

# Shepherds Symposium To Feature Minnesota Sheep Experts

UNIVERSITY PARK - Sheep and livestock producers can learn the latest in sheep operations at the first annual Keystone Shepherd's Symposium scheduled for the Ramada Inn in Somerset, Pennsylvania, Friday and Saturday, Dec. 19 and 20.

A team of experienced sheep husbandrymen from the nationally recognized Pipestone Sheep Project, Pipestone, Minnesota, will present sessions on how to increase lambing, what kinds of grasses and forages produce the

best sheep and how to decide when to call the vet. They will also discuss fencing and handling facilities for a working sheep operation.

The symposium is sponsored by the Pennsylvania Sheep and Wool

Growers Association, the Penn State Cooperative Extension Service, Penn State's Department of Dairy and Animal Science, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Markets, the American Sheep Producers Council and allied industries.

Ron Guenther, superintendent of the sheep program at Ohio State University, will be the featured speaker at the banquet Friday evening. His topic will be "Where Have We Been and Where Should We Be Headed in Purebred Sheep Production?"

Mike Caskey, Pipestone project coordinator, will begin the symposium with a session on management, breeding and selection for increasing marketable pounds of lamb per ewe.

Other sessions include sheep equipment, handling facilities and fencing needs for a small sheep enterprise, and designing and managing a sheep forage program as well as an update on preventive sheep health.

A computer session comparing present production costs and income levels to production levels of lamb and wool will be useful to livestock producers who are considering sheep production as an alternative enterprise.

Dr. Clair Engle, Penn State professor of animal science and extension sheep specialist, and James Sheeder, president of the Pennsylvania Sheep and Wool Growers Association, are co-chairmen of the symposium.

Successful commercial sheep producers, Jonathan May of Timberville, Virginia and Ian Cunningham of Pipestone, will discuss what makes one sheep operation more successful than another.

Contact your county Penn State Cooperative Extension Office for registration details or write to Dr. Engle at 316 Henning Building, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802. Preregistration is due by Dec. 8.

## Preconditioning Is Key To Healthy Feeder Calves, Vet Says

UNIVERSITY PARK - More than 400 calves to be sold in Pennsylvania cattle sales this fall have been "preconditioned" - that is, vaccinated and protected against parasites - under the Keystone Feeder Calf Certification Program.

While the program means added costs for the producer, Dr. Thomas R. Drake, extension veterinarian at The Pennsylvania State University, says these calves are now protected against diseases such as Bovine Respiratory Disease. BRD complex accounts for 75 percent of the health problems in feeder cattle, striking usually when the calves are moved to the feedlot.

Program administrators are hoping that cattle buyers will encourage participation in the program by paying the producer a few cents more per pound at the cattle sales. Drake says the treatment saves money for the buyer in the long run because animals are less likely to die of pneumonia, and treatment costs are prevented.

Drake also points out that the disease damages the lungs of affected animals even if they do recover. Such animals will not gain as much weight as a healthy animal even if fed the same amount of food.

Under the program, producers and veterinarians work together to precondition animals.

The program, which is in its second year, is sponsored by the Pennsylvania Veterinary Medicine Association and the Pennsylvania Cattlemen's Association. The Cooperative Extension Service provides eartags and drugs for the calves.

"We're estimating that the

producer should get an extra 3 to 5 cents per pound," Drake says. "We are hoping that we can get the buyers to pay this extra amount so they can take advantage of the health benefits. We also want them to encourage the producers to pay for preconditioning next year."

Dr. Melvin Butler, a veterinarian and cattle producer from Greene County, says whether the program works or not is a matter of economics - whether the producer gets enough money for the time and effort needed to precondition the calves.

From a health standpoint, he notes, no one argues that preconditioning is best for the calves. "The question is whether the premium is going to be there at the time of market."

Cattle buyer Paul Espy, of Green Ridge Beef Farms in Spruce Creek, says he would be willing to pay a little more as long as the animals show significant weight gain. Just preconditioning the animals is not enough. "The producers also have to do a little better job as far as breeding and raising the animal," he notes.

Espy says he keeps records of all the animals he buys, so he knows where he can buy healthy animals that will gain weight. He wants to know how the animals will perform before he will commit to paying a significant amount more for preconditioned animals.

"The program must be established over the years," he adds.

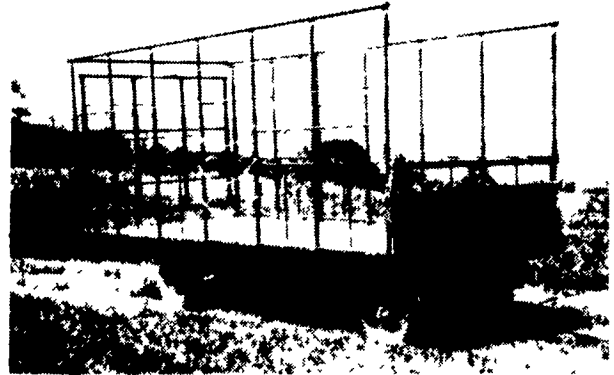
To encourage participation in this year's program, extension provided animal health products free of charge.

The calves, which were preconditioned at six to seven months of age when they weigh 400

or 500 pounds, will be sold at cattle sales throughout the state. They must be preconditioned three weeks before sale. Sales in Waynesburg, Green County, will have all preconditioned calves, while preconditioned calves will make up only part of those sold at others.

Drake notes that consumers probably will not see any difference in the meat they purchase at the store, and they should not be affected by the added costs.

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