

# RHODE ISLAND SHEEP COOPERATIVE - NEWSLETTER

VOL. XX ISSUE 2

May 2009

## RHODY WARM BLANKET PROJECT

Over the years, the decline of the textile industry in New England, combined with low wool prices, turned much of the wool produced in Rhode Island into a nuisance rather than a product. The Rhody Warm Blanket Project was brainstormed and thereafter introduced in 2006 as a way for Rhode Island farmers to create a wool blanket that is warm, beautiful, natural, and made from a Rhode Island farm product! Wool blanket sales by local farms help to fund their sheep operations. Harriet Powell the RI RC&D President stated, "The Rhody Warm has been an overwhelming success. We see this as an opportunity to create a beautiful blanket to bring more income to farmers and serve to promote the sustainability of local agriculture." The Rhode Warm Blanket was the proud recipient of Rhode Island Monthly Magazine's *Best of Rhode Island* award for Best Blanket in 2007! Over the past three years, 5127 pounds of raw wool was processed into 1460 beautiful wool blankets. This year, join us in making another beautiful blanket! The Blanket Committee has been very busy with meetings planning this year's project. This little newsletter will bring you up to date ..... so, here we go people, read on and mark your calendars accordingly!!

### In Preparation for Wool Collection Day

**Skirting your wool** – this year the Committee is asking all producers to skirt their fleeces before bringing them to collection day. Now don't be scared --this is can be a pretty easy process. The skirting area or table can be easily put together by using a piece of lattice laid or a piece of plywood on top of sawhorses or barrels. (The lattice or plywood should be clean). In a pinch, you could lay out a clean sheet or blue tarp on the ground. Then spread your fleece out flat on your "table" or tarp with the clean side down. Look over your fleece and remove all the areas of that contain hay, manure, caked mud and such; this is usually around the neck and butt areas of the sheep. If there is a lot of hay chaff down the back or neck area that should be removed as well. Then flip the fleece over and remove any second cuts (which are the short pieces where the shearer may have gone over an area on the sheep a second time.) When your skirting is done, roll the fleece and put it in a clean plastic bag or cardboard box. Do not tie the bag or tape the box shut as the fleece needs "to breath". The discarded skirtings or tags will make great mulch for your gardens. Note: the fleeces do not have to be in one complete piece to put into the blanket pool. It is better to remove the bad areas before storing to keep the rest of the fleece clean. You may place more than one fleece in a bag after skirting, just remember not to seal it up tight. On collection day, you will be asked to stay while the ladies at the skirting tables who look over your fleeces. This is not to scold you, but to comment on your fine job of skirting or to give pointers to help you to be a better skirter next year. If need be, these ladies will also give ideas on better ways to keep your fleeces clean while on the sheep or give tips on storing your wool. Remember, the better the wool, the more poundage you will put into the blanket pool, and the more return you will get (in both money received and the amount of blankets you can get back). Last year, some beautiful fleeces came into the pool (about 100 lbs), but it was full of hay chaff and most had to be thrown out (we were able to salvage enough to make a throw). The thought is: those people feed their sheep by throwing the hay over the backs of the sheep all year long ☹ – what a waste of beautiful wool! Learn from other's mistakes !

**Skirting workshops:** Need to learn more about skirting, or want to try it first, attend one of the following:

May 9<sup>th</sup> "Spring Festival" from 10:00 -2:00 at URI East Farm, Rte. 108, Kingston - Wool skirting demonstrations

May 16 – 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual R.I. Wool & Fiber Festival at the Coggeshall Farm, Bristol, RI, 9:00 to 4:00, skirting demonstrations and wool collection

\*\*\*\*\* **Collection Day Is Coming!** \*\*\*\*\*

**Collection day** will be **June 6, 2009** from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the Urban Edge Farm, 35 Pippin Orchard Road, Cranston, Rhode Island. When you arrive you will be greeted by a Committee member, who will get your name, address, etc. Then you will be asked to bring your wool to a skirting table, where it will be looked over by the skilters and then it will be weighed. You will then go the check out table where they will finalize your paper work, and you will receive an order form for the blanket(s). A check will be sent within a month or so based on the amount of wool that was accepted.

\*\*\*\*\* **Anniversary News!** \*\*\*\*\*

This year, celebrating the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rhode Island Sheep Cooperative, the producer will be receiving 60¢ per pound for their accepted wool collected on Collection Day, June 6<sup>th</sup>.

\*\*\*\*\* **Profits to Producers** \*\*\*\*\*

The Rhody Warm Blanket Project was created to help the wool producer/sheep farmer in Rhode Island to earn a little extra income. Here is how this works: Since you pooled wool at the Collection Day and placed an order for blankets or throws, you are considered a “Producer” and as such you are entitled to purchase more blankets or throws at a slightly higher price, to resell and therefore making a profit on those sold. For example, if you had 8 pounds accepted at the Collection Day, you would be able to order a long throw, with the cost to you (the Producer) of approximately \$50.00 (this amount covers the cost of the processing from fleece to blanket). If you decide you can sell three more throws, and would like to purchase them – and you may order them at Collection Day. The cost for the additional throws (which means blankets over your allotted wool poundage) would be approximately \$67.00each. The price to sell them at would be \$95.00 plus tax. Therefore you, the farmer, would make a profit of approximately \$69.00 on each throw. To clarify (or confuse, I am not sure which) the reason for the increase in price on the “additional blankets” order, is to cover handling and a slight margin of profit for the RI Sheep Cooperative. This offer is made to those Producers whose wool was accepted on Collection Day and who placed orders – remember you must be a participant to begin with! All blanket orders not turned in on Collection Day must be returned no later than June 30<sup>th</sup> to be guaranteed placement on the cutting list. If you don’t want a blanket or throw but do want to get rid of you wool, we will accept wool from Producers who just want to sell their wool and not order blankets. For all the wool that is accepted on Collection Day, the farmer will be paid \$0.60 per pound, whether you order a blanket or not.

\*\*\*\*\* **Questions?** \*\*\*\*\*

If you are still confused, feel free to call the RI Sheep Cooperative phone (401-578-2012) and leave a message. President Robin Meek will get back to you and explain this all in further detail.

\*\*\*\*\* **Things to remember** \*\*\*\*\*

\*Call your shearer if you haven’t already. Dates are getting booked-up fast!.

\*Dues (\$10.00) to the RI Sheep Co-op may be paid on June 6<sup>th</sup> or prior to that date by sending your check to the RI Sheep Co-op, Attn: Treasurer, P.O. Box 88, Harmony, RI 02829. You must be a member to participate in this project.

\*Blanket orders should be filled out on June 6<sup>th</sup> and turned in at the table, but must be received by June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2009 to be put on the Producers List.

\*Additional blanket orders may be submitted at any time (at a little higher price, if you have used up all your wool poundage).

\*Fleeces must be at least 2 inches but no more than 6 inches long. They should be clean, dry and shorn within the last year. Sorry no hair sheep materials will be accepted. White and colored fleeces are accepted, but please keep color fleeces separate from white fleeces when storing.

A good saying to remember: *“When you take your winter coat off - its time to shear your sheep!”* This means in March, April and May, not in June, July or August - when the temperature gets really hot. It is more harmful to shear sheep in extreme heat than to shear on cooler spring days! Their wool insulates the sheep from extreme heat and the sudden change in body temperature by shearing on a hot day could be detrimental to sheep.

**SHEARER’S CREED**

1. Sheep off feed 6 – 10 hours before shorn.
2. In cool weather, keep draft down to a minimum. Provide plenty of light for shearer to see.
3. Keep sheep close to the shearing area.
4. Two 4 x 8 sheets ½” plywood to shear on is also good with an old rug on top, if possible. Broom & yard rake are also good for clean up between sheep and helps to put up a good wool clip.

## **SHEARERS:**

### **Experienced Shearers:**

Aaron Loux, Cummington, MA: 413-634-2142

Bill Cournoyer, CT.: 860-887-3793, (best way) email: [bill.cournoyer@gmail.com](mailto:bill.cournoyer@gmail.com)

### **Novice and Enthusiastic Shearers:**

Taylor Meek - (cell) 401-626-6599 (home) 401-949-2167 college student,  
former 4-H/FFA member, has been shearing a couple years, interested in small flocks.

Brittany Sederback (cell) 401-369-4730 (leave message)

High school senior, 4-H/FFA member, new to shearing, interested in small flocks  
(\*these two girls may team up on shearing jobs)

## **RABIES CLINICS FOR LARGE ANIMALS**

The Rhode Island Veterinary Medical Association and the RI Division of Agriculture are pleased to announce that there will be three rabies vaccination clinics offered for large animals (cattle, sheep, and goats). (Note: We will not be able to offer vaccination of horses for safety reasons at these clinics.) The cost of vaccinations will be a nominal fee only to cover the cost of the medical supplies, disposal of waste generated, and processing the rabies certificates, including mailing of those documents. The first clinic was scheduled to take place on April 25<sup>th</sup> at the Washington County Fairgrounds. As of the writing of this newsletter, a report was not available as to the turnout, but it was expected to have a lot of interest.

No appointment is necessary, just show up. If your animal(s) is not properly identified (official ear tag, microchip, registration tattoo) a means of official identification will be applied so that you will have proof of vaccination. For biosecurity and safety reasons we will attempt to vaccinate all animals without off-loading them.

Please pass this information to anyone that you may think is interested. The animals that we are focusing on are the animals that will be shown in this upcoming season, however all cattle, sheep, and goats are eligible to be vaccinated. We are hoping for a large turnout! We will not vaccinate any animals that did not originate in RI unless those animals meet state importation requirements for identification, testing, and are accompanied by a valid certificate of veterinary examination.

The other two vaccination clinics are scheduled for:

**Glen Farm, Portsmouth --Saturday, May 9th, 8 AM to Noon**

**Foster Fairgrounds --Saturday, June 6th, 8 AM to Noon**

Any questions contact: Scott N. Marshall, DVM, State Veterinarian,  
Rhode Island DEM, Division of Agriculture/Animal Health,  
235 Promenade St., Providence, RI 02908-5767  
Telephone: (401)222-2781

## **SVF Foundation Annual Visitors Day - Saturday June 6, 2009**

SVF will be hosting our third Annual Visitors Day on Saturday, June 6, 2009. This year we are happy to expand the day to include all of our partners in conservation and agriculture. SVF will open its gates to the public for a self-guided tour through the historic property of Swiss Village and offer several educational agricultural displays. The SVF laboratory supervisor, animal husbandry staff and team of veterinarians from Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University will be on hand to answer questions and explain our important scientific mission. Rare breeds of cattle, sheep and goats will be on display, along with sheep-shearing and cryogenic demonstrations using liquid nitrogen. The American Livestock Breeds Conservancy [www.albc-usa.org](http://www.albc-usa.org) will also join our open house. ALBC is an important partner in livestock conservation, working to prevent the extinction of endangered breeds of livestock and poultry. SVF will be open 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday June 6, 2009. This event is free to the public and free parking is available at Fort Adams (directly across from SVF). Trolleys will transport visitors back and forth from the parking area. No parking will be allowed on the SVF site. For additional information about our program or Visitors Day, please visit [www.svfoundation.org](http://www.svfoundation.org)  
Sarah C. Bowley, Program and Livestock Manager, SVF Foundation, 152 Harrison Ave., Newport, RI 02840  
[sarah@svffoundation.org](mailto:sarah@svffoundation.org) [www.svfoundation.org](http://www.svfoundation.org)

\*\*\*\*\* **ADVERTISEMENTS** \*\*\*\*\*

(advertising is available to all paid members of the RI Sheep Cooperative, email Polly @ [khop4811@aol.com](mailto:khop4811@aol.com) for details)

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Rhonda Jaacks

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**GET INVOLVED!!!**

MEMBERS: COME SERVE ON A COMMITTEE

INTERESTED IN THE BLANKET PROJECT,  
EDUCATIONAL MEETINGS,  
SKIRTING DEMONSTRATIONS,  
YOUTH ACTIVITIES?

CALL ROBIN TODAY TO  
GET INVOLVED: (401) 578-2012.

Looking for a  
***Gift or Remembrance?***  
How about a ***RHODY WARM BLANKET?***

Lap Throws 45"X60" & Long Throws 45"X72"

Now Available  
100% Wool  
Made from local wool  
Call 578-2012  
Or visit our web site  
**RISheep.org**



Sponsored by the R I Sheep Co-op

**3RD ANNUAL WOOL & FIBER FESTIVAL**

Saturday, May 16, 2009

hosted by

Coggeshall Farm Museum

Rte 114 off Poppasquash Rd, adjacent to Colt State Park

Bristol, Rhode Island

9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

(rain or shine)

<http://www.coggeshallfarm.org/FiberFestival.html>

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**SAVE THE DATE!**

**November 6-7, 2010**

New England Sheep & Wool Growers Assoc.  
and Eastern States Exposition

presents their first annual wool and fiber festival  
in the Mallary Complex at the Big E Fairgrounds,  
West Springfield, Massachusetts

to get on the mailing list call 508-637-1239, or  
send a quick email to: [beadsheep@charter.net](mailto:beadsheep@charter.net)