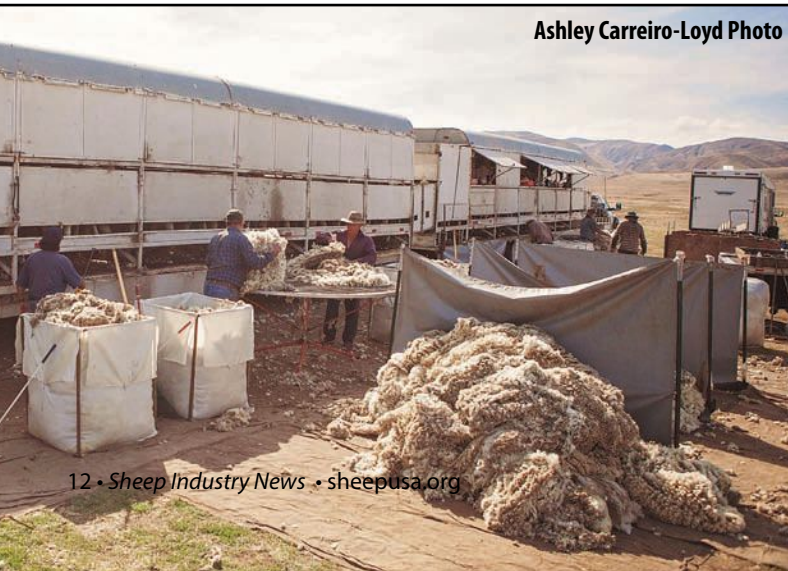
In the past, Wilkes might even stay in a producer's guest room overnight, but that option is out the window now. She drives a van to jobs that allows her to be self-contained, even if she stays overnight.

Hoopes said he'll continue to keep his crews separated from producers and their helpers as much as possible – a practice that he started in 2020.

Producers can assist the shearing process by limiting help as much as possible. While shearing is a physical task that often requires a lot of extra people to move sheep and handle the raw wool, think twice about inviting any unnecessary help to this year's shearing.

It should also go without saying that anyone who appears to be sick should be kept away from the process. There are only so many shearers available, and one COVID-19 outbreak among a crew could affect the ability of those producers in line behind you to get their sheep shorn. 🐏

Ashley Carreiro-Loyd Photo



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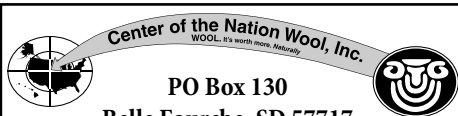
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Meet The Exec. Board

Laurie Hubbard, Pennsylvania Region I

A regular attendee at the ASI Annual Convention since graduating from Penn State University, Laurie Hubbard sees the sheep industry as extended family. They have watched her get married, start a family and are always asking to see photos of the kids – Garrett, 12, and Mackenzie, 10. Having served with the American Lamb Board and the National Sheep Industry Improvement Center, Hubbard is now leading the industry as the Region I Director for ASI.

GROWING UP, MY FAMILY HAD the usual hobby farm including sheep, goats, horses and chickens. I really took an interest in 4-H and the sheep. It just kind of flourished from there. I learned how to shear when I was in middle school. I learned to spin wool and was part of a championship sheep-to-shawl team back in the early 1990s. My interest in sheep continued to grow. With my family these days, it's a mixed flock. We joke amongst ourselves that everyone in the family has their own breed. At this time, we are running about 90 brood ewes.

MY FLOCK CONSISTS OF DORSETS and a few Tunis. My daughter has registered Tunis. My son has registered Oxfords. And then Greg, my husband, kind of dabbles where he thinks it might be fun. He's had Texels most recently. We select for that easy-going, can maintain themselves on pasture type of ewe. We have a diverse flock, but it works for us. We found with our kids that at a young age we had to get them to buy into working with sheep. They both started showing when they were 3 years old and got their first registered ewes and learned that when it was time to go out and work in the barn you have to take care of your sheep because mom and dad are taking care of their sheep.

WHEN WE BUILT THE NEW HOUSE and bought land about six years ago, obviously we didn't have a lot of money for the extra stuff. We still don't have any permanent fencing but are able to do rotational grazing using net fencing from Premier 1 and we absolutely love the stuff. In November of 2019, we put up a hoop building and now have a new barn, as well. Our hope is to expand the flock to 200 head of ewes. Time is our biggest limiting factor. Greg and I both have full-time jobs off the farm.

I AM A 4-H EXTENSION EDUCATOR with Penn State University. I do some adult livestock work, as well. It keeps me busy. You get to know folks and they become friends and because of that you can get calls at any time of the day or night with questions and people just looking for some help. Before that,


I was the shepherd at Penn State. I was there for 10 years after I graduated from college with an animal science degree. Greg works for the Commonwealth. Pennsylvania has a Livestock Evaluation Center and he's the station manager. That's where our state does our bull, ram and billy goat tests.

WE CURRENTLY ARE SELLING LAMBS to a buyer down in Washington, D.C. We work with the sale in New Holland (Penn.), as well. Last year, we worked with a different buyer and sent our lambs into Virginia. We keep our ears to the ground to find the best price. We're fortunate on the East Coast that we have a lot of different markets and can pick and choose where we want to send our lambs. Most go to the ethnic market. The Northeast region has a large share of the lamb market. Our wool industry is more of a niche market with hand spinners. In the region, both can be strong markets but it's important to look at the bigger picture. Working with ASI puts it all in perspective for me as to how we fit together with the rest of the country.

I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND and appreciate what the entire industry is doing. Sometimes, we get caught up in our own situations and maybe can't appreciate or understand what someone else might be going through. Being on the ASI Lamb Council with Bob Harlan, I really appreciate the different perspective that he brings from the feeding side of the industry. I met him a number of years ago, as we've hosted the Howard Wyman Leadership School (put on by the National Lamb Feeders Association) in Pennsylvania twice now. It's fascinating to me how all of the segments of the industry come together.

THE OVERALL FOCUS OF THINGS IS DIFFERENT in each of the groups (ALB, NSIIC and ASI). With ASI, it's looking at the bigger picture and putting it all together. We all have to work together to accomplish our goals. I wasn't necessarily seeking a director position, but I'll be here as long as the industry wants me. 🐏

This is a series of articles spotlighting members of ASI's Executive Board.

A woman with long blonde hair, wearing a white turtleneck and a maroon Carhartt jacket, stands in a sheep pen. She has her hands in her jacket pockets and is smiling. In the background, several sheep are visible, some standing and some lying down, near a wooden structure with a translucent roof.

Laurie Hubbard has served on the boards of three major sheep industry groups: ASI, the American Lamb Board and the National Sheep Industry Improvement Center.

Solar Grazing Is Win-Win For Farmers, Graziers

ARJUN MAKHIJANI

Institute for Energy & Environmental Research

Siting solar photovoltaics on farmland is often considered to be at loggerheads with food production. Why displace food production when you can put solar on rooftops? It's a good question, but it is asked from the point of view of siting solar installations.

What if we asked a different question: can solar installations on farmland also produce food and fiber while increasing overall farm profits, making farms more economically resilient and opening up farming to new entrants? That answer is a resounding yes. Indeed, dual use of the land for solar and agriculture – and specifically solar grazing with sheep – can help strengthen the family farm and enrich its soil while providing graziers with land they get paid to use.

Consider a dairy operation with cattle grazing on a few hundred acres such as is typical in the mid-Atlantic and Northeast regions. It's an industry in distress. Maryland alone has lost more than 70 percent of its dairy farms in the last 30 years. Profits might be \$200 per acre in a good year; bad years have obviously been more frequent.

A 300-acre dairy farm in Maryland with profits of \$150 per acre would bring in \$45,000 uncertain dollars. Now put sheep and solar on 16 acres of it – just 5.4 percent of the total land – with the rest in dairy as before. It creates a financial transformation. Milk profits would decline marginally (by \$2,400). Net profits from the sale of solar energy would be about \$90,000 in the first year and rise thereafter. In other words, with a little more than 5 percent of the land in solar, total farm profits would triple, with two-thirds of profits not subject to the vagaries of milk prices. The farm would remain in business even in lean years. And solar profits would provide the room to diversify the farming operation.

I've assumed that the electricity would be sold to third parties like schools or colleges (as allowed under Maryland law) at a 20 percent discount to get long-term contracts. A win for them. Those very same long-term contracts are bankable: they can enable the landowner to borrow the money to build the solar. The profit calculations assume a commercial loan at 8.5 percent. If low-interest loans were available, say at 4 percent – a rate that a state agency makes available for energy efficiency retrofits to buildings – profits from solar would rise to about \$145,000 in the first year and total profits would be \$190,000. After the loan is paid off, profits would rise even more.

When I went through this analysis with University of Maryland Extension's Sheep and Goat specialist Susan Schoenian, she remarked that having solar on a farm was like having an off-farm job without leaving the farm.

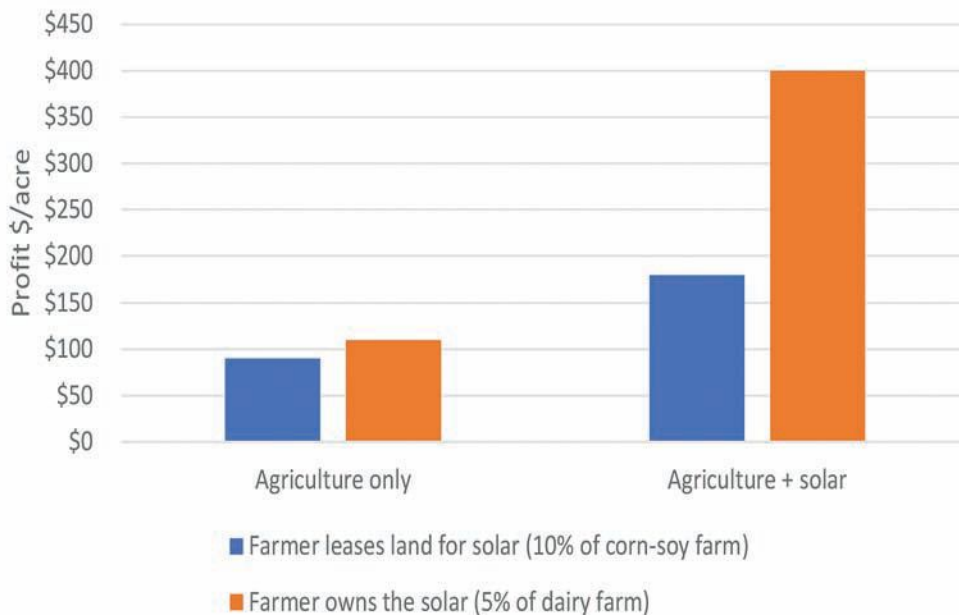
Where do the sheep come in? Those 16 acres of solar need maintenance. The normal practice has been to treat solar installation land like a golf course – plant it with grass and mow it. Mowing costs money and makes for air pollution and carbon dioxide emissions. It's difficult to mow under the panels, so the grass is kept down with pesticides. That costs money too and makes solar generation less than pristine.

Enter the sheep and the grazer, who gets paid by the solar owner for the sheep to mow the solar installation. The payment might be



Sheep are better than machines when it comes to mowing in and around solar panels. The panels can also provide shade for the sheep as they consume the grass underneath. Solar installation can also provide valuable income for farmers and ranchers.

Farm profits per acre of the entire farm, with and without solar



solar are shown in the bar chart for two kinds of farming operations – a dairy farm with 5 percent of the land in solar and a commodity crop farm with 10 percent of the land in solar. Sheep would graze on the solar installation land in both cases. A no-solar case is also shown for comparisons. The analysis uses Maryland data.

Beyond dollars and cents, one of the biggest advantages of putting solar on farmland is that it can open up farming to young people and others who do not have the capital to buy land. Even better, since building solar requires long-term leases, typically 20 to 25 years, graziers could, in principle, get secure, long-term access to the land. The marriage of solar and grazing also fits the temper of the times – protecting climate, creating more local and more secure food supply, and, best of all, enabling farmers to make a more

a few hundred dollars an acre (up to \$600). For larger solar installations of hundreds of acres or more, it might be \$100 or \$200 per acre. In such cases, the grazer can practice rotational grazing on the same site – and possibly have room to graze sheep belonging to a third party, as well, further increasing revenues. Rotational grazing can improve soil and ecosystem health.

The solar owner gets a free pair of eyes on the installation. Synthetic chemicals are reduced both relative to normal solar installations and relative to (non-organic) commodity crop production. The grazer's profits are greater than they would be if he/she had to lease or buy the land.

It takes some investment on the part of the solar developer – in water, in ensuring that wires are out of the way, in the movable fences. But these expenses are minor – on the order of 1 percent of the solar investment in the above example – compared to the multi-sided wins.

The grazing of sheep on solar installation land is independent of the ownership arrangement of the solar. Usually, the landowner does not own the solar – she/he simply leases the land to the solar developer. It's all the same to the grazer, who gets paid to maintain the land by grazing sheep. The landowner who leases won't make as much – at \$250 to \$2,000 per acre, depending on location – lease revenues are generally far larger than typical commodity crop profits of around \$100 to \$150 per acre. The lease revenue is much lower than owning the solar, which can be \$5,000 per acre of solar if electricity can be sold at retail. Best of all, solar lease revenues are net revenues; the only a trip to the bank required is to deposit the money.

The profits from ownership compared to leasing approaches to

secure living.

It will still take a lot of work and skill, but it will be better rewards for work farmers love. 🐑

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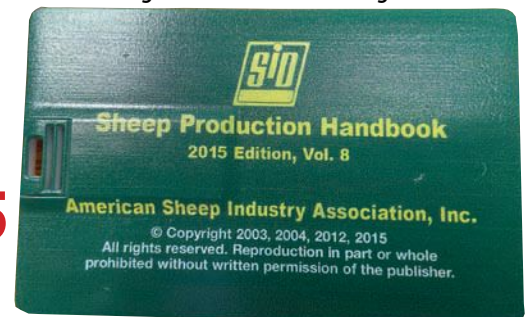
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WYOMING

SIMS TO REPRESENT ASI ON PLC

Wyoming producer Shaun Sims was recently appointed to fill the ASI Representative position on the Public Lands Council. Steve Osguthorpe of Utah previously served in the position, but was elected secretary of PLC – which created the opening.

A public lands rancher who runs both cattle and sheep, Sims is no stranger to PLC. He serves as vice chair of the group's Wildlife Committee. Sims has also worked with the Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts and the National Association of Conservation Districts.

"It's an honor to serve," Sims said. "We run the family ranch (with his dad, Mike, and brother, Steve) on probably 15 different allotments – both Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service ground – in two states. So, we understand the important role that livestock grazing plays in the management of our public lands. In the West, the sheep industry is run predominantly on federal rangeland. So, there's a need to have our voices heard, and the Public Lands Council plays a tremendous role in providing that opportunity."

"In the West, we can't have a sheep operation without public lands," Sims continued. "So, it's important to keep these lands open and productive."

WASHINGTON

WSSP TO HOST THREE LAMBING SCHOOLS

The Washington State Sheep Producers have set the dates for three lambing schools – March 20, April 3 and April 17. All three schools will be at Feustel Farms in Lamont, Wash., and Dr. Jill Swannack will serve as the instructor.

Class sizes will be limited to 10 students and COVID-19 regulations will be in place. The classes will cover everything from basic newborn lamb care to grafting lambs and raising bummer lambs. Students will also get to practice difficult extractions with a phantom ewe.

The charge to attend is \$50 for WSSP members and \$95 for non-

members. For more information, visit WSSP.org or contact WSSP Executive Secretary Ashley Larson at 360-999-8118.

NATIONAL

FOUR WOOL PRESS GRANTS AWARDED

ASI's American Wool Council announced in January the awarding of four \$5,000 grants to go toward the build or purchase of new wool presses.

The AWC had budgeted funds for two grants in the third round of the program, but decided to award grants to each of the four applications that were submitted. Those selected for grants in 2021 include: Jacob Beaström of Pierre, S.D.; the Tennessee Sheep Producers Association; Helle Livestock of Dillon, Mont.; and Patty Kelly of Faith, S.D.

The wool press grant program is designed to bring new presses into the American wool industry for a variety of reasons. These American-built presses lower costs for producers and the shearing crews they work with while also producing a wool bale that is designed to meet overseas shipping standards.

LIVESTOCK CONSERVANCY

TWO SHEEP PRODUCERS RECEIVE MICROGRANTS

The Livestock Conservancy recently awarded more than \$22,300 to 17 farmers, ranchers and shepherds raising endangered breeds of livestock and poultry across the country. Now in its third year, the Microgrants Program puts funding into the hands of conservation partners.

Among the recipients are two sheep producers:

- Crystal Criswell plans to install a handling system with a gathering pen, sorting gates and weighing scale next to her barn. Handling and evaluating individual animals will help improve the health and productivity of her St. Croix sheep flock in Ohio.
- Janna Miller plans to build a shearing shed for her Navajo-Churro sheep in New Mexico. She recently joined the Conservancy's Shave 'Em to Save 'Em Initiative and is excited to start marketing her fleeces and improving her breeding stock. 🐏

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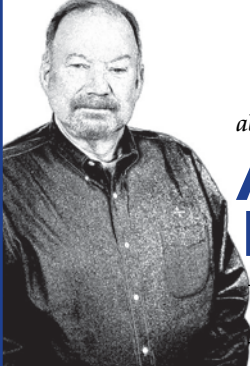
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Obituary

GLENN EUGENE HARDY, 1930-2020

Glenn Eugene "Gene" Hardy, was born in Douglas, Wyo., on Feb. 19, 1930, and died in Casper, Wyo., on Dec. 18, 2020, from a short and sudden illness. Gene was born to Marion Glenn "Mick" and Grace Virginia (Elbourne) Hardy of Bear Creek, Wyo., in 1930 and spent most of his upbringing on the ranch 45 miles northwest of Douglas.

He rode his horse four miles to the North Point School, at a neighboring ranch, for the first few years of school before being farmed out for a short time to a family in Douglas, so he could attend school in town. Gene graduated valedictorian of his class and received a full scholarship to play football at the University of Wyoming.

However, football and schooling weren't to be for Gene. A horse wreck and injury inflicted upon his dad kept Gene at the family ranch. A stint in the United States Army, serving his time in Germany and then the National Guard was something that Gene shared many memories and stories of through the years.

When he returned from the Army, he began a seven-year courtship with his future wife, Joy Ann Falkenburg, of Douglas. After their marriage, Joy moved to the Hardy Ranch and she and Gene began their life together raising their daughter, Michelle. As with most ranches, there was a generational change and the ranch continued to grow. Gene was truly proud of the family ranch and

was known to have what would be considered a reputable herd of cattle and flock of sheep. This past year marked the 100th anniversary of the ranch and Gene was truly proud of the fact that it had continued to the next generation.

Gene was to get more involved with what was to be his true love, ag politics, through the Wyoming Stock Growers and Wyoming Wool Growers. For the rest of his life, Gene was to be an industry leader in the movement of Wyoming agriculture in all aspects. He became known as a staunch supporter of ranchers, farmers, veterinary medicine, the brand program, and his favorite, the predator program.

Gene served as vice-president of the Wyoming Stock Growers, president of the Wyoming Wool Growers, president of the Wyoming State Animal Damage Management Board, as well as multiple committees and chairman positions. He served on the Wyoming Board of Agriculture and the Wyoming Livestock Board.

Gene was voted into the Wyoming Agriculture Hall of Fame in 2012.

An avid pilot, Gene was always eager to help someone out when they had lost something and needed to find it with an airplane.

He is survived by his daughter, Michelle Musselman and her husband, Shaun and their children, Hardy and Haley; and his many nephews, nieces, in-laws, and friends.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Joy; father, Mick; and mother, Grace.

A Gene and Joy Hardy Memorial Scholarship Fund has been established at the Converse County Bank, P.O. Box 689, Douglas, WY 82633. 🐾

Sheep Heritage Fund Recent Contributors

Michael & Vicki Guerry

In memory of Barbara Oneida

Amy Orwick

In memory of Andrew Peroulis & Betty Niemi

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In memory of Andrew Peroulis,
Katherine Peroulis and Connie Theos

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In memory of Andrew Peroulis

Sherri Halandras

In memory of Andrew Peroulis

Irene Mason

In memory of Andrew Peroulis

Sasha Overholt

In memory of Andrew Peroulis

Industry Calendar

FEBRUARY 2021

2 – Birth Management for Sheep & Goats – Online – Commerce.cashnet.com/msu.

3 – Early Pregnancy Determination to Add Profit to Your Operation Webinar – Online – AgriLife.zoom.us/j/92814042552.

6 – Nebraska Sheep & Goat Producers Western Lambing and Kidding School – Bayard, Neb. – ne.sheep.goat@gmail.com or call Melissa at 308-386-8378.

16 – Ohio State University Small Ruminant Nutrition Webinar – Online – go.osu.edu/smallruminantwebinars2021.

MARCH 2021

3-4 – Missouri Shearing School – Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Mo. – Amy Bax at 573-681-6190 or BaxA2@LincolnU.edu.

16 – Ohio State University Weaning, Sorting and Selling Webinar – Online – go.osu.edu/smallruminantwebinars2021.

20 – Washington State Sheep Producers Lambing School – Feustel Farms in Lamont, Wash. – WSSP.org.

APRIL 2021

3 – Washington State Sheep Producers Lambing School – Feustel Farms in Lamont,

Wash. – WSSP.org.

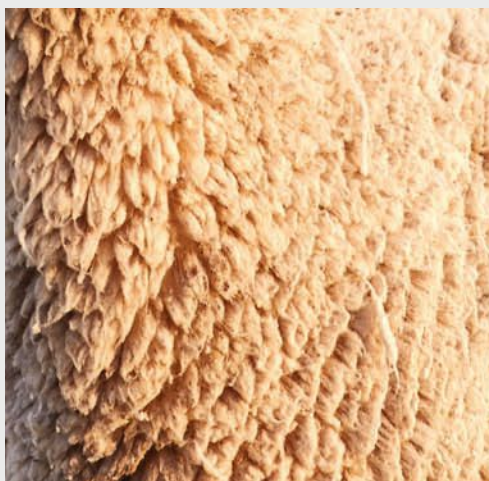
15-17 – Sheep Shearing School at Shepherd's Cross – Claremore, Okla. – ShepherdsCross.com.

17 – Washington State Sheep Producers Lambing School – Feustel Farms in Lamont, Wash. – WSSP.org.

21 – Designing Your Sheep & Goat Grazing Systems – Online – Wisc.edu.

MAY 2021

1-2 – 48th Annual Maryland Sheep & Wool Festival – West Friendship, Md. – SheepandWool.org. 🐾



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Photo Contest.

