



O.P.P.

**CONCERNED
SHEEP
BREEDERS
SOCIETY**

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**Texel Leadership Commended
OPP Tests Now Required for National Show/Sale**

Editor's note: Over the years, several have wished out loud that breed associations would take a more active role in promoting high health status among member flocks. The Texel Sheep Breeders Society did just that in 2003, and will do so again in 2004, with an OPP test requirement for all entries in the TSBS annual show/sale. All test results, both positive and negative, must be posted prior to the sale. The following letter was sent to the TSBS board and is used here with their permission. Since much of what Gene Schriefer wrote could apply to any breed, this should be an inspiration to others who serve in leadership roles with their respective breed organizations.

TO THE TEXEL SHEEP BREEDERS SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

I recently learned that the Texel Sheep Breeders Society board is requiring an OPP test for their show and sales. I'm surprised and quite pleased to hear a breed association take this bold and progressive step in helping to control and eliminate the spread of this slow insidious disease. I vigorously support this decision and hope your entire membership also supports this. Stand firm on your OPP test requirement and encourage Texel owners to do whole flock testing at least to assess the prevalence of OPP in their flocks. You cannot manage what you don't measure.

Our flock was well underway in testing and eliminating OPP when I purchased my first Texels 9 years ago, and even though I checked the reputation of the breeder with several people and asked the breeder specifically about OPP, I still wound up purchasing infected ewes. *Anyone* with Texel stock originating or descending from USDA-MARC needs to be testing, if they want to control the spread and eliminate this disease.

Texels are still our predominant breed and used as both crossbred dams and as terminal sires. With OPP eliminated from most of the flock, ewe productivity in terms of lambs, weaning weights and ewe longevity has improved, this improves the bottom line. Most of our breeding has been brought in via A.I. but we began a search for rams three years ago. Unfortunately, the U.S. Texel breeders I contacted were not testing for OPP, didn't have individual flock health programs in place, nor were they utilizing ultrasound for carcass traits at the flock level. This forced me to look at other breeds and also purchase stock from Canada, where health issues were more of a priority for purebred producers supplying seedstock to the commercial industry.

Being elected to your leadership position means not only dealing with the present but also establishing a vision and goal for the future, which may not be initially easy nor popular. Directly attending to health issues, especially when they appear to be prevalent within a breed, indicates a degree of serious commitment about the production of quality, healthy animals. Taking this first step and requiring testing to show/sell puts the Texel association ahead of other breeds not taking this measure. As your members clean up OPP from their flocks, I would certainly be interested and reconsider purchasing stock from U.S. producers.

Thank you,

Gene Schriefer
Dodgeville, Wisconsin
400 commercial ewes

**OPP Society Names
Honorary Lifetime Members**

Dr. Randall C. Cutlip	Joan E. Mueller
Stefania Dignum	Elizabeth K. Reedy
Mary Jarvis	James Schultz
Dr. Robert Leder	Dr. Cynthia B. Wolf
Brian Magee	<i>Please turn to page 3.</i>

For more information on Texels and the Texel Sheep Breeders Society see: www.usatexels.org or contact breed Secretary/Treasurer, Julie Korkow, at 406-436-2486 or: info@usatexels.org

OPP SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING

September 6, 2003

Wisconsin Sheep & Wool Festival (near Milwaukee)

Recap provided by Judy Lewman

We were honored to have Guy & Pat Flora and Kathy Kark of *The Shepherd* magazine stop by for a brief lunchtime discussion this year. Guy's presence was a first — never before has an ASI president attended an OPPCSB gathering.

With so many excellent speakers on board for the Festival, our meeting morphed into a roving discussion of the health certification issue as OPP Society members and other interested parties huddled between sessions. The consensus among those at the Festival concurred with member surveys received earlier in the year: that any type of certification protocol was beyond our resources, and that a connection to the voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program seemed most viable. Dr. Bob Leder agreed to carry on with that project. (See update below.)

Our literature was prominently displayed throughout the weekend. As always, the directories were a hot item and disappeared as fast as we could set them out. Another sign that our message is being heard: two consignors to the production-tested sheep sale posted OPP test results this year, and one mentioned that our Web site was his incentive to begin testing! (All sale rams were also genotyped for scrapie susceptibility at codons 171 and 136; this was a new requirement by sale management.)

OPP CERTIFICATION PROGRAM UPDATE:

OPPCSBS Petitions APHIS

by Bob Leder, DVM

In early December I drafted a letter, with the input of the other directors of the OPP Society, to Diane Sutton, DVM, the head of the Scrapie Flock Certification Program at APHIS. In the letter we encouraged APHIS to consider offering an add-on program of OPP free certification to the SFCP. It is our hope that APHIS would give this proposal serious consideration. We believe that such a program would serve as an incentive to encourage more producers to enroll in the SFCP. Additionally, such a program would serve producers who have already eliminated OPP from their flocks by offering official recognition of their efforts.

The letter was sent in the middle of December, before the Christmas rush. We have not received any notice yet from Dr. Sutton regarding her thoughts of our proposal.

DICK SISCO REMEMBERED

With sadness, we note the death of Dick Sisco who was elected to serve on the OPP Society board early last year. He was diagnosed with leukemia last summer and died a short time later, on August 21st. Dick was always a strong supporter of sheep health and was a leader in trying to find ways to educate producers about scrapie, OPP, and other health issues. His flock was the 2nd in the country to be certified under the SFCP. Dick is remembered as a person of respect and integrity, a good friend to the industry, and to the Suffolk breed in particular.

NEW DIRECTORS WELCOMED:

Mary Gloster — Jean Walsh — Gene Schriefer

Jean Walsh and Mary Gloster were elected to the OPP Society board of directors last year (to serve through 2006 and 2005, respectively), as was Dick Sisco (through 2004). The board later appointed Gene Schriefer to fill the remainder of Dick's term. Bios for both Mary and Jean appeared on the ballot sheet enclosed with your 2003 newsletter. To read more about Gene, please turn to page 4.

ADVERTISING & OPP STATUS

by Bill Duffield

Advertising of an "OPP-free" flock makes me very nervous. One of the problems that I see is the potential for being sued. The OPP Concerned Sheep Breeders Society voted to change the bylaws a few years ago to read "OPP test-negative" instead of "OPP-free." The Society also has test guidelines for people to refer to that can assist them in knowing which questions to ask prior to purchasing new animals. The farm records should show the dates when tested, if the complete flock was tested, and any other information that the potential buyer would like to see.

In Ontario, the normal is to state "low risk Maedi-Visna" or "Maedi-Visna low risk." A flock in Ontario could be on the Ontario Sheep Health Program for this or, if there is ample data, could also advertise this way. This states to me that this farm has been testing for OPP and has a relatively clean flock for this disease. I realize that at the farm of origin the animal was low risk. I also realize that bringing that animal home in a not clean vehicle, or in a vehicle with animals that have not been tested, or into a flock that has not been tested for this problem, will NOT guarantee that that animal will stay this way (low risk).

Here are also some others that could get people into trouble:

"Johnes free" This is very hard, and not a very accurate test as the test runs around 50% accuracy. This test if not done properly can show false positives due to some vaccines used on animals. I have, because of semen collection, had to test my rams for this disease before and after collection, and these tests had to be negative at that time to Johnes's. The words I'd use would be "low risk Johnes's" or "Johnes's test negative."

"Certified Scrapie-Free" (in the USA) This too makes me nervous as the testing is still experimental. Yes, there have been a few flocks that were Certified Scrapie-Free after 5 years or more and came down with animals that had scrapie. I feel again there are better words. Since this is a government program, maybe "SFCP" or "USDA Certified Scrapie-Free" would be better.

One person in the OPP group I must congratulate as this person stated "closed ewe flock." This tells me that this flock does not purchase any ewes outside the flock but only purchases rams to improve the flock. The Fact sheet of the Ontario "GLOSSARY OF SHEEP BREEDING TERMINOLOGY" (Order no. 00-079, October 2000) states the following for:

Closed Flock:

An existing flock that does not introduce any live animal breeding stock to the flock. New genetics enter the flock through the use of artificial insemination and embryo transfer.

SOCIETY NAMES HONORARY LIFETIME MEMBERS

The OPP Society will soon be 14 years old. And with the organization having now reached a level of respectability, we'd like to recognize those who pioneered the cause long before it was considered a reasonable thing to do.

The board has voted to award honorary lifetime memberships to the following people. Many of them have served as OPP Society officers and/or directors. All have played key roles — and we are fortunate that all remain valued resources.

Dr. Randall C. Cutlip:

Longtime Research Leader of the Respiratory and Neurologic Disease Unit at USDA's National Animal Disease Center in Ames, Iowa, Dr. Cutlip retired in 2000. Widely known for his pioneering work with OPP, including the standardization of the AGID test, he conducted an experimental eradication program through the '80s in which producers willing to follow his protocol learned that they finally had an option beyond just "culling the lungers."

Stefania Sveinbjarnardottir-Dignum:

A native of Iceland living in Ontario, Stefania imported the first Icelandic sheep to North America and then unknowingly exposed them to maedi-visna (OPP). After learning of her flock's infection via a government survey in 1988, she became one of the first to tackle eradication via the orphan route, beginning with 64 lambs in 1989. Stef remains active with her breed association, and recently organized a producers' A.I. workshop tour to Iceland.

Mary Jarvis:

If not for Mary, there most likely would not be an OPP Society today. From all reports, she was the glue who held everything together as our secretary/treasurer for seven of the early years. It was Mary who produced the first newsletters and posted OPP Society information on the Internet before many of the rest of us even knew what a Web site was. Though health issues put an end to their dairying, Mare still has her sheep, llamas and dogs.

Dr. Robert Leder:

While it's unconventional to recognize a sitting director in this manner, we couldn't imagine naming this group without including Bob, the veterinarian and commercial producer who cofounded the OPP Society along with Jim Schultz. In addition to returning to our board a few years back, Bob continues to work in many areas for his state sheep association. And as many have already noticed, he's also the star of the Society's blood collection video.

Brian Magee:

A renowned Cornell University animal scientist, Brian was president of the Finnsheep breed association in 1986 when Cornell's Finns and his own flock were found infected with the OPP virus. Never too busy to help others, Brian's writings in the Finn newsletter, as well as reports on his eradication work done at Cornell, made their way into the popular press and generated a great deal of respect for one of the first breeds to tackle OPP head on.

Joan E. Mueller:

Though OPP was first reported in the U.S. in 1914, producers heard very little about it until 1986, when Joan wrote a no-holds-barred account of her experience and introduced readers to Dr. Cutlip's work. Her two-part article was a real eye opener and, in many ways, remains as timely today as it was then. A retired college professor, Joan parted with her Clun Forest flock after a bout with lyme disease but she remains an inspiration to us all.

Elizabeth K. Reedy:

An OPP Society director for more than a decade, this noted Clun Forest breeder published our membership directory for several years while also serving as mentor and cheerleader at a time when few others were willing to discuss OPP. Having recently retired from the Department of Women's Studies at the University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse, Bets continues to serve as secretary for her breed association, a position she has held for many years.

James Schultz:

As a high school biology teacher and commercial producer with a sharp eye on the bottom line, Jim's always been keenly interested in flock health. So when ewes began to fade by 3-5 years, he was determined to learn why. An OPP diagnosis led to heavy culling in 1988, followed by a difficult search for replacements. Seeing a need to educate and network, Jim and his vet, Bob Leder, convened their first-ever OPP Society meeting in 1990.

Dr. Cynthia B. Wolf:

Another stalwart who was "there at the beginning" of the OPP Society in 1990, Cindy wrote our original OPP fact sheet and also served as a director for many years. Now heavily involved with various industry issues and organizations, as well as with her own large commercial whiteface flock, this University of Minnesota veterinarian continues to be a tireless promoter of the OPP Society and healthy sheep and goats wherever she goes.

NEW MEMBERS WELCOMED

Breed Association:

Texel Sheep Breeders Society

Individuals:

Bob Adams, Indiana (Texel)
 Larry & Jami Beintema, Washington (Texel)
 Christine T. Camann, DVM, New York
 Noel Carlson, California (Icelandic)
 Tara Lee Higgins, Alberta (Jacob)
 Sharon Inman, Michigan (Cotswold, Karakul, crosses)
 Laura Jacobson Pensis & Steven Pensis, Michigan
 (Border Leicester, Polypay/Coopworth/Rambouillet X)
 Tim Reese/Three Rivers Park District, Minnesota
 (Border Leicester, Clun Forest, Finnsheep)
 Yvonne Uhlianuk, Michigan (Corriedale, Jacob, Moorit/brown X)
 Al Weeder, Nebraska (prolific crossbreds)

MANY THANKS!

To Laura Jacobson, new OPP Society member from Michigan, for writing about her OPP testing experience in *The Shepherd* magazine (see the January 2004 issue, page 6).

— BLOOD COLLECTION VIDEO AVAILABLE —

This video was produced by the Society several years ago. Used with veterinarian cooperation, it can help producers lower the cost of OPP testing by learning to draw the blood samples themselves. Available to Society members for \$15.

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SEE OUR WEB SITE AT
www.OPPsociety.org

NEW DIRECTORS WELCOMED

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Mary Gloster and Jean Walsh were elected to the OPP Society board of directors last year, as was Dick Sisco. The board later appointed Gene Schriefer to fill the remainder of Dick's term. Bios for both Mary and Jean appeared on the 2003 ballot sheet. We introduce Gene below.

Gene Schriefer, Wisconsin

608-987-4337 — sheepfarm@charter.net

Gene and Ruth Schriefer run a commercial white faced flock of 400 ewes on an intensive grazing system in the rolling hills outside of Dodgeville, Wisconsin. There are 3 distinct lambing periods, with shed lambing, modified shed lambing, and pasture lambing groups. The flock is closed to ewes with occasional rams brought in from high health status flocks in Canada, or via A.I. The original ewe flock was single sourced and came with some added features, OPP. The flock is divided in an OPP positive/suspect/untested group, OPP negative, and SFCP flock. Predominantly the ewes are varying percentages of Texel x Finn and Charollais x Finn, to produce maternal ewes for crossing to a terminal ram.

Gene says, *"We've been using the AGID test for 8 years, but still have 1-2% positive rate. If there is a silver lining to this experience it is we are convinced that healthy disease free sheep live longer, produce more and earn more income. The sheep industry as a whole needs to reduce, control and possibly eradicate those diseases that cost producers income, and call into question the safety of the product to the consumer."*

Gene is a certified trainer for the Sheep Safety and Quality Assurance program and is president of the Southwest Wisconsin Sheep Producers. He's participated in the National Lamb Feeders Leadership School, and this summer will be attending the World Sheep Congress in Quebec. Gene spent 8 years with the University of Wisconsin-Extension as a county extension agent working with adult volunteers in 4-H and youth programs, and in that role worked with a variety of different volunteer boards. His wife, Ruth, is still a UW-Extension Agent in Iowa County with 20 years experience and works with families. Gene is currently working as a Grazing Specialist for the Southwest Badger Resource Conservation and Development Council, assisting new graziers in establishing grazing plans. Their farm hosts sheep or grazing field days each summer or fall.