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National Sheep Improvement Program

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After 4 years of planning and development the National Sheep Improvement Program (NSIP) is on line to accept records for the 1987 lamb crop. Development of the NSIP involved careful planning and input from commercial and purebred producers, major sheep organizations and extension personnel.

The NSIP evolved because several groups, representing various segments of the industry, called for the development of a national program to increase flock profitability by selecting superior animals through the use of a simple, flexible cost-effective performance record and evaluation system.

The NSIP is designed to allow both the commercial and purebred producer to make genetic improvement of their flocks for the number of lambs born, wool production and growth rate of lambs. The program is designed to meet the needs of all breeds raised under different environments and flexible to meet the unique needs of an individual flock. Estimates of genetic merit for five of the most economically important traits will be provided to NSIP participants. A producer may choose one or all five for every ewe, ram and lamb in their flock. The economically important traits include number of lambs born, weight at 30, 60, 90, 120 and 240 days of age, fleece weight, wool grade and length and total weight of lamb weaned per ewe lambing. Other traits will be included in the program when research provides the necessary parameters to allow inclusion.

Producers participating in the program will receive reports showing the genetic merit of a sheep for each of the five traits listed previously. The trait will be expressed as an Expected Progeny Difference (EPD). An EPD is the estimate of how much better or poorer an individual's progeny will perform compared to the average of all individuals in the flock.

The information provided from NSIP should allow participating producers to select sheep for the economically important traits. Genetically improved flocks where selection has been based on performance records should be able to produce more efficiently than those flocks where performance records have not been used in selection. Rapid flock improvement should be made when animals with a high positive EPD are selected. In addition, seedstock producers will be able to provide performance data to customers on all animals offered for sale.

The NSIP was designed to minimize record keeping for participating producers. Producers choosing to participate need only submit performance data for those traits which they wish to improve in their flocks.
Information required includes identification number, lamb dam and sire ID number, birth date, sex, type of birth and rearing. For commercial flocks, sire identification is desirable, but NSIP does not require this information from commercial flocks if ewes are exposed to more than one ram. In addition, performance information for the reproductive, growth and fleece traits for which EPD's are to be calculated must be provided.

The information is recorded by the producer on NSIP record forms and submitted directly to the NSIP processing center at Iowa State University.

All records will be processed as soon as received and the information printed out in an easy to read form. It is anticipated that NSIP records will be mailed back to the producer in 3 to 4 days after they are received.

Current costs will be a $12 flock charge per year plus $.50 per ewe per year. Producers with flocks on an accelerated lambing schedule pay a higher rate.

A performance program such as the NSIP offers great potential to all producers whether commercial or purebred for improving productivity and efficiency. For the sheep industry it is a giant step in the right direction toward the future. However, if it is going to survive, all producers need to participate and put the records to use in their individual flocks.

To receive more information about NSIP and to receive an NSIP enrollment package, write to:

NSIP
200 Clayton Street
Denver, CO 80206