

What a journey this has been . . .

And yet, in some ways it's just the beginning. When Wisconsin science teacher Jim Schultz and his veterinarian, Bob Leder, hatched the idea for a sheep disease club back in 1990, we will admit to having wondered why. Turns out that Jim had eradicated OPP and was having a devil of a time finding test-negative rams, so a need to network with other producers was their motivation.

Today, nearly 30 years later, we're in the same fix and to an even greater degree. As flocks with many hundreds of ewes begin to eradicate OPP there's a growing need for test-negative replacement stock in large numbers. And producers tell us that they can't find the animals they're looking for, ewes as well as rams, in the quantity that they need. So we're hopeful that this report will be incentive for others to test, and then deal with OPP if it's discovered — one more way to boost ASI's *Let's Grow* efforts.

To say that much remains to be done is an understatement, but producers need to be the driving force. For starters, check out our proposal on the back cover. Yes, controversy remains over the economic importance of OPP, and we address that later in this booklet. But for now consider USDA Microbiologist Mike Heaton's observations at the Meat Animal Research Center in Clay Center, Nebraska: Mike reports that *more than 90% of sheep showing OPP at necropsy exhibit no obvious clinical signs*. This is a truly stealth virus, rapidly spread from sheep to sheep but often taking years to develop into full-blown disease.

Minnesota, to our knowledge, is the first and only state to offer an official OPP program, but we're certainly not the only ones promoting eradication. Our role model was Paula Menzies, who pioneered Ontario's program and was the first to introduce the Elitest ELISA to North America. Geri and Jay Parsons continue to work with producers in Colorado and neighboring states. And Mary Smith reports that New York now has a sheep and goat health assurance program that is encouraging eradication.

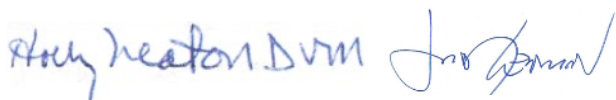
Several flocks now use the Elitest ELISA and we're consulting with producers from New York and Pennsylvania in the East, to Wyoming, Utah and Montana in the West, and all points between. You may have heard that we're providing additional test data to these cooperating producers, with results held in strict confidence, and the resulting feedback has been helpful to all parties including ourselves. Feel free to get in touch with either of us if you'd like to explore this option. The plan is for these expanded results to eventually become standard, but for now the lab will continue to report as simply positive or negative.

While the eradication trial has been a success, *it's important to note that this was not a scientific study* but rather a producer-driven attempt to rid OPP from infected flocks as quickly as possible through use of a newly available test in combination with recent research findings. Further, *we did not test every lamb born during the trial*. To maximize limited available funds, only those lambs selected as potential replacements were tested.

So where to now? Only producers can make it happen, and we're indebted to those whose stories are included here. By sticking to their guns they've proven that this new eradication strategy works. We know you'll enjoy their reports, which are more powerful than anything we could say. Also inside is a piece by Bill Fosher that was commissioned by Premier 1 Supplies. It's the most eloquent OPP saga we've seen and we thank Stan Potratz and Ben Rothe (Premier's CEO) for allowing us to use it.

If your flock's status is unknown, we hope you'll now be inspired to find out. While we always encourage producers to consult with and support their local veterinarian, the sad fact is that only 50% of sheep producers do so. Hopefully, a shared interest in OPP will allow more of these critical vet-client-patient relationships to develop over time. We've seen it happen. But for now, if you're one of those hardcore DIY types, you'll be happy to know that we'll be working with Premier to make blood sampling supplies more readily available.

In closing, we want to recognize ASI for helping to spread the word through *Sheep Industry News*. Also Cat Urbigkit for carrying on the legacy of the Floras and Karks at *The Shepherd* magazine. And last but not never least, our fellow members of the OPP Society. Your support has made all the difference.



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