For Immediate Release

Shropshire Sheep: A Growing Breed

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Louisville, KY – November 18, 2014 – 2,450 sheep arrived at the North American International Livestock Exposition (NAILE) in 2014, ready to be shown. Of those 2,450, 139 came from the Shropshire breed. The breed has shown a sizeable growth since its original debut at the NAILE.

Shropshires originally came to the United States in the 1880’s from England. They made history as the first U.S. sheep to be slick sheared as an entire breed and to have a black face.

Although Shropshires ranked fifth in the number of exhibitors out of the twenty-two sheep breeds at the NAILE, incoming American Shropshire Registry Association president, Jim Percival of Xenia, OH is predicting the breed will continue to grow. Percival, who has been raising Shropshires since the early seventies, predicts that Shropshire will continue to grow in the United States for a variety of reasons. He attributes the majority of the growth to the compatibility of the breed with young children.

Shropshires are moderate sized, making them easier to be handled by children. A major breed advantage is the fact that Shropshires are slick sheared. That means all wool is sheared off the sheep prior to show day. Slick shearing was incorporated as a competition rule at the NAILE in 1998. It enables children to fit their own sheep and spend a limited amount of time in the barn at home. It takes only approximately forty-five minutes to wash and shear a Shropshire, allowing juniors more extracurricular time.

Outgoing American Shropshire Registry Association president, Brad Slutz of Maple Park, IL, believes that slick shearing contributed vastly to the breed’s continual growth, but not just for ease purposes. Slutz also said the decision for the breed to start slick shearing caused body confirmations to make the sheep more visually appealing.

The growth in Shropshires since the slick shearing began has been immense. Shropshires are now the largest sheep breed in Ohio and in the top three in Illinois and Indiana, according to Percival.

Shropshires also appeal to sheep breeders due to their longevity, their high birthing rates, and their environmental adaptability. The average life span of a Shropshire ewe is seven to eight years. The average life span of a Shropshire Ram is four to five years. Slutz also said artificial insemination has led to a longer longevity because semen could last for ten or more years.

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Shropshires birthing rate is nearly 260%. Ewes commonly give birth to twins. If the breeder decides to flush, depending on how hard he flushes, the ewe may give birth to triplets. The mothers are prolific and easily take on and raise more than one lamb. Shropshires ewes are also good milkers, providing enough milk to raise twins or triplets.

Percival said the American Shropshire Registry Association ranges from California to Maine due to the breed’s high environmental adaptability. It is a very hardy breed. Percival’s Shropshires are pasture fed from the time they are weaned through December 1. Shropshires can flourish in a variety of climate conditions.

Although Shropshires are easily set apart from other sheep breeds by their slick sheared coats, Percival says the biggest downside of Shropshires is an inconsistent appearance within the breed. He said Shropshires can vary from a frame type to a wether type and range anywhere in between. Percival stated the Association has discussed and is going to put an emphasis on the need for a consistent Shropshire appearance.

Slutz and Percival both agree the breed has a bright future. Youngsters will continue to show them as they carry on their family traditions. More people will choose to raise Shropshires due to ease of care. The men predict that the breed will quickly find its way into the top three breeds in the nation.

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