

Maryland 4-H Shepherd Recalls Getting Started

WESTMINSTER, Md. — Rachael Schuster has been raising and exhibiting sheep for just about as long as she can remember. At age 13, going on 14, the Carroll County 4-H'er recalled how she got started.

"I was around cows before sheep," she explained. She lives on the family farm in New Windsor where her parents, Charles and Sharon Schuster, raised beef cattle for about 20 years. "I attended the Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival regularly as a small child," recalled Rachael. "I told my mom that I wanted a lamb more than anything and that I would never ask for anything ever again."

The 9-year-old's plea worked, and the smallest lamb they could find went home with them on her lap in the car that afternoon. Rachael picked out a black Finn lamb that she named Zorro because of the distinct dark mask on his white face.

"I started showing him at the fairs," she said. "That year I won a blue ribbon at the Carroll County Fair and a silver bowl trophy at the Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival for his wool." The Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival, always held on the first

weekend in May, is billed as the largest festival in America. At just nine, Rachael became the recipient of a much sought after trophy that bears the inscription, 25th Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival; Best of Maryland Wool — Producer, 1998.

Zorro became the first of her flock of Finnsheep. She went on to increase her flock to where she now has her own breeding program. She selects sires for their correctness and wool quality. Rachael said she sells her fleeces to hand spinners. "Finns have soft wool and a long staple length, nice luster and they come in all colors." She has gotten top dollar for the prizewinning fleeces which range in weight from about four to seven pounds. "A hand spinner in Virginia bought Zorro's fleece for \$100," she reported.

Rachael said she uses the wool from her sheep for her own projects, too. "I felt it and weave it after the wool is spun. I wove a scarf with Zorro's wool. I make crafts out of it, like a wreath I made, and I use it for stuffing, like in stuffed animals. I use their wool to make projects to enter in the fairs."

Rachael is a regular exhibitor

at the fairs in Carroll County, Howard County, Montgomery County, and the Maryland State Fair 4-H and open shows. She also travels to New Jersey each September where she always brings back ribbons for her entries in the New Jersey Harvest Sheep and Wool Festival.

"My favorite breed is Montadale," said the young member of Maryland Sheep Breeders Association. Rachael got her start with this American breed of sheep quite by chance. "I wrote an essay — 'Why I want to raise a Montadale lamb' — and to my surprise, I won!" she explained. "I always wanted big sheep. They're the perfect size," she said. The young shepherd added that she has had a Shetland lamb and a Merino lamb, but she has decided to "stick with Montadales and Finns."

The two sheep breeds can be used for their meat or for their wool. Rachael said that the pure white Montadale fleeces are also worthy of show and are purchased by hand spinners. She has won champion ribbons at county fairs and at the Maryland State Fair with fleeces from both the Finnsheep and Montadales.

"I tried my first market lamb

last year," said Rachael. She found that raising an animal for meat is a much different process than when the focus is on the wool. She exhibited her market lamb, a Montadale wether, at the Carroll County 4-H and FFA Fair and sold it at the end of the fair season at the Maryland State Fair. "It was exciting," she said of the new experience. She said she will try raising a market lamb again this year, but the focus of her program will continue to be on breeding sheep for their wool quality and correctness.

The room full of ribbons and trophies attests to Rachael's achievements in 4-H. "There are a lot of other things to do in 4-H besides animals, although I think animals are the most rewarding," she explained. "I do writing, photography, crafts, baking, public speaking, horticulture and other things," she said. "I like the competition of showing sheep," she continued. "It's also nice to be able to say you have a hobby. Not many people know about sheep, and I like teaching people."

As a member of the local Sam's Creek 4-H Club, Rachael has reached out to the community via her sheep project. "I have visited nursing homes, Alzheimer patients, and the Lions Club. I also take my lambs to

church and schools." Rachael said she would recommend 4-H to other young people.

While it is not necessary to have an animal, she said that raising sheep "is a good learning experience. It teaches you responsibility." The young shepherd has daily chores and stepped up preparation during the summer fair season. "They have to be halter trained, shorn, washed, clipped, and carded for the shows," she said.

With two sets of Montadale twins and a set of Finn triplets born this year, Rachael has lots of responsibility. "They're all pets," she said of her flock of about a dozen. "We give them all names. My favorite is Princess," she said referring to a large white Montadale with twins in the pasture. "She's my first homegrown lamb. She has the best personality. Whenever I walk into the field, she's always smiling." And that's a good thing for a shepherd whose own name, 'Rachael,' means 'lamb.'

Look for Rachael and other 4-H'ers at the Carroll County Fair from July 27 through Aug. 2 at the Agriculture Center in Westminster, Md. For more information and a complete schedule of events, visit www.carrollcountyfair.com or call Barry Lippy (410) 848-FAIR.

USDA Begins Hiring 1,000 Employees To Speed Up Farm Bill Implementation

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman recently announced the authorization to hire an additional 1,000 employees to aid county offices throughout the country expedite implementation of The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002.

"USDA is strongly committed to ensuring that the new farm bill is implemented as carefully, effectively and timely as possible," said Veneman. "These new hires, along with comprehensive training and information technology advances, will help ensure we meet our commitment."

This first round of staffing will account for about 40 percent of the additional employment needed to implement the new law. The new Farm Bill contained \$55 million for Farm Bill implementation. The Bush Administration had requested \$110 million because the

new law contains extensive modifications to existing laws, creates many new programs, and has a very aggressive implementation timeline.

Putting the programs of the new law into place, most of which are applicable to the 2002 crops, significantly increases the workload of the Farm Service Agency (FSA), which had been steadily reducing staff since the enactment of the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996.

A newly completed workload assessment for the new law provides estimates of the additional staff required at the county offices, Washington headquarters, and other field offices for timely implementation of the new law. Based on this assessment, the agency is hiring the first group of approximately 1,000 temporary employees, most for local FSA offices in parts of the country where the expanded workload will be the greatest.

"These new employees will go to the offices with the least staff and where the workload will be the greatest," said FSA Administrator James R. Little. "While the new law provided some funding for implementation, USDA had requested a larger amount, and is seeking additional resources through a supplemental Congressional appropriation or the regular appropriations process."

USDA began implementing the new law immediately upon enactment. Veneman named an implementation team to reduce the red tape and expedite approval of all the new regulations. The department has also launched a new Farm Bill Website featuring responses to frequently asked questions.

Correspondence has been sent to producers describing significant program changes and identifying information they will need to provide when enrollment begins for the new programs.

USDA Grants Protection To 33 New Plant Varieties

WASHINGTON, D.C. — USDA has issued certificates of protection to developers of 33 new varieties of seed-reproduced and tuber-propagated plants. They include corn and soybean.

The 33 certificates are being issued under the Plant Variety Protection Act. The certificates require that the varieties be new, distinct, uniform, and stable. The owners will have the exclusive right to reproduce, sell, import and export their products in the U.S. for the duration of protection.

The 33 certificates are:

- The PH3HH variety of corn, developed by Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc., Johnston, Iowa.
- The GF6150, 86IS126, 86IS127, 22DHQ3, 87ATD2, 17DHD16, 17QFB1, 4SCQ3, 91IS15, 01HFI3, 87DIA4, WDHQ2, 01HGI2, 22DHD11, 17IN120, 09DSS1 and 01INL1 varieties of corn, developed by

DEKALB Genetics Corporation, DeKalb, Ill.

- The LH302 variety of field corn, developed by Holden's Foundation Seeds, L.L.C., Williamsburg, Iowa.

- The 02324990, SN79628 and SE80014 varieties of soybean, developed by Asgrow Seed Company LLC., Ames, Iowa.

- The 91B03, 91B42, 90B51, 90B74, 94B13, 94B74 and 95B42 varieties of soybean, developed by Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc., Johnston, Iowa.

- The KS 4895 and KS4997 varieties of soybean, developed by Kansas Agricultural Experiment Station, Manhattan, Kan.

- The HBK 6600 variety of soybean, developed by Hornbeck Seed Co., Inc., Dewitt, Ariz.

- The MN0201 variety of soybean, developed by Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station, St. Paul, Minn.

Lancaster Farming's annual

Dairy of Distinction section is July 27. The issue is scheduled to include feature farm reports on more than two dozen Dairy of Distinction award winners.

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