



ACCENT ON THE FUTURE

The title seemed fitting after viewing and listening to a recent musical program where a very talented composer/conductor undertook the arduous task of bringing artists from both worlds of classical and jazz music together as one group. The challenge was met with some bold leadership, determination, coordination, and a profound understanding and appreciation of the diversity within each musical category. These were just a few of the many attributes one could appreciate observing as the composer cleverly searched for and blended a variety of medleys from two very distinct types of music. The result was a musical fete all molded into a beautiful symphony titled, "Accent on the Upbeat."

You might ask, what does such have to do with my producing lamb and wool? I believe, a great deal if you are somebody who is both concerned and interested in meeting the many challenges for restoring industry stability both in Pennsylvania and the U.S. First, we must understand there exists diversity within the domestic sheep industry, and next it is important to recognize you have chosen to be part of an industry that presently has a very fragile infrastructure.

Any industry growth and/or stability comes from continual individual producer support and commitment. The U.S. &/or Pennsylvania sheep industries are no exceptions. As potential composer/conductors, producers need to

be on-line with their industry leaders, appreciate diversity, understand the importance of every voice at all levels, communicate their thoughts, and make both a financial and personal commitment if they want their industry to grow and remain strong. The glue for building a stronger industry infrastructure is a blend of all these factors and more.

To some, phasing out of the National Wool Act signaled a complete collapse of the sheep industry and gave reason to abandon ship. If you still profess to believe this, and you have not jet jumped overboard, would you seriously re-evaluate your present sheep production goals? Hopefully, many of your personal sheep business aspirations are compatible with those of American sheep industry. If not, please take time to ask yourself, why not?

Next, look around and take careful notice what other domestic crop production, livestock and poultry industries have been and are doing to build a stronger infrastructure, bolster their image and strengthen their posture in the market place. If all this is not yet convincing enough, to get you thinking how you might better align yourself with your respective industry, then I urge you ex-

pand your thinking globally. Take time to carefully review present trade policies, and observe what your international competitors are doing to reshape their agriculture production and marketing programs. If none of this makes any sense, then you probably should move out of the "endangered species" category and venture into the business of raising some exotic species.

The sheep industry, overall has much to gain, and has reason to be "upbeat" as it prepares for the future. To the meek this may sound a bit harsh, but loss of the Wool Act support program, in my opinion, is a blessing in disguise. In many respects we have the jump on those remaining subsidized commodity-based industries who still believe all is well and that support prices must prevail. The destiny of any agriculture (food and fiber) producing industry, I believe, is going to center more and more on production efficiencies, value-based marketing, free-trade policies, and environmental issues. The sheep industry has already demonstrated the ability to adapt well to all these factors. Producer initiative and support, coupled with the collective abilities to look beyond the horizon, design and implement short and long-term educational, marketing and promotional programs is certain to initiate growth and enhance sustainability.

Maybe the question now, for many producers, is the American Sheep industry leadership making proper plans for the 21st century? Nothing is perfect, but I believe the present leadership within the American Sheep Industry Association, (ASI) understands and respects the diversity that exists within the industry. They strive to establish good dialogue with their constituents, government policy makers, consumer advocates, ani-

mal welfare and environmental policy groups. Likewise, they have not overlooked the need for building good bridges (coalitions) with various public action groups, in an effort to resolve differing views. Most important, the ASI leadership has a keen respect for the industry's fragile infrastructure. They believe in the participatory process and understand that initiating and supporting some basic grass-roots type programs will boost local and national support. Action on these fronts will become more evident as you take time to acquaint yourself with ASI activities and the working committees.

Again, a reminder and final question, is the accent on your personal sheep business, basically complimentary to the parent organization's goals? If so, the opportunity is yours to help move both your business and the national sheep industry forward. The test will come, we hope this fall when you are asked to vote on a national referendum that proposes one cent per pound on domestic and imported lamb and two cents per pound on domestic grease wool. Discussions are still going on as to how they might assess imported degreased wool and wool products.

Pennsylvania sheep producers are fortunate to have the leadership of Janet Mawhinney of Greene County, who is an ASI representative. She and her colleagues have compiled a very detailed report, in the last (May) issue of the Pennsylvania Sheep Producers magazine, on the upcoming referendum. I would suggest you get a copy of this Pennsylvania Sheep Producer magazine. Janet voices the opinion of the ASI leadership, when she urges your participation and written input on the upcoming referendum issue(s). Please take the time

over the next few months to become informed and share your thoughts, by writing to the editor of your sheep producer magazine, Lynn or John Zerphy, at (717) 362-4315.

Now, sheep producers have the opportunity to step forward and become partners in building a stronger and more competitive industry. The reality check is, those agriculture industries gaining in producer support, in marketing skills, and in promotional funding will be the industries who can best guarantee themselves a reputable spot in the market place. The sheep industry is no exception. Consequently, because of the present fragile infrastructures existing both within the Pennsylvania and the U.S. sheep industries, timing for this referendum is especially critical. Obviously, the outcome of any national referendum is a direct reflection upon producer attitude and level of commitment. For any producer who believes the sheep industry should grow and continue to maintain a competitive place in animal agriculture, the choice is quite simple. Become an informed voter by calling the American Sheep Industry Association for more details on the proposed referendum at (800) EWE-VOTE.

By now many of you have either read or been informed of the recent U.S. Department of Agriculture's announcement for conducting the upcoming election on the National Sheep Referendum. USDA released information to all State Referendum coordinators and industry leaders that Tuesday, Feb. 6, has been set as the voting date. Voting can be either in-person, at the county extension office or by absentee balloting.

In order to follow the strict guidelines set up for absentee voting it is important that all persons

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