



Pandemic resources for producers

September 11 is the deadline for applying for Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) funds. This financial assistance is available to producers of lambs, yearlings, and older sheep (some of almost 60 agricultural commodities covered) who have suffered a five-percent-or-greater price decline or who had losses due to market supply chain disruptions due to COVID-19 and face additional significant market costs in marketing their inventories due to unexpected surplus and disrupted markets. USDA is accepting applications through September 11, 2020.

Producers can apply online, download and print a fillable-form PDF application to submit at your USDA Service Agency office, or use the Excel CFAP Application Generator and Payment

Calculator to print, sign, and submit to your local office. Learn more at farmers.gov/cfap. You may also track your application online.

Producers must provide the following information to apply for CFAP assistance for sheep and lambs:

- Total owned, unpriced inventory as of January 15, 2020, that was sold between January 15th and April 15th. These sales must be separated by species and class, and can include any offspring from inventory that was sold.
- Highest inventory of owned eligible livestock, by species and class, on a date selected by the producer between April 16 and May 14, 2020.

CFAP payments also are eligible to wool producers who have suffered a five percent-or-greater price decline over a specified time as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and who face increased marketing costs for inventories.

Producers will be paid based on inventory subject to price risk held as of January 15, 2020. A single payment will be made based on 50 percent of a producer's 2019 total production or the 2019 inventory as of January 15, 2020, whichever is smaller, multiplied by 50 percent and then multiplied by the commodity's applicable payment rates.

Producers must provide the following information for CFAP:

- Total 2019 production for the commodity that suffered a five percent-or-greater price decline, and
- Total 2019 production that was not sold as of January 15, 2020.

Newsletter of the
MARYLAND
SHEEP BREEDERS
ASSOCIATION
 SUMMER 2020

Clun Forest ewes follow shepherdess Jen Puffenberger to the feed troughs. [Image by Gretchen Frederick]

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Deadline Approaching for USDA's Coronavirus Food Assistance Program

WASHINGTON, Aug. 28, 2020—U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds farmers and ranchers that the deadline to apply for the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) is Sept. 11, 2020. This program provides direct relief to producers who faced price declines and additional marketing costs due to COVID-19.

"FSA offers several options for farmers and ranchers to apply for CFAP, including a call center where employees can answer your questions and help you get started on your application," said Richard Fordyce, Farm Service Agency administrator. "With only two weeks before the deadline, now is the time to check out the resources on our website and contact the call center or your local office for your last-minute questions."

Over 160 commodities are eligible for CFAP, including certain non-specialty crops, livestock, dairy, wool, specialty crops, eggs, aquaculture, and nursery crops and cut flowers.

For more information and instructions on how to apply, read the full press release at <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAAMS/bulletins/29c47d4>.

Contact: FPAC.BC.Press@usda.gov



President's Message

Adapting to a wild year

Jeff White is
President of MSBA

I hope this summer's newsletter finds everyone safe and well. It's been a year that I bet we would all like to forget, but none of us will. If you are like me, you are looking forward to meeting with friends in person. On top of it all, July set records for the number of days with high temperatures above 90. I am ready for fall weather (but come February I'll be ready for spring).

On to business. In case you haven't heard, the board of directors has voted to cancel this year's annual dinner and meeting that is held each October. We are working on a plan to hold a virtual meeting along with a combination of online voting and post office mailed ballots for those who do not have internet access. Watch your email or mailbox for more information. We are booking a date for the October 2021 annual dinner and meeting.

How has everyone been coping with getting dates at our local butchers? I have talked to shepherds and other livestock producers and all say they are having trouble getting a date from any of the local butchers. In the past I have used two butchers.

My regular go-to butcher won't even give me a date, saying they are booked through the end of the year. The other gave me a date for September—September 2021, that is. Now I know it's fair season, but I've been trying to get dates since March.

As I'm a producer who sells frozen cuts at farm markets and off the farm, this is a big deal. What happens when these butchers open their schedule for next year? Will we be calling constantly until we get through, just to find out the dates we need are booked? I have a vision of repeatedly dialing the number, like I'm trying to be the 15th caller who wins the free tickets. It's not my idea of a good plan. We have little choice now but to start booking dates a year out or more.

I have wondered if there is anything we can do as an organization. I know the short answer is we need more local butchers. Let me know what you think, if you have ideas, or just have something to say. I can be reached at chestnutcreekfarm@gmail.com.

In this issue you will read about financial assistance for producers of sheep and wool from the federal government, legislation that down the road can help those who direct market their meat, and a perspective about the dismal state of wool marketing. And we include a few articles on strategies and programs that might increase the profitability of both meat and fiber for your operation.

On to a more optimistic view, I think 2021 will be a great year. We have already started receiving applications from vendors for the 2021 Festival. As a primary care physician friend and others in public health have told me, we have so much good research and development in progress that a vaccine(s) against Covid-19 should be here sooner rather than later. I know you can always find a dissenting voice, but I will go with the majority.

All the best.

—Jeff



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Ad Rates

Size	Specs (inches)	Price
Full page	7.5 x 9.5	\$95, \$320/year
Half vert.	3.3 x 9.5	\$60, \$200/year
Half horiz.	7.5 x 4.25	
Third	7.5 x 3	\$45, \$150/year
Quarter	3.3 x 4.25	\$30, \$100/year
Biz card	3.3 x 2	\$15, \$50/year
Classified	230 characters	\$10

Acceptable formats are PDFs, Word docs or jpegs.

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COVID-19 has exposed some of the weaknesses in the U.S. meat supply chain.

There is a shortage of federally inspected slaughterhouses, as just 50 plants process 98 percent of the meat in the United States.

The current “one-size-fits-all” meat safety regulations put small producers and processors at a disadvantage. In response, Congress has introduced (or re-introduced) three bills, aimed at giving both livestock producers and consumers more options. These are the Direct Act, Prime Act, and Ramp-Up Act.

The **DIRECT Act (Direct Interstate Retail Exemption for Certain Transactions Act)** would allow meat processed in state-inspected establishments to be sold across state lines via e-commerce.

Currently, state-inspected meat (with some exceptions) can only be sold intrastate. Since state meat inspection is “at least equal to” federal standards, why state-inspected meat can’t already be sold across state lines remains a bafflement (to me).

While Delaware, Virginia, and West Virginia have state meat inspection, Maryland and Pennsylvania gave up their programs a long time ago.

The Direct Act is supported by industry groups such as the American Sheep Industry Association.

The **Processing Revival and Intrastate Meat Exemption (PRIME) Act** would loosen regulations to allow meat such as beef, pork, goat, or lamb from custom kill plants (not state or federally-inspected) to be sold to consumers, restaurants, hotels, and grocery stores.

While there are no guarantees, it would allow states to pass legislation that could open up custom-exempt facilities for commercial slaughter/processing. Currently, a producer can sell a live animal (or shares) to a customer and deliver the animal to a custom plant for processing, but pieces of the carcass cannot be sold (or given away) by either the producer or the customer. The packages of meat are labeled “not for resale.”

Various industry groups oppose the Prime Act because it would allow uninspected meat to be sold. USDA/FSIS would also lack recall authority.

Custom slaughter is exempt from continuous inspection; only the facilities are inspected (periodically) to ensure they meet sanitation and labeling standards. Inspectors are not present before, during, or after slaughter. Small



producers claim the Prime Act would level the playing field. On-farm poultry slaughter (up to 20,000 birds) is already exempted from continuous inspection.

The American Sheep Industry Association neither supports nor opposes the Prime Act.

The **RAMP-UP Act (Requiring Assistance to Meat Processors for Upgrading Plants Act)** would provide federal grants (up to \$100,000) to help existing meat and poultry processors move to federal inspection and be able to sell their products across state lines and internationally.

It would give processors the tools to become federally inspected facilities, which would widen their customer base while maintaining strong inspection standards. The one-to-one match requirement would be scheduled to be waived for the first year.

The Ramp-Up Act has widespread support, including from the American Sheep Industry Association.

If any of these bills are important to you, be sure to contact your Congressional leadership.

Addressing meat processing woes

Susan Schoenian

is a University of Maryland Extension Sheep & Goat Specialist at the Western Maryland Research and Education Center. This article was initially published in the July 31, 2020, Delmarva Farmer.

Need contact info for your U.S. Representative? Go to <https://www.house.gov/htbin/findrep>.

Read and track the bills

Here is how to keep track of these bills’ progress through Congress. The links below are to the bill tracking pages of the U.S. House of Representatives. They take you to the text of the bills; you also can check on the status of the bills as they go through the legislative process.

The DIRECT Act (H.R. 7425). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/7425/text?r=1&s=1>

The PRIME Act (H.R. 2859). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/2859/text>

The RAMP-UP Act (H.R. 7490). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/7490/text>

CONGRESS.GOV

National views ▶

Processing capacity woes across the nation

The crunch that East Coast direct-marketing lamb operations are now experiencing from insufficient capacity at custom slaughter plants (especially during the pandemic) has recently been felt at a much larger scale in the West.

Our American Sheep Industry representative Patty Sanville, who also serves on ASI's legislative committee, reports that at a recent legislative update session ASI members discussed the sale of the second-largest lamb processing facility in that region (which processed 350,000 lambs annually). The Mountain States Rosen facility's purchaser, a Brazilian company, will cease lamb processing and convert the facility into a cattle processing plant.

"I have brought to ASI's attention our struggles here in our area with local butcher shops being unable to fit in long-time customers," Sanville said. "Even when we've planned ahead by six months or more."

"I'm attempting to draw these parallels for those who can help affect a change in our circumstances," she said.

Sanville reports that "the new owners also happen to be the largest importer of foreign lamb to the United States."

UPDATE: The August 28 ASI news reported that a U.S.-owned company has just purchased an unused Texas sheep processing plant and will renovate it, with an expected capacity of more than 450,000 lambs a year—to the relief of Western lamb producers and feeders.

A group of farming, ranching, soil health, animal welfare, and fair trade professionals, who formed the Regenerative Organic Alliance (ROA) in 2018, has recently announced availability of a Regenerative Organic Certified™ (ROC™) certification standard for food, fiber, and personal care products.

Regenerative Organic Certified

To be eligible for ROC, farms must first hold USDA organic certification. ROC adds further criteria to ensure soil health, animal welfare, and social fairness. Buyers of such products are assured that their purchase "supports farm workers, soil health, and pasture-based animal welfare." "The new certification also has three levels—bronze, silver, and gold. The levels require farms and businesses to phase in more rigorous regenerative organic practices over time.

"COVID-19 has quickly revealed the underlying risks and inequalities in the global food system. Many farmers, doctors, and scientists agree that fixing our broken food system and adhering to regenerative organic practices is one of the tools we have to improve human health, as shown in a new white paper recently released by Rodale Institute and The Plantrician Project," the ROA press release states. See <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/regenerative-organic-certified-roc-standard-is-open-for-business-roc-products-now-available-from-leading-brands-301109510.html>

The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is announcing the initial purchase of vaccine for the National Animal Vaccine and Veterinary Countermeasures Bank (NAVVCB). APHIS will invest \$27.1 million in foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) vaccine, which the Agency would use in the event of an outbreak to protect animals and help stop disease spread.

Foot-and-mouth vaccine added to bank

"While we are confident we can keep FMD out of the country, as we have since 1929, having access to vaccine is an important insurance policy," said Marketing and Regulatory Programs Under Secretary Greg Ibach. "Vaccines could be an important tool in the event of an incursion of the disease in the United States, but their use will depend on the circumstances of the incursion and require careful coordination with the affected animal industries."

Vaccination helps control the spread of infection by reducing the amount of virus shed by animals and by controlling clinical signs of illness. While an outbreak would temporarily disrupt international markets, vaccination would allow animals to move through domestic production channels. FMD is not a threat to public health or food safety. It is also not related to hand, foot, and mouth disease, (a common childhood illness caused by a different virus).

The NAVVCB is one component of a three-part program established by the 2018 Farm Bill to comprehensively support animal disease prevention and management. The new U.S.-only vaccine bank—a concept APHIS officials have long discussed with stakeholders and industry—makes a much larger number of vaccine doses available than we currently have through the North American Foot and Mouth Disease Vaccine Bank. —USDA APHIS press release

Help get us (the U.S.) to Scrapie Free!

EDUCATE yourself on the signs of scrapie.

REPORT by contacting your State Veterinarian to conduct testing on your animals over the age of 12 months if you suspect scrapie. This will increase efficiency in identifying those infected.

SUBMIT the whole head from any sheep or goat over the age of 18 months that dies or is euthanized on your farm.

See Winter and Spring MSN issues for more information.

The most common question I get from people who drive by our farm and see our sheep in grazing in the fields is: Why are your sheep wearing coats? It's a fair question for the uninitiated. The quick and simple answer is: to protect the wool in order to optimize its value. Wool is our primary product. More specifically: our goal is to produce raw, natural-colored wool particularly for hand-spinners who wish to work on an individual fleece basis.

For our type of wool (we have crosses and mixes of several breeds including Corriedale, Romney, Romeldale, and Border Leicester), year-round coats have proven to be an invaluable tool to achieve our goals with regard to marketing and selling our fleeces to our target audience. The wool from these breed mixes is very versatile and has proven attractive to hand processors over the years. We have been using year-round coats on our sheep for 14 years.

So why would you choose to coat your sheep? To protect their fleeces from non-wool contaminants (vegetable matter [VM], dirt and mud, manure, etc.) and from weather and sun damage. Why would you do that? To increase the appeal of your fleeces to fiber artists who are willing to pay more for a fleece that is very clean and has minimal wear and tear from weather. Or, of course, perhaps for your own personal use. A successfully coated sheep makes processing a fleece by hand much easier and more pleasant (especially for a buyer who may not want a barnyard in a bag in their home). A VM-free fleece will process into a more uniformly VM-free yarn, whether processed by hand or in a commercial mill. Having said this, coating sheep is not for everyone, and does not come with guarantees for success.

Let's take a close look at both the advantages and disadvantages of year-round coating of sheep. Note that the degree to which these apply may vary significantly as a function of the breeds and types of wool in your flock.

Advantages

Contaminants. Coating keeps your fleeces free of non-wool contaminants (at least on the parts of the sheep's body where the coat is). This can bring the added benefit of easier and faster skirting.

Weathering. It reduces weather effects and potential damage to fibers. Depending on the type of sheep you have (dense fine-wool types will be less affected than less dense more open type fleeces), weather and sun can affect parts of the fleeces more dramatically than others. Along the topline, rain can cause the wool to part right down the middle, exposing the full length of the staple right down the skin to loss of lanolin and grease which can lead to dry, even brittle fibers



Image by Barbara Klein, of Nancy Cox Starkey's Kep

when exposed to sun. Along the flanks and sides, the water will generally run off and not penetrate as deep, but the tips will be rinsed of oils and may also become brittle and even weakened. Sun damage in the form of dry or brittle fibers can occur even in the absence of removal of oils from rain. Weathered tips are more likely to become tender and break during processing. Coated fleeces don't suffer from these effects.

Bleaching. Coats reduce sun bleaching of colored fleeces. Natural ultraviolet light from the sun can dramatically bleach natural colored fiber, especially black and brown wool. Black wool can become as light as butterscotch brown, and brown (moorit) fleeces can become positively blond. The extent to which the bleaching penetrates (how far into the staple from the tips) will vary a lot based on the type of fleece. Long-wool types with a more open fleece, and some medium wools that are not very dense, will have deeper penetration of bleaching. More dense or closed fleeces typical of finer wool will naturally see less penetration.

A coat can dramatically decrease (though not entirely eliminate) the depth of penetration of bleaching. It is worth noting that some may not see color bleaching as a negative, and some customers actually like the resulting depth and variation of color in their finished products.

Coating your sheep

Lee Langstaff, *past president of MSBA, helps coordinate the Maryland Sheep & Wool Festival Fleece Show & Sale.*

The well-dressed flock. [Images courtesy Lee Langstaff except as noted.]



Management ►

A young Corriedale ram, coat off, shows off a pristine fleece beneath. [Image courtesy Geoff Ruppert, via Facebook]



Prices for coated fleeces

We are fortunate in our part of the country to have the Maryland Sheep & Wool Festival (MSWF) and numerous other fiber festivals in the mid-Atlantic and Northeast with well-attended fleece sales, where visitors are willing to pay good prices for quality fleeces. Data from the last two MSWF Fleece Sales (2018-2019) reflects the possible income advantages of coated fleeces:

On average, prices received for coated fleeces were 170% of the average uncoated fleece sales prices (on a price per pound basis)

Average price paid for coated fleeces was \$22.50/lb

Average price paid for uncoated fleeces was \$13.25/lb

Coated fleeces made up approximately 30% of the fleeces entered.

Of those entered, 85% of coated fleeces sold, and 75% of uncoated fleeces sold.

Economic value. Successful use of year-round coats can enable you to realize higher prices for your fleeces for a couple of key reasons. First, the visual appeal of a clean fleece will draw buyers to it. In many cases a consistent color maintained by the coat is also a desirable trait. It means less work, less mess, and potentially a higher yield of usable fiber. Most wool is priced by weight, and the weight of a raw fleece is influenced by the amount of non-wool debris in the wool. If people are going to pay more for a raw fleece, they want to be buying wool, not dirt and VM.

Sounds good, right? Well, in the interest of not pulling the wool over anyone's eyes, let's look at some real challenges and potential disadvantages that you really should consider if you are contemplating coating your sheep.

Disadvantages

Financial investment. Coats cost money. This is true whether you purchase them or make them yourself (more on that later). As of this writing, coat prices from the two most available sources range from \$21 (smaller sizes) to \$34 (larger sizes).

A typical adult wool sheep will need at least 3 sizes throughout the year (depending on breed). Depending on a number of variables, a coat can last anywhere from an hour to 4 or more years! Most, but not all, of these variables can be controlled by good management.

Management effort. An additional and significant level of management effort above and beyond the usual is required to be successful with the use of year-round sheep coats. If you are not prepared to do these things, the advantages of coating are not likely to be achieved and you can encounter some counterproductive outcomes ranging from "a bummer" to injuries or fatalities.

Time and labor is required to change coats as the wool (and sheep) grows. Depending on the type and rate of growth of your wool, you should assume anywhere from three or five coat changes between shearings for each sheep. Fine-wool sheep will grow wool more slowly, long-wools more quickly. If you are starting with a lamb, more changes will be required since both the animal and its wool will be growing!

Inspecting and sheep-coat-proofing your infrastructure. Before turning sheep loose in coats, and ongoing on a regular basis, be sure to thoroughly inspect your infrastructure for absolutely anything a sheep could get their coat snagged or hung-up on. There are two reasons for this. The most important is that if a sheep gets her coat hung up on something that prevents her from gaining access to water or food; or causes

her to panic, you may lose that sheep. Secondly, if there is something sharp or if your sheep gets snagged on something, even the most durable coats can get torn up. Once that happens, not only do you have a ripped-up coat, but if it's hanging half on and half off, it's possible for the sheep to get tangled up in it with disastrous results including injury or death. An ounce of prevention goes a long way in ensuring success here.

Constant vigilance. All of us who care about our sheep are vigilant in looking out for their welfare. Coats just make that even more important. Ideally you'll want to rest an eye on each coat-wearing sheep every day. Did anyone step out of a leg strap, or get a leg through the neck opening when lying down? (This happens more easily than you might think.) Is anyone dragging ripped coat around, stepping on it and stumbling? Did one sheep get a leg or even a head through another sheep's coat? Is a coat getting too snug and needs a change? (If left too long, leg straps can become very tight and can dig into or even become painfully embedded in the backs of hind legs.) When coats are very wet, they can sag and slip to one side or another and making them more vulnerable to getting tangled, especially if the coat is just a little on the loose side.

Damage to fleeces. In addition to vigilance for the benefit of animal welfare, keeping a close eye on how fleeces are faring is also important. Is a coat starting to look snug? If so, how is the fleece looking under it? You will get to know which fleeces can handle a little snugness and which ones cannot without creating a problem. A snug coat can mean more friction between the coat and the wool. Combine that with wet weather and you may want to watch carefully for matting or felting action, or rubbing along edges of the coat that could lead to tender spots in the wool. If you have long-wool, open-fleeced sheep, their fleeces may be very unforgiving of snug coats. Keep a close eye out. A beautiful fleece can be ruined by a coat if not managed carefully!

Washing coats. The coats will need to be washed from time to time, as they can get pretty saturated with sweat and lanolin, and encrusted with dry manure particularly in the hip area. You may be understandably reluctant to pop them in your household washing machine like that. A good soaking or two in a muck bucket full of water, and just a little rubbing the worst bits together, will go a long way to making it more acceptable to put them in your washer.

Making repairs. No matter how good you are at minimizing infrastructure snags for your coats, some will get torn, wear holes, or leg straps come unattached. A sturdy sewing machine and basic

skills at using it will certainly extend the lives of the coats. If you can do it yourself, or have access to someone who will do it for free, it is worth it. If you have to pay someone else to do it, keep in mind that the cost of a new coat is between \$20 and \$35. Old coats too damaged to repair can be cannibalized for patches, etc. when doing repairs.

What coating cannot do for you: It cannot fix a fundamentally flawed fleece (non-uniform, kemp and medullated fibers).

Additional issues and helpful hints

Effect of coats on different types of fleeces.

Which fleece type you are working with may have implications for how to manage coats. It is helpful to think about fleeces at two ends of the spectrum and how they may be affected by year-round coats: the dense, fine-wools at one end and the more open long-wools at the other.

Fine-wools. The fleeces of the finer wools are denser because they have more hair follicles per square inch of skin. As a result, the fibers tend to grow continuously straight out perpendicular to the skin surface. From base to tip, they are so tightly packed that they can't bend over. Consequently, only the very tips of the fibers are exposed to the underside of the coat. As the fleece grows and approaches shearing length, a snug coat might compress the fibers along their length, but their relatively tighter crimp makes them quite resilient to compression. In addition, rubbing at the tips might lead to small "pills" (especially the finest wools) on the outside "surface" of the fleece. The integrity of the fleece is essentially not compromised by the coat unless there is so much friction at the tips that there is breakage there and extensive pilling of the broken tips. Some coats are made of less abrasive, more slick fabric intended to avoid this abrasion effect. The downside is that those fabrics tend to be thinner and more prone to tearing, and being slick, can slip around and be a little trickier to fit properly.

Long-wools. At the other end of the spectrum are the less dense (fewer hair follicles per square inch of skin) long-wools. This wool grows faster than the fine-wools, and the individual fibers are not close enough together to hold each other up and perpendicular to the surface of the skin. Their length and weight cause them to part down the topline and drape to the sides layering over one another along the sides of the sheep. These fleeces will be less resilient to compression, since the pressure is more along the sides of the fibers (not from tip to base), and their crimp is softer and less elastic anyway. The coat then rests over the top and sides and a greater proportion of length of the staple is in contact with the coat (not just the very

tips as with the dense fine-wools), especially along the topline. This means more length of fiber is affected by abrasion of these typically easy-to-felt fibers. Consider also that some of these types of fleeces are prized for their soft crimp or curl, and/or ringlet style tips. These qualities may be damaged by coats and should be watched carefully. People do successfully coat long-wool fleeces, but only with careful attention to coat changes and checking the status of the fleeces under the coats.

When to start coating. The ideal time to start coating a sheep is immediately following shearing. Many recommend a topical dose of insecticide along the topline as a lice preventative, followed by the coat. This can be at any age. If you want to coat a young lamb with a promising fleece, it is still recommended that it be sheared so that lamb tips are removed. Often weak, lamb tips are prone to pilling when coated. Young lambs means having smaller coats on hand and more changes through the year, but some of the most beautiful fleeces are the result!

Coat sizing. Sheep coat sizes are typically measured from the angle at the back and base of the neck where it meets the top of the shoulder along the topline to the dock (base of tail). This usually works, but there are some challenges. A sheep that measures 35 inches long, and has just been sheared, will not fill out a coat the way a 35-inch long sheep in full wool will do! That coat will hang down farther and be looser on the just-sheared 35-incher than it will on the full-fleeced one. A leggy sheep will accommodate a looser coat without getting into trouble stepping out of the leg straps, whereas the leg straps on a short-legged (same body length) sheep may be nearly dragging on the ground and be unworkable. If you start coating your sheep, you will figure it out!

Skirting coated fleeces. While coating can make skirting fleeces faster and easier, it does not "excuse" you from careful skirting, assuming you want to optimize your return on the fleeces. As with any fleece, you need to skirt

◀ Management



"Fleece" knit fabric coats for lambs accommodate rapid growth, as the stretchy fabric expands (up to a point). [Image by Martha Polkey]

The ewe on the left has a serious butt-puff. Both ewes' coats are showing tightness from front to back, where abrasion may degrade fiber quality, especially along the along the sides where there is significant movement as the sheep walks about.



Getting the fit right

It's pretty clear when a coat is just not big enough. The leg straps are tight and run the risk of inhibiting movement of hind legs and even becoming embedded in the back of the legs. The chest piece that is too tight can almost restrict shoulder movement in front. On a lamb, the top edge of the chest panel may even put pressure on the trachea and interfere with breathing. Too small *must* be addressed.

But what if the next larger size coat is too big? The leg straps hang down around the hocks or below, and the front neck opening gapes enough for a front leg to get through when the sheep is reaching down to graze or getting up and down. Here are three ways to adjust a coat:

- Pull up the coat from just over the hips, place a small stone or other object (some use golf balls) about ¾ inch in diameter under (inside) the “tent” created by pulling up the coat. Then twist the fabric around the object and tie a piece of twine very tightly around the base of it like tying off a balloon. The size of the object and how many twists will determine how much fabric is taken up. This shortens both the coat's width and length. Just snip the twine when it needs to expand to accommodate growing wool (or animal). You might be able to do this with a strong elastic

hairband or heavy-duty rubber band, but watch to be sure the elastic holds up.

- Use a heavy-duty blanket pin on the top of the coat (diaper safety pins are less strong but do less damage to lighter weight fabrics). Make a longitudinal fold in the fabric along the midline on top—maybe a couple of folds—to hike up the leg straps and the front panel and pin it through all layers. This works great as long as you are around to keep a close eye on the sheep in case the blanket pins open up. And when it gets too snug, you just remove the pin(s) or adjust the folds and re-pin it so the coat fits just right. I especially like this for a quick fix when a coated ewe has lambed. I can quickly hike up the coat, get the leg straps snug and high on the inside of her thighs so a lamb can't get its head caught in the strap. If the coat is too long front to back you can make the folds across the back instead of longitudinally in order to shorten it.

- Get out your sewing machine (or have needle and thread on hand in the barn—waxed linen thread is nice and sturdy) and fold the coat across the back, using wide stitches that are easily removed later. This will shorten the length but not hike it up if the leg straps are too low. Watch to be sure the sheep doesn't rip it out.

out any second cuts, belly wool, top knot, some lower leg wool, and any other short fibers and manure tags (not covered by coat). Beyond that, there are some things to pay particular attention to when skirting a coated fleece:

Coat edges. Check for weak fibers where the edge of the coat rubs against the fleece. The lower edge of a coat on a full fleece may rub back and forth along the wool that is sticking out below that edge, creating tender wool in that specific area. It is not indicative of tenderness throughout the fleece, but a potential buyer coming across it might reasonably assume that it is. Be sure to skirt that “strip” of wool out.

Neck. The area around the back neck area of the fleece is where the wool gets smushed down and rubbed quite a bit as the sheep raises and lowers

its head, etc. This is also the area where VM concentrates, worked right down to the skin by the edge of the coat and is particularly bad if hay has been fed. Sometimes this whole

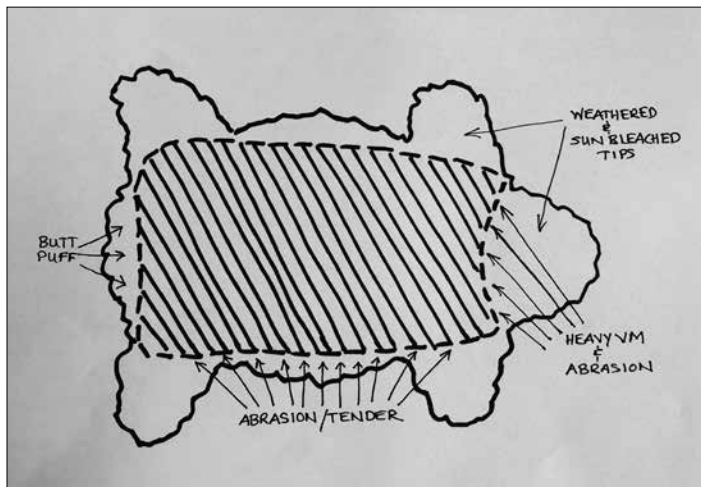
section needs to be skirted out to remove the embedded VM and prevent it from contaminating the rest of the fleece. But, if the sheep has been out in a clean pasture and not eating hay, this wool may be very nice and should just be checked for matting and or tenderness from rubbing on the coat edge.

Shoulders and chest. Again, the edge of the coat at the front of the shoulders, and where it comes around to the front and chest can get compacted and rubbed by the coat. Depending on your desired market you may or may not want to skirt some of this out – but at the very least, check it for tangling, matting and embedded VM.

Butt puff. A telltale sign that a coat needs to be changed to a larger size is the presence of a significant “butt puff.” Wool that grows out from under the coat as it becomes too short to cover the back end of the sheep gets exposed to the weather and sun gets fluffed up into an impressive puff. The quality of this wool will not be the same as the lovely stuff under the coat, so it will be your decision whether to remove it and put in the “good skirtings” pile or discard it.

Matted tips. Some fleeces may have their tips matted under the coat. You should assess whether the matting is mild and easily pulled apart and whether the tips are sound (not tender). If you can pull it apart easily and the tips are good, then the fleece is fine even though it might not be eye-candy. If the tips are really matted and the fleece is hard to pull apart, you may be in trouble,

What to check for when skirting a coated fleece.



especially if, in pulling it apart, the fibers actually break.

Uncoated fiber. What to do with good quality wool that was not under the coat. Some people with coated fleeces remove any wool that was not covered by the coat and only bag and sell what was covered. This ensures a most uniformly clean, unweathered, and unbleached fleece that can demand a very good price. The wool “removed” would include wool from in around the sides and underneath the neck as well as butt puff and wool from upper leg areas. Much of this wool, if not full of VM, is perfectly good wool. Setting it aside as “good skirtings” it can be sold as “prime seconds” or used by the producer for personal use. If enough high-quality skirtings accumulate, they can be sent off to a mill for processing into roving or yarn.

Having said this, sometimes that good wool that was not under the coat is especially nice. A customer might really like the bleached tips of a black or brown sheep provided they are sound. If it is very clean of VM, you may choose to leave it in so that the buyer can decide for themselves how to use it. It’s your call.

Rams and coats. Great big beautiful ram fleeces can be fabulous when they’ve been coated. One issue to highlight in particular is that if you run multiple rams together, when you change the coats on any one or all of them, they may need to go through a re-introduction period again—just like after they are sheared and don’t recognize

each other, or when they are placed together after being apart. If the coat looks and smells different, they may need to re-establish their order of dominance. Horned rams may need coats with front closures.

Keeping track of coat sizes. This may seem like a minor detail, but it can be very frustrating when you need to switch out a coat that is getting too tight and you don’t know what size you need because you can’t tell what size the sheep is wearing. Some coats come with different color fabric tabs on the front of the chest or at the tail end that is supposed to indicate the size. Some come with the size embroidered on the hind corner—around the lower britch area. In both cases, these indicators are obliterated by dirt and grease build up or mud or manure within a day or two. We have taken to marking the size on the top of the coat—right above the shoulder area to be read easily from the front, and also right on top at the highest point over the hips, easily read from behind. We use big fat permanent markers to write 2-inch tall numbers. This way you can easily see the size they are currently wearing and select the necessary upgrade. We write over the numbers after each washing.

- If your flock is large, and you’re not primarily focused on wool, you might choose a handful of the sheep with particularly uniform fleeces that are true to their breed, and coat them. Hand-spinners and other fiber artists are increasingly interested in down-type wools from sheep

◀ Management

Thinking of making your own sheep coats?

You may decide that you want to make your own, either because you think it will be less expensive or you want to tweak the design or use more interesting fabrics. The two important variables are finding suitable and affordable fabric, and the time it will take you to make the coats (assuming you have a sewing machine that can handle heavier fabrics and that you have basic sewing machine skills). The basic pattern and type of sewing is not complicated. Based on my experience, here are a couple of things to think about:

Appropriate fabric is not easy to get and certainly not cheap. Standard sheep coats from Rockysheep.com are 1000 denier Cordura with no waterproof (polyurethane) layer. Their lighter weight coats are 400 denier. Most Cordura comes with polyurethane coating, which is not appropriate for sheep coats! The fabric must be breathable—not waterproof. You may find some marine covering or awning fabrics, even outdoor furniture fabrics like Sunbrella. These fabrics range roughly from \$15 to \$35 per yard or more (remember the cost of purchased coats ranges from \$21-\$35). Most coats will require at least a yard or more (depending on width of the fabric and size of coat).

If you can find remnants (shorter bits left on the end of a bolt of fabric) or seconds (which may have a stain or a flaw in the weaving) you can get a reduced price—sometimes as little as \$6 per yard. It takes some searching! Fabric that is UV resistant is important if you want your coats to hold up to being exposed to sun year-round.

Note that cotton canvas is not an appropriate fabric for year-round coats. Cotton holds moisture and (literally) rots, may get moldy, and is not sufficiently durable. Cotton canvas show coats are not suitable for year-round outdoor sheep coats.

If you are able to find the appropriate fabric at a reasonable price, factor in your time and effort, and other supplies such as upholstery needles and thread and nylon webbing for leg straps, etc. You can do the math, and if saving money is your goal, you might want to reconsider.

That said, a great reason to make your own is to tweak the patterns and try to improve some of the trouble spots of existing coats, such as how to keep the neck area better protected, and ensure that a full fleece is adequately covered along the sides approaching the belly. If you come up with a new improved design, please let us all know!

Homemade blankets can incorporate tent cord into neck and rear openings to better accommodate newly shorn sheep and to allow for fleece growth. [Images by Martha Polkey]



Management ►

traditionally referred to as “meat breeds” (Dorset, Suffolk, Hampshire, etc.). You might find that instead of getting nothing or less than \$.40/lb for your wool, you can get \$5, \$8, \$10 per pound for those nice ones.

Sources of sheep coats

We have purchased and used year-round sheep coats for more than 14 years. Here are some sources.

- Sheep Suits (rockysheep.com) in Loveland, Colorado. The standard version is made from durable 1000 denier Cordura fabric, with no waterproof (polyurethane) layer so that it is breathable. They also make a lighter weight (400 denier Cordura), smoother coat for those who prefer it. They have a special version for use on horned sheep, and also make covers for camelids. The Sheep Suits have sewn hemmed edges and darts at the back of the neck and at the back end to hold the coat in place and keep VM out. They use no elastic.
- Sheepman Supply in Frederick sells Finero year-round sheep coats in multiple sizes. These coats resemble the Australian “Matilda” covers that were sold at Sheepman Supply for years. They have elastic at the neck and around the back end. The fabric is a ripstop nylon and is quite smooth and slippery. The only downside to the elastic is that it doesn’t last forever—and may need to be replaced, or darts sewn in to achieve the same purpose.
- FleeceKeeper Coats (fleecekeeper.com, Maxwell, Iowa) offers coats in three different weights of nylon (in 420-, 600-, and 1000-denier). Their coats have adjustable elastic at the neck opening, and offer additional options:

adjustable elastic at the rear opening, rear leg buckles, extra wide, and horned (front opening).

- Wool Tinker Sheep Coats (Vermont) are no longer being made, but are mentioned because they used a marine sail/boat cover fabric that is durable and has excellent UV protection, but tears easily if it encounters sharp objects. They were made with elastic over the back of the neck and drawstring elastic for adjustability at the back end, which was very useful.

Finally, it is important to note what coating your fleeces will *not* accomplish. It will not improve or correct a fundamentally flawed fleece, such as a non-uniform fleece (one that is inconsistent with respect to crimp or amount of modulated fibers or hairs or britch, or one that has a tender or weak area in the staple due to some health issue). They will be cleaner and look prettier but their inherent quality will not be better.

The added effort of managing the coats is not a guarantee that you will realize prime prices for your wool. If the coats are managed well on the types of fleece that are suited to coats, you can reasonably expect a better price than you would for the equivalent uncoated fleece.

Even beautiful coated fleeces don’t sell themselves. You still need to find and work your market. Fiber festival fleece sales are a great way to get your nice fleeces seen by lots of people, and hopefully purchased. Building your reputation for well managed and well skirted coated fleeces will pay off, and will give buyers the confidence to purchase your fleeces online as well. The community that buys these fleeces is very socially connected and word (good or bad) travels easily and quickly, especially across social media.

Management Calendar

September 8

Webinar: Pasture and Grazing Management for Sheep and Goats. 7-9 p.m. Pennsylvania State Extension. Free, registration required. <https://extension.psu.edu/pasture-and-grazing-management?fbclid=IwAR3eztWPDyBwTTaEj933u7SEjWwgRR-BvwMU-QK1TSsvgFRANK6uVc-6vgM>

September 8

Let’s Grow-sponsored Webinar: The Conservation and Comeback of Heritage Breed Sheep. Register for free. Go to <https://www.sheepusa.org/newsletter/august-28-2020> and scroll down to find link.

September 15

Webinar: Pasture and Grazing Management for Sheep and Goats. 7-9 p.m. Pennsylvania State Extension. Free, registration required. <https://extension.psu.edu/pasture-and-grazing-management?fbclid=IwAR3eztWPDyBwTTaEj933u7SEjWwgRR-BvwMU-QK1TSsvgFRANK6uVc-6vgM>

Coats at lambing time

Some shepherds remove coats from ewes for lambing and nursing, concerned that lambs may get their heads caught in the leg straps. They may even get their heads up under the coat behind a front leg and through the neck opening and get stuck there. It is a valid concern.

But if you are coating your sheep to protect your fleeces, removing them to let lambs climb, paw, and otherwise use reclining ewes as playground equipment is going to put a huge crimp in your plans (so to speak).

Once again, proper fit is the solution. You can use the same techniques for fitting a coat to minimize the likelihood that lambs will get caught. We have done this for years and have never had a lamb injury or fatality due to getting caught in a coat.



If you want the current wool situation summed up for 2020, let's just say that the Maryland Sheep Breeders Association should be glad it got out of the wool pool business when it did. 2020 has set records for lowest wool prices of all time, and much of the Eastern wool clip remains in producers' barns or is being warehoused.

Let me preface the below discussion by saying that since the closure of the Maryland Wool Pool, I have been operating as a buyer for Gronewold Fur and Wool, based in Illinois. Gronewold's prices have held true to the going market rates being paid by other warehouses and mills, so I feel confident in using their prices to show you how the market has been crawling steadily downward.

Now, let's go back in time to get some history on how we got to this point.

Three years ago, prices were holding around the 30-to-40-cents-a-pound mark for commercial eastern wools—that is, wool sold with minimal preparation (i.e., little to no skirting or cleaning) and typically falling in the medium to coarse wool category (from your standard meat breeds like Dorset, Suffolk, and Cheviot as well as your long wools like Border Leicester and Lincoln). This wool has limited usage in a worldwide economy due to the overwhelming demand for fine wool like Merino.

Most wool usage and recognition is given to Merino and other fine wool breeds and even products that don't end up next to the skin still demand Merino wool in their labels (like wool shoes). Because of this our Eastern wool continues to drop in value. Unless some new and unusual use of wool pushes its way to the market front (or wool becomes cheaper than fossil fuels) there will continue to be a suppression of market price for our types of wool.

Which leads us to the first market crash in 2019. Due to the rising tensions in the worldwide economy (on-going trade wars with China), the wool trade here in the United States came to a grinding halt due to the fact that a large majority of our wool had gone to China to be scoured and processed. This, coupled with the fact that you can't just snap your fingers and have infrastructure in other countries ready to go, meant the United States was faced with storing large amounts of wool that had no place to go.

There was a lot of hope in certain circles that once the trade issues were resolved that wool would start moving again and the temporary stockpile would be taken care of. But unfortunately, at the beginning of 2020 and



Wool takes a hit from pandemic, trade wars

the rise of the COVID-19 virus, wool once again had to be pushed to the back burner as industry came to a grinding halt, mills were shut down to keep workers safe, wool auctions were canceled, and pretty much any opportunity to sell or distribute wool became impossible due to social distancing and state restrictions.

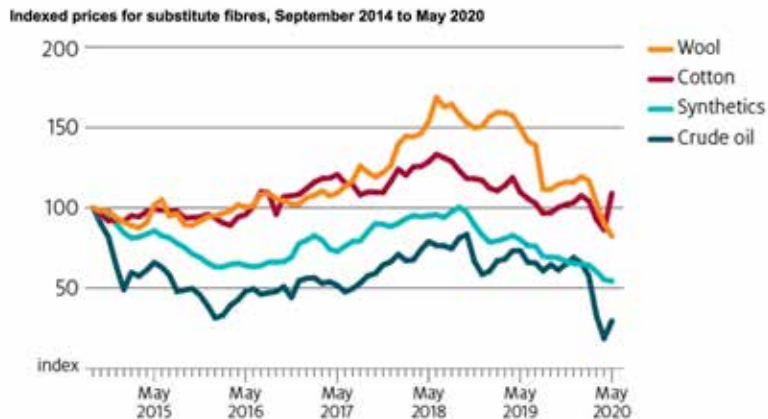
Which brings us to this year. Wool prices at the beginning of 2020 were holding at 20 cents a pound. This was disheartening for me as a shearer to see—such a useful and renewable product become so valueless. After the pandemic sharply worsened in March, the price dropped again to a new record low of 10 cents a pound. At this point the value of the burlap bag we use to package the wool is higher than the value of the wool being put inside the bag. There was very little reason to go to extremes to keep wool clean or sorted since black and white wool all carried the same value. This led to lower quality clips and lack of interest in maintaining the high standards that ASI has long promoted to keep our American wool clip competitive on a global market.

In spite of this, we continued to collect and buy wool all spring, but we always tried hard to make sure farmers were aware of the dismal state of wool sales in the current economy. In August the wool truck came and picked up more than 30,000 pounds of local wool from our

Emily Chamelin Hickman

is a professional shearer and MSBA Board member. She also serves on the ASI Wool Council and the ASI Shearer's Council.

Six years of wool prices versus substitute fibers. [Image from Australian Department of Agriculture. <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/research-topics/agricultural-outlook/natural-fibres>]



Note: September 2014 = 100. All fibre prices are originally in US¢/kg and crude oil is collected in US\$/bbl. 21 micron wool (Wool), Cotton 'A' Index (Cotton), average of North Asian acrylic staple fibre 1.5 denier, China polyester staple fibre 1.4 denier 38 mm, Nylon staple fibre (Synthetics), Brent crude oil (Crude oil). Sources: Australian Wool Exchange; Cotton Outlook; Fibre2Fashion; US Energy Information Administration

Marketing ►

Marketing Calendar

September 7

Special Lamb Sale. Farmers Livestock Exchange, Winchester, VA. Take-in 8-11 a.m. <https://farmerslivestockva.com/index.php/schedule>

September 9

MidAtlantic Women in Agriculture Webinar: Thoughts on Animal Welfare: Influential factors, animal welfare science, assurance program. 12 p.m. Register at <https://universityofextension.eventbrite.com/>

Some of the good old days for wool markets? Below, a wool wagon in Australia in 1900. In 1903 greasy wool there sold for about \$5.45 a pound current USD. [Image from the Tyrrell Photographic Collection, Powerhouse Museum, via Wikipedia]



warehouse. The saddest part of that day was not the fact that the wool going on the truck was so undervalued, but learning that the warehouses are all stockpiling and storing all this wool for the indefinite future. Stockpiles can affect wool prices for many years and can continue to suppress prices. The bad news is that I think these low commercial wool prices will continue into the foreseeable future.

Which brings us to now. How can we as wool producers find value in the product we are producing? What suggestions can we offer going forward to help you make the best decisions for your operations? Here are a few.

- Make sure the wool stays clean and free of vegetable matter (VM). There still are smaller mills in the region seeking to create a locally sourced “farm yarn.” These mills all have the same request, clean and a solid 3-inch staple length. These mills are willing to pay upwards of \$1 a pound for wool that is VM-free and of consistent length. Many of our local small mills do not have the equipment necessary to burn out large amounts of VM or handle burrs and stems of any kind. If you want a premium price you need to be willing to provide the product they want. Some things to consider are shearing earlier in the winter, prior to feeding hay.

- Consider limiting your flock to one breed (no cross breeding). Many local yarn producers want to produce single-breed-sourced yarns. I get asked frequently to source Suffolk or Dorset wool for this purpose. Obtaining a consistent and quality clip from one breed (especially traditional meat breeds) is not easy. First, many raising those breeds shear before the wool is long enough or shear twice a year, so the wool is too short to

market this way. Second, those breeders cross several or more breeds, resulting in a nice carcass animal but with wool that has no value for these single-breed yarn producers.

- Sell the top 10 percent of your wool clip privately. Selling even just two or three fleeces privately can more than double your wool income in years like this. If you have lambs or yearlings with particularly pretty fleeces, bag those separately and ask a reasonable price for them. While many festivals had to cancel this year, there are still numerous wool and fiber sales groups on Facebook. Look up your local spinning guild or yarn shop, or post an ad at the local craft store. A small amount of effort can yield big results. Again, make sure your wool is clean and at least 3 inches long. Selling one 6-pound bag of wool for \$20 will pay out the same amount as 200 pounds sold commercially today. Most shearers will gladly help you figure out which fleeces are your best and would be worth trying to sell individually.

- Fleeces of some breeds are just more in demand and more valuable than others. Ultimately, if you are passionate about your sheep breed, that will help you sell the fiber. If you just want to sell your clip in one lot, consider breeds that continue to hold spinner and mill demand. I am frequently asked to source bulk amounts of wools from breeds like Shetland, Wenslydale, Cormo, Blueface Leicester and CVM. These breeds among others continue to be popular with the hand-spinning and knitting crowd. Smaller mills and yarn producers want to produce American yarns that are single breed or local sourced.

- Shear earlier. By the end of May, there is usually a glut of “okay” fleeces floating around. In January lots of wool buyers and spinners are keen to start getting new wools and are willing to buy fleeces that in May they simply won't touch. Supply and demand dictates that if you wait till the market saturates then you must work harder and supply a higher quality product to compete.

We all look forward to a world without fear of COVID and one where our trade and individual buying choices make the world better and our farms more productive. I am looking forward to going back to festivals and conventions and continue to work to sell our amazing product.

But until then we will do what we can to maintain the value of the product we are producing. We are always happy to brainstorm with producers and make connections to help them sell their wool. We want every wool producer to get fairly compensated for their wool. The best part about where we are right now is that we have no where else to go but up.

Before you began shepherding, did you grow up on a farm? Whether the answer is yes or no, imagine how it would have been if you had not had a friend or family member to help guide you or teach you.

Someone new to sheep and goat farming these days most likely turns to the internet and encounters a wealth of conflicting information. It's often helpful for the new farmer to have an experienced mentor to talk things out and validate that he or she is on the right track. They cannot call the vet or the Cooperative Extension agent for everything.

Our shepherding community is only as strong as the relationships we form, and the mentor-mentee relationship is the cornerstone of that community.

Are you ready to be a mentor to other small ruminant producers? I have a list of people that need help. You will help strengthen our organization, promote the success of new producers—and you may even make some new friends along the way

First let's consider what it takes to be a good mentor (and a good mentee).

A mentor is, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "a trusted counselor or guide." I love that "mentor" comes from Greek mythology. Mentor was not only the teacher of Odysseus but also a loyal friend and advisor. For me, a mentor is a teacher, loyal friend and advisor who can be relied on for advice in good times and emergencies.

Today's global pandemic has limited normal face-to-face interactions. How do mentors maintain relationships and help foster our community? The same foundational skills are necessary. However, the communications channels have changed.

You need five skills to be an effective mentor: knowledge, respect, boundaries, commitment, and personal responsibility.

Knowledge

First and foremost, as the mentor you need to possess real-life extensive expertise. And the mentee needs to be able to accurately articulate his or her problems. Both individuals need to problem solve together and come up with an action plan that is doable.

The mentor must also not be afraid to admit to not knowing the answer to a question. The mentee is putting a certain degree of faith and trust in you and admitting a lack of knowledge is not a sign of weakness. When I am in these situations, if I do not know the answer, I usually refer the mentee to someone that might know or



an authoritative source (a website, video, or book) and contact information (if an individual).

Respect

The mentor and mentee must respect each other. The mentor needs to be willing to take the time necessary to listen to the problem and ask questions to get to the root of the problem. The mentee must be able to listen, understand and hopefully implement the advice.

Boundaries

Setting up boundaries helps maintain the relationship. Knowing when not to call, for example, will prevent resentment if the mentee or mentor goes to bed early. Boundaries also help ensure that nobody is taking advantage of the other person.

Commitment

Both the mentor and the mentee will invest and be committed to helping each other and strengthening the relationship. Nothing is harder on the mentor than making suggestions, spending time away from their own commitments to help the mentee, and then having the agreed upon suggestions ignored.

Likewise, as a mentee, it is incredibly disheartening to divulge your shortcomings, weaknesses, and failures to your mentor and have them suddenly disappear and stop giving guidance.

Personal responsibility

This one is HUGE. The mentor offers "opinions" and "suggestions" and "advice," all based on real knowledge and facts. The mentee is responsible for learning, researching, and confirming that this is sound advice. There is no place for blame in the relationship.

Mentoring builds community

Patty Sanville is an MSBA Board member and ASI representative for Maryland.

*A mentor must have knowledge and a commitment to mentees.
[Image by Jayne Samuel-Walker via Pinterest]*



MSBA news ▶

If the relationship is solid and both parties are willing to take on the responsibility, then the relationship will grow and flourish.

Mentoring is just as important during the pandemic, although my usual communication channels have changed. Today, I do Zoom calls, texting, phone calls, video calls, link-sharing, and email. One day, I left my safety bubble for a socially distanced walk through a few pastures with a mentee, and offered solutions and suggestions using my “outside voice.”

I have found being a mentor to be an incredibly rewarding experience. Some beginners are just starting out as a after retirement on a new endeavor. Others are adding sheep or goats as a new species on their farms. Mentoring is also not limited to new producers. Most of us need help and support at some point.

Please let me know if you are willing to be a mentor to new sheep producers. Note that this article and newsletter will reach more than just our members. It also goes out to 4-H and FFA advisors. These are the folks that see a need long before we do.

My favorite way to mentor occurs organically, face to face, with a cup of coffee in hand. I look forward to going back to this method! But until then we can still build and foster these relationships and strengthen our community.

Contact me at patriciasanville@gmail.com, or call 240-357-1437.



It is with a heavy heart that I share with you the recent death of Ron Allen, long-time MSBA member, supporter, Festival Committee stalwart, and devoted shepherd of his Clun Forest flock. Ron was chair of the Festival’s Tent & Table committee for many years.

Ron, an astrophysicist at the Space Telescope Science Institute until his retirement last year, developed a love for shepherding early in his career, during a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands.

After the Allens moved to Baltimore County, his wife Jan gave him two breeding ewes for his 51st birthday. She told the *Baltimore Sun*, “It doesn’t go with him when you picture an astrophysicist, but he found the fact that the sheep had a life that depended on the seasons and knew what they needed, he just loved it.”

We will miss his easy smile and always helpful attitude. His obituary appeared in the August 16 *Baltimore Sun*. Condolences may be sent to: Janice Allen, 3900 Eland Road, Phoenix, MD 21131.

—Kris Thorne

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...and become part of an active organization that sponsors the Maryland Sheep & Wool Festival (the premier event of its kind in the nation), Sheep Shearing School, various youth activities, and a variety of educational functions.

You can join and pay online at <http://marylandsheepbreeders.org>, and fill out your member profile page. If you prefer to register by mail, fill out the form at left and mail with your \$25 check.

The Maryland Sheep Breeders Association Board of Directors meets every other month. Meetings are open to members. For minutes of meetings, contact the MSBA Secretary (see p. 15). 2020 meeting dates: Feb. 3, April 2, June 1, Sept. 14, Oct. 9, Dec. 7.

Here are sponsored events and activities for 2020

- March 13-14: Beginning Shearing School
- TBD: Shepherds Seminar Day **CANCELED**
- May 2-3: Maryland Sheep & Wool Festival **VIRTUAL**
- October 9: Annual Meeting & Dinner **VIRTUAL**

Membership application MARYLAND SHEEP BREEDERS ASSOCIATION

Name: _____

Farm Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Please include me in the MSBA Breeders Directory.

Web URL: _____

Breed(s): _____ No. Ewes: _____

Send form and \$25 check made payable to MSBA to Kris Thorne, Membership Chair, 1130 Martin Drive, Westminster, MD 21157. She will contact you for additional information for the breeders directory and online profile.

As a member you will:

- Join an active and friendly community of shepherds and others
- Support the core activities of the MSBA.
- Receive the quarterly Maryland Sheep News, MSBA's informative newsletter.
- Receive regular publications from the American Sheep Industry Association.
- Receive priority consideration for enrollment in the Maryland Shearing School (applicable only if you own sheep), and your family members will be given priority consideration for the annual MSBA scholarship.
- Receive free admission to the Maryland Sheep & Wool Festival and be mailed a free copy of the catalog.
- Pay a reduced commission on all fleeces sold at the Maryland Sheep & Wool Festival Fleece Show & Sale..
- Be able to promote your farm or business through a free profile page on the MSBA website.

Annual membership/subscription fee: \$25. The membership year runs from October through September. Dues for membership received prior to June 1, 2020, will be accepted as paid through September 30, 2020. Dues received on or after June 1 will be accepted as paid through September 30, 2021.