



West Virginia University

# News Ewe Can Use

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## Sheep and Shepherds

November 9-11 sheep producers from West Virginia and the surrounding region had the unique opportunity to attend back-to-back, but very different programs. One program focused on sheep and the other on the shepherd.

The first program, held November 9 & 10 in Morgantown, was called "Reinventing the Appalachian Shepherd". Over the years, a tremendous amount of research has been conducted in the area of genetics and selection in sheep. Sheep, as a species, are extremely versatile. Through an understanding of genetics and emphasis on selection, sheep with superior growth and carcass characteristics, milk production, wool quality, fecundity, parasite resistance, and even the ability to shed have been developed. Now however, it seems that after years of reinventing sheep, it is time to "Reinvent the Shepherd".

Within the Appalachian region of the United States there lies a group of counties - eastern Ohio, western Virginia, south-central and western Pennsylvania, and most of West Virginia - that share a common topography and climate. The area is well-suited for sheep production and

boasts a rich sheep heritage. There was a time when agriculture was the leading industry in many of these counties and sheep the largest and most profitable enterprise.

Those days are gone. The tragedy lies in the fact that even though the economic environment has changed, those natural resources that once made Appalachia a leader in sheep production have not. Although the sheep industry will likely never return to its former glory days, this region still possesses every resource necessary for sheep farming to provide a sustainable source of income for farm families.

For sheep to again make an important contribution to farm income and to the rural lifestyle, the industry must be rebuilt with new ideas, new management systems and new alliances. The region will have to "Reinvent the Appalachian Shepherd".

The conference, sponsored by West Virginia University Extension Service and Northeast Region Sustainable Agriculture and Research Education, provided a platform for producers, researchers, business people and educators to meet together, exchange information and share ideas.

The second program, held November 11 in Riverton, was sponsored by the West Virginia Sheep Management Project and West Virginia Shepherd's Federation. This program focused on flock health.

Wet pasture conditions during the spring and summer months created an ideal environment for both parasites and foot problems in our sheep. Dr. William Shulaw, Extension Veterinarian, The Ohio State University, addressed these challenges in separate presentations entitled, *Parasite Control: Biologic Approaches for the New Millennium* and *Foot Rot Management: An Ounce of Prevention or a Pound of Cure*. Dr. Shulaw equated parasite management to pasture management and differentiated between foot rot control and eradication.

Dr. Kevin Pelzer, Production Management Medicine, VA-MD Regional College of Veterinary Medicine, addressed vaginal prolapse and abortion in ewes. This issue of *News Ewe Can Use* focuses on the lambing period and includes excerpts from the material presented by Dr. Pelzer.

Copies of the Flock Health Workshop proceedings are available for \$3.00 by calling



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# Vaginal Prolapse in the Ewe

Kevin Pelzer DVM, MPVM

Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine

A vaginal prolapse in a ewe is a condition that is frustrating to treat and in many cases results in the death of the unborn lambs and ewe. It is not unusual to have one ewe prolapse during the lambing season. The average incidence of vaginal prolapse is 0.5% with an acceptable rate being 1%. If the number of vaginal prolapses exceeds 3% of the lambing flock, an investigation into the cause of these prolapses is warranted.

Many factors have been proposed to be the cause of vaginal prolapse, unfortunately many of them have not been substantiated. Like most diseases, it is the interaction of several factors that result in the development of a prolapsed vagina. Before discussing the possible causes of the prolapsed vagina, an understanding of how the vaginal prolapse develops may be helpful.

The vagina is held in the pelvic canal by pelvic ligaments and the vestibular muscles. If the intrabdominal pressure exceeds the holding capacity of these structures, the bladder and other viscera push the floor of the vagina out the lips of the vulva. The circulation to the vagina becomes impaired resulting in the tissues becoming enlarged and edematous

[affected by abnormally large amounts of fluid in the intercellular tissue spaces]. The prolapsed vagina is exposed to the environment, becoming dry and irritated and depending on the severity of the environment may become infected. The pain associated with swelling and irritation, causes the ewe to strain, pushing more of the vagina out to the point where the cervix may prolapse.

So what are the factors that produce increased intrabdominal pressure and weakening of the pelvic structures? One factor that increases pressure within the abdomen is the pregnant uterus. Multiple fetuses are associated with the development of a prolapsed vagina as two or more lambs take up more space than a single fetus. The other organ within the abdomen that has the potential to enlarge is the digestive track, especially the rumen. The feeding of poor quality feed stuffs increases the time for the animal to digest the feed, resulting in the feed remaining in the digestive track longer. In order to maintain her energy needs, the ewe continues to eat increasing the fill of the digestive tract and increasing abdominal pressure. When the ewe lies down, especially if she is on a hill with her head looking up the hill, abdominal pressure is forced downward towards the pelvis push-

ing on the floor of the vagina. If the pressure is great enough to overcome the supportive structures of the vagina, the vagina is prolapsed.

Not only is the quality of feedstuffs important during the pre-lambing period but the delivery of those feedstuffs is important. All ewes should have access to the feed in order that all ewes obtain their ration. If feeder space is inadequate, some ewes may be pushed away and others will squeeze in in order to get to the feeder resulting in increased abdominal pressure.

Increased risk of vaginal prolapse has been associated with body condition score. Ewes that are in heavy condition, body condition score greater than 4.0, may have increased pelvic fat and abdominal fat which increase the pressure on the vagina. Ewes that are in light condition, body condition score less than 2.0, may have increased abdominal pressure as a result of consuming poor quality feed stuffs.

Factors resulting in weakening of the pelvic structures, resulting in vaginal prolapse, have been identified. Ewes that have experienced vaginal trauma or prolapse during previous lambings are at increased risk of vaginal prolapse during subsequent gestations. Examples of vaginal trauma are

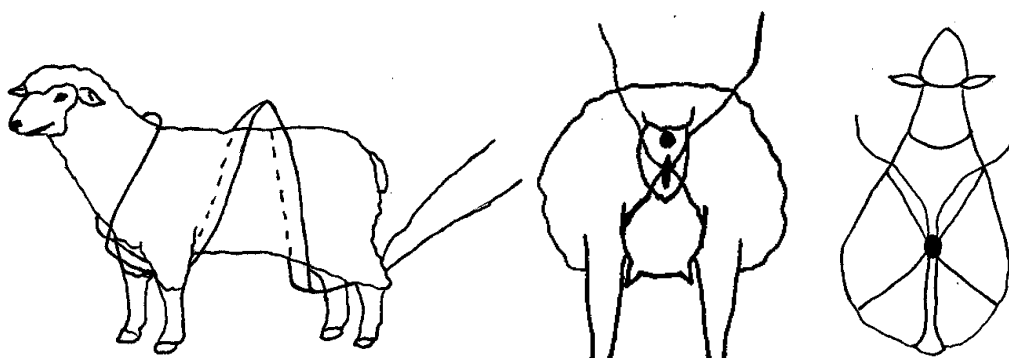


Figure 1. Harness method

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# Vaginal Prolapse in the Ewe

*Continued from page 2*

ewes that experienced difficult births and vaginal tearing during birth.

Estrogen plays a role in the relaxation of the pelvic ligaments and vaginal vault around the time of lambing. This allows for dilation of the structures so the lambs can be delivered. Although not substantiated, the feeding of forages with estrogenic compounds, clover and alfalfa, may increase the risk of vaginal prolapse.

There are several methods for treating the ewe with a vaginal prolapse. In all cases, the vagina is cleaned with water and a mild soap. Antibiotic salve may be applied if the vaginal wall has been traumatized. The vagina should be lifted up. If the bladder or the urethra have been trapped because of the prolapse, the bladder will be full of urine making replacement of the vagina difficult. Lifting the vagina will allow the ewe to urinate. The next step is to gently massage the vagina back into the pelvis starting at the periphery and working to the middle of the prolapsed vagina. Lifting the hind quarters of the ewe often times makes replacement easier. The hind legs can be held over a couple of bales of hay.

Once the vagina is replaced, one of several methods is employed in order to prevent the vagina from re prolapsing.

1. Using a harness method, a piece of twine or small rope is doubled over. The midpoint of the rope is placed on top of the neck's base. The ends of the rope are crossed over and passed between the two front limbs. The ends are brought up under the elbows, over the ribs and then crossed over the back of the ewe. The ends are then passed between the udder and the

hindlimbs and carried back up and crossed over in the area of the vulva. The two ends of the rope are then tied to the rope where it crosses the back. The pressure that the rope applies to the back and the area of the vulva will prevent the ewe from straining, keeping the vagina in place (Figure 1).

2. One quarter to 3/8ths inch umbilical tape can be used to form a purse string suture around the vulva. A needle is inserted below the vulva and threaded under the skin. It is important that the needle go out to the junction of the wool and wooleless areas. The tissues in the wooleless area are friable and if the suture is placed in this area, it is likely that the suture will tear out when the ewe strains. The needle is advanced towards the anus and popped through the skin below the anus. The needle is then inserted on the opposite side and directed down toward the bottom of the vulva, existing near the original point of entrance. The tape is then snugged down to the point where two fingers will fit into the point of the vulva. The tape is tied in a bow using a double knot. The reason the tape is tied in a bow is so the tape can be untied and the ewe examined in case the owner suspects the ewe is lambing. If the ewe is not lambing, the tape can be retied (Figure 2).
3. A plastic prolapse retainer may be used to keep the vagina in place. This is a spoon shaped piece of plastic with wings. The spoon is inserted into the vagina on the floor of the vagina and the wings are secured to tufts of wool on either side of the rump. This method is preferred for those ewes

that are close to lambing as the ewe can lamb over this device (Figure 3).

4. Ewes should be given something for pain and swelling. I prefer to give banamine or ketofen. These products are not approved for the use in sheep and therefore need to be prescribed by a veterinarian. Depending on the severity of trauma to the vagina and involvement of the cervix, penicillin or another appropriate antibiotic administration may be warranted.

Prevention of prolapse vaginas should center around reducing the risk factors that bring about this condition.

1. Cull ewes that have had a prolapsed vagina in the past.
2. Do not retain ewe lambs from ewes that experienced a prolapsed vagina.
3. Maintain ewes in a body condition score of 2.5 to 3.5.
4. Feed good quality forages to ewes, especially during the last third of gestation. Have the extension service perform forage test analysis of the forages you plan to feed during gestation and develop a sound feeding program.
5. Ensure that there is enough feeder space, 18 – 24 inches per ewe.

*Adapted from "Vaginal Prolapse in the Ewe," Dr Kevin Pelzer, West Virginia Sheep Management Project Flock Health Fall Workshop, November 11, 2000.*

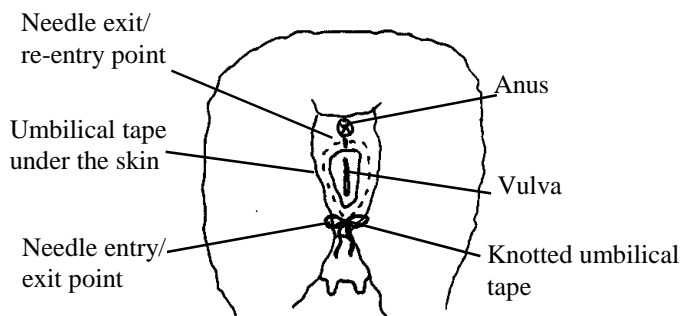


Figure 2. Purse string method

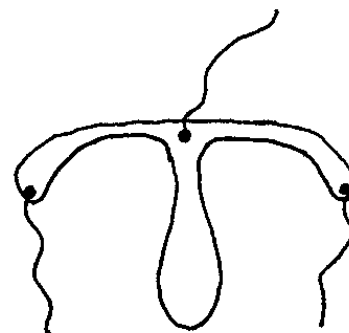


Figure 3. Prolapse retainer

## Abortion in Ewes:

Type of Abortion	Clinical Signs	Transmission
<b>Enzootic Abortion of Ewes, Chlamydial Abortion</b> <i>Agent: Chlamydia psittaci</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Occurs in last month of gestation</li> <li>2. May see premature, dead, weak or healthy lambs</li> <li>3. Ewes do not exhibit signs prior to aborting</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ewes contract organism through aborted tissues and uterine discharges                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• if pregnant 30-120 days, may abort this year</li> <li>• if not pregnant, or &gt; 120 days pregnant may abort next year</li> <li>• usually a problem in 2nd lambers</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Lambs born to infected ewes become infected at birth and may abort the next year</li> <li>3. Takes 5-6 weeks after infection for abortion to occur</li> </ol>
<b>Toxoplasmosis</b> <i>Agent: Toxoplasma gondii</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dependent on the time of infection                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) first 2 months of gestation                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- resorption (ewe doesn't lamb)</li> </ul> </li> <li>b) 3rd and 4th month of gestation                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- dead and mummified fetus</li> <li>- dead lambs a week premature</li> <li>- stillborns at full term</li> <li>- live lamb and mummy</li> </ul> </li> <li>c) 5th month of gestation-normal lamb</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Ewes appear normal</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pregnant ewe ingests toxoplasma oocyte from cat feces  <i>Cats are the only source of the organism for the ewe</i></li> </ol>
<b>Vibriosis, Campylobacter Abortion</b> <i>Agent: Campylobacter fetus fetus and Campylobacter jejuni</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Abortion in last 2 months of gestation</li> <li>2. Most ewes show no signs of abortion</li> <li>3. Some ewes may develop diarrhea</li> <li>4. Aborted, stillborn and weak lambs</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The organism lives in gastrointestinal tract and is often brought into flock via a purchased infected carrier animal</li> <li>2. Aborted lambs, placenta and discharges are highly infectious</li> <li>3. Boots, clothing, and contaminated equipment may transmit infection</li> <li>4. Birds at the feed bunk</li> </ol>
<b>Salmonella Abortion</b> <i>Salmonella typhimurium, abortus ovis</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ewes are often quite ill prior to aborting. <i>S. abortus ovis</i> may be the only sign</li> <li>2. Ewes may show signs of diarrhea</li> <li>3. Retained placenta and metritis are common after abortion</li> <li>4. Abort during last trimester</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Acquired from ingesting feed or water contaminated by infected fecal material or fetus, placenta, or discharges</li> <li>2. Brought in by carrier animal</li> <li>3. May be associated with some type of stress eg. poor nutrition, severe weather changes</li> </ol>
<b>Border Disease, Hairy Shakers</b> <i>Agent: Border Disease Virus</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Barren ewes at end of the lambing season</li> <li>2. Abortion, macerated or mummified fetuses</li> <li>3. Newborn lambs may have pigmented hair-like wool, are small with shortened legs and faces</li> <li>4. Lambs have uncoordinated movements and are unable to stand and nurse</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Association with cattle</li> <li>2. Shedding of the virus by an infected adult</li> <li>3. Persistently infected sheep shed virus</li> </ol>
<b>Leptospirosis</b> <i>Agent: Leptospira interrogans species associated with cattle and swine</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ewes may be ill, icteric, and have a fever</li> <li>2. Abortion in last 2 months of gestation</li> <li>3. Weak or premature stillborn lambs</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ingestion of urine of a carrier animal (cattle, wildlife, rodents)</li> </ol>
<b>Listeriosis</b> <i>Agent: Listeria monocytogenes</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ewe aborts in late gestation and is usually sick</li> <li>2. Fetus is decomposed</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Usually from consuming poorly ensiled feeds</li> </ol>

# Summary and Reference Guide

Kevin Pelzer, DVM, MPVM

Diagnosis	Control	Prevention
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Placenta: cotyledons grey-brown color and intercotyledonary areas are leathery grey-brown or clay colored</li> <li>2) Uterine discharge: gray-brown to reddish-brown persisting for a few days.</li> <li>3) Fetuses: clean, well preserved, subcutaneous hemorrhages</li> <li>4) Serology: take blood sample at the time of abortion and again 3 weeks later</li> <li>5) Vaginal swabs: up to 3 days after abortion/ do not contaminate with fecal material</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Buy females that have not previously lambed</li> <li>2. Lamb out purchased ewes separate from home flock in case of abortion</li> <li>3. LA-200 6 &amp; 3 weeks prior to lambing or 400-500 mg/hd/day of tetracycline in feed</li> <li>4. Remove aborted ewes, clean up and disinfect area</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Vaccination: if vaccinating for the first time, vaccinate 3 &amp; 6 weeks prior to breeding, then booster annually 3 weeks prior to breeding</li> <li>2. Vaccinating infected ewes will not necessarily prevent abortion</li> <li>3. Ewes only abort once in a three year period</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Placenta: small white spots on cotyledons</li> <li>2. Ewe: serology</li> <li>3. Lamb: fetal fluids from chest cavity</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Control of cat population</li> <li>2. Prevent exposure of ewes to cat feces prior to breeding</li> </ol>	<p>Same as control methods</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cotyledons are soft and gray</li> <li>2. Aborted lambs have blood-tinged fluid under the skin and between muscle, excess fluid in the chest and abdominal cavity and doughnut-shaped spots on liver</li> <li>3. Culture organism from abomasal (stomach) fluids</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Injection of LA-200 (oxytetracycline) or 250 to 300 mg/hd/day of tetracycline in feed till the end of lambing</li> <li>2. Vaccinate</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Vaccinate at the time of breeding followed by a 2nd injection 60-90 days later</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. History of ewe and lambs being ill</li> <li>2. Culture</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Treat ewes with antibiotics for a minimum of 7 days</li> <li>2. Sanitation</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Don't ship animals over long distances</li> <li>2. Don't withhold feed for long periods of time</li> <li>3. Don't buy animals going through a stockyard</li> <li>4. Rodent and bird control</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Clinical signs</li> <li>2. Serology</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Remove ewes that give birth to an affected lamb. Remove affected lambs</li> <li>2. Keep cattle and sheep separate</li> <li>3. Vaccination with a killed bovine Bovine Viral Diarrhea vaccine 2X (effectiveness questionable)</li> </ol>	<p>Same as control methods</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Serology</li> <li>2. Fetal tissues</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Eliminate stagnant water.</li> <li>2. Separate from cattle and swine</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Vaccination</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fetal tissues</li> <li>2. Fetal liver may have small pinpoint spots</li> </ol>		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Avoid feeding ensiled feeds that have spoiled or didn't ferment properly</li> </ol>

## Procedures for Submitting Abortions

### What to do when abortions occur:

1. Assume that abortion is infectious in nature
2. Isolate aborted ewes; identify
  3. Remove aborted lambs and after births; bury or burn
4. Remove bedding & apply lime to contaminated area
5. Wear rubber or plastic gloves, wash hands thoroughly
6. Contact health professional
7. Place fetus & membranes in plastic bag; send to lab immediately

### Discovery of cause:

1. Over 50% of the samples sent to the diagnostic lab yield no results
2. Samples contaminated with bedding
3. Decomposition
4. Insufficient material submitted
5. Wrong samples submitted
6. Abortion caused by something other than the infectious agent screened for

### What to collect for the veterinarian:

1. Management practices, feeding practices, housing, pre-lambing procedures
2. Source of female replacements
3. History of previous abortions, lambings and lambing percentages
4. Vaccination history
5. Prediction of start and end of the lambing season
6. Stage of pregnancy when abortion occurred
7. Health status of ewes

### What to send to the lab:

1. Fetus and placenta
  - submit the whole thing
  - keep chilled but do *not* freeze
  - submit in a leak proof container
  - submit as quickly as possible
2. Serum from ewes
  - collect a blood sample from all aborting ewes & a sample from still pregnant ewes
  - rebleed ewes about 3 weeks later
  - separate blood clot from serum & freeze serum
  - submit paired samples together
3. Blood from ewes
  - collect in a purple top tube (EDTA)
  - selenium levels and virus isolation
4. If you can't submit the whole fetus immediately, collect the following & chill
  - fluid from the chest cavity – use a sterile syringe and needle
  - fluid from the stomach
  - cotyledons – buttons on the afterbirthCollect the following in 10% formalin
  - liver, lung, kidney, stomach, small intestine, lymph nodes, spleen, adrenal glands, cotyledon, brain

### Where to send samples:

US Postal Service: UPS or FedEx:

Animal Health Laboratory Animal Health Laboratory  
P.O. Box 376 154 Oakland Sang Run Road  
Oakland, MD 21550 Oakland, MD 21550

**Cost:** The out-of-state necropsy fee, which includes gross necropsy, bacteriology, virology and histopathology, is \$120. *HOWEVER*, the West Virginia Department of Agriculture has a contract with the Animal Health Lab whereby the WVDA will cover \$100 of the total cost for any food animal submitted. *This means that a gross necropsy and standard abortion screening will cost the owner ONLY \$20!* For more information, call (301) 334-2185.

# WVSF Annual Meeting and Membership Drive

The West Virginia Shepherd's Federation held its annual meeting on November 11, in conjunction with the West Virginia Sheep Management Project Fall Flock Health Workshop.

**Annual Meeting** - During the meeting it was proposed that the regional boundaries recognized by the WVSF be redefined, combining some regions and reducing the total number of regions from seven to four. The proposal was adopted and a director elected to represent each of the four new regions (see below).

A recommendation was also set forth that a representative from each WV wool pool be appointed to the WVSF Board of Directors. This recommendation is being pursued and, pending a report to the membership, may be submitted for a vote at later date.

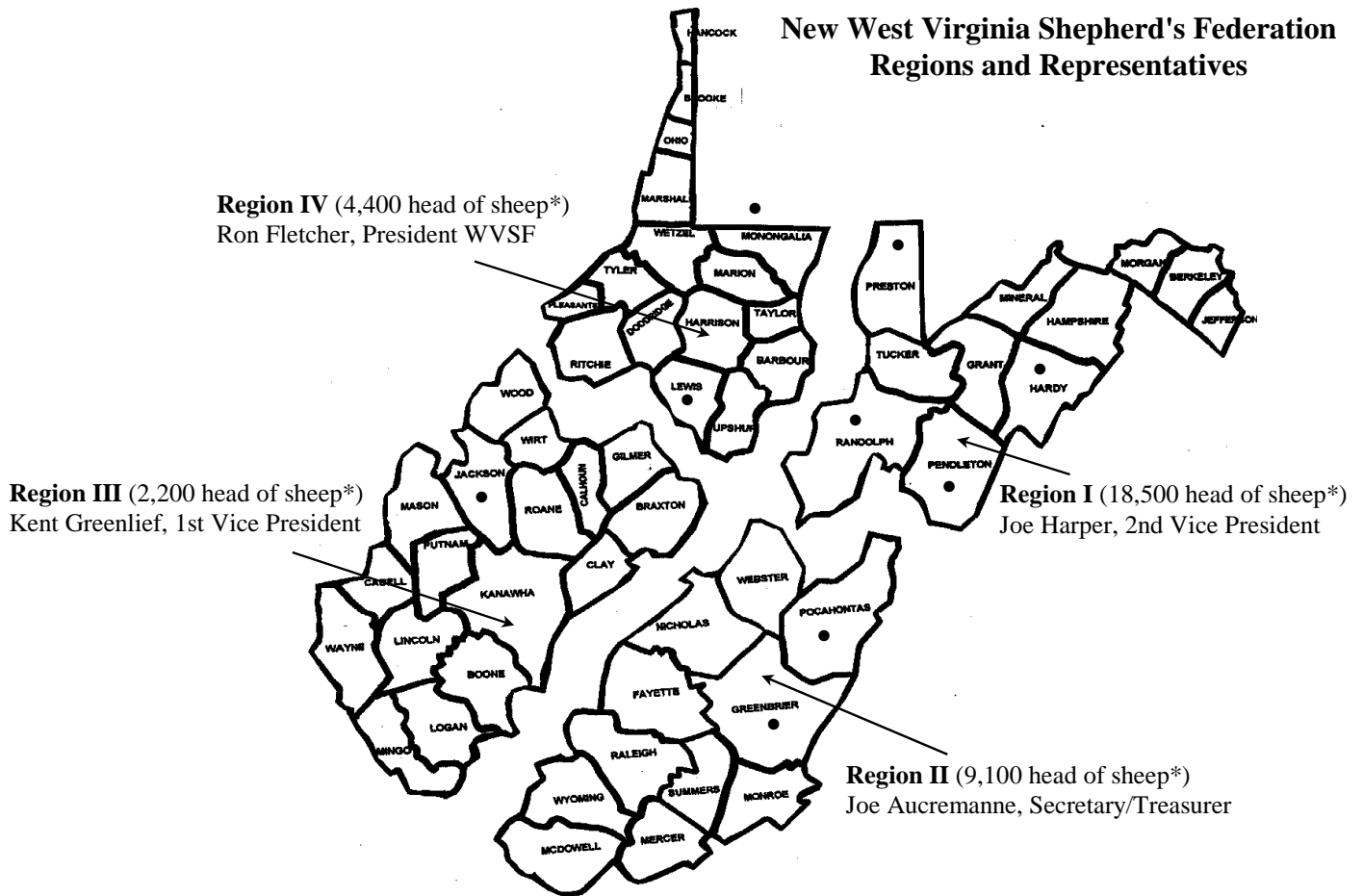
**Membership** - The WVSF is again participating in the unified membership program offered in cooperation with the American Sheep Industry Association (ASI). Through this program, sheep producers are given the opportunity to join both their state and national producer organizations at a reduced cost.

As a joint member of ASI/WVSF, producers benefit from the combined strength and resources of both organizations. Your membership gives you a voice, at both the state and national levels, with which to speak to the wide range of issues and challenges that face the sheep industry today. Your membership helps assure that your interests as a sheep producer in WV are represented and supported. Joint members will also receive the official ASI monthly publication, *Sheep Industry News*.

Please take time to read about the ASI/WVSF Membership Program (see flier insert). Then fill out the application form and return it with your annual dues TODAY! The American Sheep Industry Association, West Virginia Shepherd's Federation and the West Virginia Sheep Management Project are **WORKING TOGETHER FOR YOU!** *Get involved!* Your participation in the unified membership program is a tangible means of supporting *your* sheep industry and investing in its future.

For more information, contact Ron Fletcher, WVSF president, at (304) 758-4819.

## New West Virginia Shepherd's Federation Regions and Representatives



\* Total sheep for each county as reported by the WV Agricultural Statistics Service 2000 Annual Bulletin No 31.  
● WV Wool Pool pick-up locations.

## WV Sheep Management Project Website

The West Virginia Sheep Management Project has gone global! Anyone, anywhere, and at any time can obtain information about the project through the World Wide Web. All you need is a computer and access to the internet.

The WVSMP has created a website to keep sheep producers and industry officials informed of the most current news and information about the WV sheep industry. The website provides an overview of the project's goals and programs and includes information about reproduction, marketing, and predation. Printable copies of all issues of the project's quarterly newsletter are also available on-line. To help you keep up with the latest news and activities involving the sheep industry in West Virginia and across the nation, the website contains information about the WV Shepherd's Federation, ASI, and a calendar of sheep events. A directory listing of the project staff, and WVU professors and extension agents associated with the project, provides a means of contacting each individual via e-mail. A free classified ads page gives WV sheep producers the opportunity to post advertisements for buying and selling sheep, equipment, and sheep related products. The website also contains a list of other organization's and business' website addresses that are useful for sheep producers.

For those of you who do not own a computer, ask a friend or relative with a computer and internet access to help you out. Your local county library should also have a computer with internet access available for public use.

The WVSMP's website address is [www.caf.wvu.edu/avs/sheep](http://www.caf.wvu.edu/avs/sheep). The website is constantly changing, so check back regularly. Happy Surfing!

### Mark Your Calendars!

#### **VA-NC Shepherd's Symposium**

January 5-6, 2001

Harrisonburg, VA

Contact: Scott Greiner, (540) 231-9163

#### **American Sheep Industry Assn.**

Winter Convention

January 25-27, 2001

Reno, NV

Contact: ASI (303) 771-3550, Ext 0

#### **Wool Payment Application Deadline**

December 29, 2000

Sheep producers may be eligible to receive a 20-cents-per-pound payment on their 1999 wool clip under the Economic Loss Assistance Program. For program information and applications, contact your local Farm Services Agency office.