



NEWS & VIEWS



The official newsletter of St. Croix Hair Sheep Breeders, Inc.

President's Message: Plan Ahead

Jason Webster, Green Pastures Farm

Long ago, an old rancher was looking to hire a farmhand. Only one guy showed up. When the rancher asked him his qualifications, the farmhand simply stated "I can sleep when the storm comes." The rancher thought that was a really odd statement, but said "You're hired!" After all, he was the only applicant.

As time passed, the farmhand was working out pretty well. One night, there came a really bad storm. The rancher panicked and decided he needed the farmhand's help to batten down the hatches. He beat on the farmhand's door, trying to get him up to help him. The farmhand did not respond, and the rancher could hear the sounds of snoring coming from within the quarters.

The rancher furiously stormed off to the first barn to put up the chickens. When he arrived, he found that it was already done. Next, he went to close all the doors on the hay barn so it wouldn't get wet. They too were already sealed. At that point, he began to understand what the farmhand meant when he said he could sleep when the storm comes.

As farmers, we can't plan for every contingency, but there are some things that we should be prepared for. It's not an easy life, and there is always work to do. However, we must try to be like the farmhand. We must take those extra steps to make things easier in the future.

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Welcome Our New Directors

Officers

President

Jason Webster - Indiana
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Vice President

Lori Marion - Oregon
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Secretary

Beth Hall - Virginia
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Treasurer

Crystal Criswell - Ohio
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Directors

Ryan Ridgley - Michigan
Tamara Lambdin-Abney - KY
Elizabeth Hernandez - WV

Please welcome the newest directors on your SCHSBI Board of Directors: Elizabeth Hernandez of Trillium Family Farms in West Virginia and Tamara Lambdin-Abney of Aldenwood Farms in Kentucky. The entire board looks forward to working for the membership in the coming two years.

The next election will be held in December 2024, and the term of office is four years. This gives directors time to settle into the board and follow through on responsibilities. If you are interested in sharing your shepherding expertise with the SCHSBI board of directors, please contact a current director to learn more.

Contact info for all directors is located on the [SCHSBI website](#). If you have questions or concerns, please bring them to a director. Each director strives to answer questions accurately and address issues of the membership. We are all member volunteers serving SCHSBI, and we welcome your input.

Finally, we would like to thank our exiting directors, Matt Morgan and Matt Mintmier. Their many years of service have helped SCHSBI grow and operate effectively.



photo credit: Lori Marion, Shasta Ranch

Why Register Your Sheep?

Lori Marion, Shasta Ranch & SCHSBI Vice President

A while back, we were looking for a new ram. We had no trouble finding offerings – on Craig's list, on local bulletin boards, on Facebook, and on the breeders' page on the SCHSBI website. We saw a lot of 'purebred but not registered' St. Croix sheep. Only those listed on the website breeder's page seemed to have registered stock.

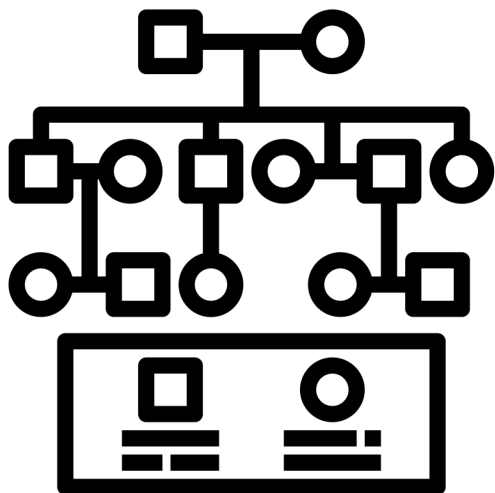
At the same time, folks who had 'inherited' a small registered flock we had previously sold called us. They lacked registration documents for lambs born to the originally registered sheep. They thought the ewes had been 'pasture bred' to 3 rams, so parentage was unknown. This is another group of 'purebred but not registered' St. Croix sheep.

There are reasons not to register the offspring of registered sheep. Sheep that don't make the cut for breeding after evaluation don't need to be registered. The table lamb is just as delicious without papers. Even if the purpose of your flock is mostly to raise meat animals, train herding dogs, or graze unwanted vegetation, there's a good chance you should register many of those sheep.

Tagging or tattooing your animals and tracking dams and sires, with the goal of registering your sheep, takes work. However, it allows you to trace the ancestry of your stock. At some point, you'll replace your breeding stock. Keeping offspring of your best sheep and avoiding unintentional inbreeding is a good idea; but you must know who is who.

Sheep that don't make the cut for breeding after evaluation don't need to be registered.

Why Register Your Sheep? (continued)



St. Croix sheep are desirable for their fertility and good mothering. You may be able to sell registered sheep which are often more valuable and can increase buyers' interest, even if you only sell a handful each year.

Maybe you have the pedigree information in your head, in a notebook, or on a spreadsheet. You may think "What difference does it make if it's 'official' and registration documents exist?"

Owners' situations and livelihoods change, and all or part of your flock may wind up being sold. If the careful breeding and husbandry you practiced over the years can't be documented via official registration documents, your flock gets sold at the sale barn as generic hair sheep. All the work and time you spent growing a sound, healthy flock will be permanently lost.

The last reason to register your animals is to preserve the breed. Once a sheep's registration and ancestry are lost, it's nearly impossible to restore it. Even when handwritten records exist or the shepherd really knows that all the parents were purebred, those genetics are lost from the breed's gene pool. Continued loss of genetics can lead to a significant reduction in genetic diversity and, potentially, the destruction of the breed. Imagine this in the St. Croix breed description: "Some St. Croix sheep were imported into the continental U.S. in the 1960s. The breed failed to take hold, although St. Croix genetic influences can be seen in some flocks." Let's not let that happen.

Membership in SCHSBI is \$20 per year, and registrations are only \$7.00. It's a small investment in the future of your flock and of the breed with a positive return on investment for you and for the St. Croix sheep breed.





Changes are Afoot: A New Registrar

Crystal Criswell, Melwood Farm & SCHSBI Treasurer

We have a big change happening this year. As you know, [GLM Registry](#) has managed our registration services for many years. George and Lynn Morgan have announced that they are retiring at the end of 2023. We want to offer our heartfelt thanks and congratulations to them both, as well as recognize their professionalism and skilled service through the years. The data management that GLM provided has ensured that SCHSBI registration documents were accurate, with 3rd-party-verified records.

The Directors are actively searching for a new registrar that offers our members the same quality services we have all come to expect. We anticipate migrating all our data to the new registrar well before the end of the year. Don't worry - the transition will be as seamless as possible, and all your records will be well-preserved. George and Lynn will help us every step of the way.

To that end, please spend some time on [SCHSB Online](#) updating your contact information so that when we make the transition, you can access your account and receive correspondence without interruption. If possible, please include a cell phone number so that texting is an option. Also, please check the status of all sheep currently listed as owned by you. Update the status of any sheep that you have sold, sent to butcher/auction, or that are deceased by logging onto [SCHSB Online](#) and using the "Maintain Animal Status" link.

While change can be scary, the Directors will ensure that this is a positive development for our organization, our members, and our sheep.





St. Croix Genetic Fingerprint Project Update

Lori Marion, Shasta Ranch & SCHSBI Vice President

The St. Croix genomics project is in the last stages of sample collection! Samples from Texas, Oklahoma, and South Carolina have been added to the previously submitted samples from across the country. Producers in North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Kentucky will provide the final samples to a total of nearly 100 sheep.

Thank you to all members who took the time to collect samples from your registered flock and return them to us. We appreciate your contribution to the breed. This project has been ongoing for some time now, and we appreciate the patience of all as we move forward.

Once all the samples are collected, the hard work of analyzing and interpreting the data will begin. Dr. Brenda Murdoch, Ph.D. (Animal Science), and her team of researchers at the University of Idaho, Moscow, in the Department of Animal and Veterinary Sciences, will assist us in that effort.

Stay tuned for more information and some exciting results from this project in the future! If you have any questions about this project, please contact directors [Lori](#), [Beth](#), or [Crystal](#).



photo credit: Tamara Lambdin-Abney, Aldenwood Farm



Mentorship and Goals in Farming

Elizabeth Hernandez, Trillium Family Farm & SCHSBI Director

As a beginner farmer, I remember being overwhelmed with farming in general. There were so many things to learn. Not only about the St. Croix breed in general but also about how to set up my pastures and barn, rotational grazing, and breeding. It's hard not to "jump right in" and "do all the things." We were there a little over two years ago. We had just bought our farm and were excited to add animals to our little farmstead. However, we only had a small barn and no fences. If I were to offer any advice to others wanting to get started in a St. Croix breeding program, I would say, "Find a mentor, ask questions, and make achievable goals."

Mentors teach by example. The mistake you are about to make and the question you are about to Google are probably the same mistake they made and the same question they Googled. In previous years, farming was a family business. The next generation of farmers grew up on farms. About 27% of farmers have less than ten years of experience, making mentorship even more critical. Mentors can help new farmers understand general sheep care, marketing, finances, and networking. Finding a mentor who raises sheep in a similar climate with similar ideas is critical. There are many opinions about the best way to raise sheep. However, given the vastness of the United States, what works for some won't work for others.

Having a mentor also allows for the opportunity to ask questions from someone with experience. When I first began raising sheep, I sent my mentor twenty pictures of hooves during hoof trimming.

Mentors teach by example.



Mentorship & Goals (continued)

This process provided for hands-on learning, even though she was an hour away. My first lambing was worse than the hoof trimming, but she was patient, answered questions, and calmed my nerves. The idea of mentorship has been around for centuries. Bringing back this form of relationship can benefit agriculture in unimaginable ways.

Finally, set achievable goals. Setting goals can help make farming less overwhelming. Speaking to your mentor about goals can help ensure they are possible. Ultimately, goals are the standards by which we measure our progress. Goal setting is purely an internal function, but talking about your goals with your mentor can help to refine them. Unachievable goals can cause distress and can cause many people to quit. A mentor can offer encouragement through times of stress and confusion, giving you an edge in the farming community.



photo credit: Elizabeth Hernandez, Trillium Family Farm



photo credit: Alyssa Manning, Bourbeuse Bend Farm

What the Hay?

Ryan Ridgley, Good Harborage Farms & SCHSBI Director

We are going into our third year grazing St. Croix sheep and other ruminants at Good Harborage Farms. While there have been many victories to celebrate, one thing we never envisioned was facing back-to-back droughts. Starting out, our dream was to implement a Regenerative Ranching Management style focused on soil biodiversity. We believed it was bound to work great in the lush green pastures we already had. Typically, it's not a drought that is the enemy within Regenerative Ranching, it's overgrazing. According to Regenerative practices, the key to bringing back lush grazing lies in dense ruminant flocks and herds (flerds) in small paddocks for short durations. Frequent rotation allows appropriate rest to each previous paddock before returning to it.

In year one, this was a breeze to implement. We had plenty of rainfall, and it seemed that our sheep couldn't keep up with their grazing duties. We were able to leave our animals on each paddock for longer periods of time. Going into year two, we figured that although my herd had doubled in size, we'd have plenty of forage to continue a "fat" grass-fed living for the flerd. Additionally, we planned to add another large area for grazing by the end of that year.

However, life had other plans. We faced several hardships, including a drought we didn't anticipate and family growth. Those challenges led to one setback after another. Consequently, we didn't get more grazing area added. Actually, we started year three breaking nearly every Regenerative principle. Talk about feeling like a failure!

According to an article titled "Pasture Management and Problems While Grazing" by the Animal Agriculture Department at Washington State University, sheep obtain greater than 80% of their nutrition from forage. That said, our goal has always been 100% forage even though we ran out of it. We were feeding more hay for longer times than expected. We started feeding hay in September of year two and August of year three. Naturally, with an ongoing two-year drought hay quality suffered as well. Poor hay quality means we must feed more of it to meet the flerd's nutritional requirements. There is also less hay to go around which leads to higher hay prices too. Fortuitously, our family has a successful hay business that helped us mitigate cost, but that doesn't guarantee us quality hay.

Our plan is to stick to the principles of Regenerative Ranching by getting back to implementing them. We need to make the necessary adjustments we didn't make before, plan better, expect hardship, exemplify humility, and do our homework. We will also be improving our hay harvesting techniques.



photo credit: Crystal Criswell, Melwood Farm

Welcome, New Members!

Leslie Buchanan & Tom Richardson - Abundant Health Farm - WV

Bill & Rebecca Horning - B&B Farm - MO

Brad & Laura Cox - Cox Homestead - TN

John Coad Westra - Ombre Skies Farm - NC

Lee Hudson - Hudson Ranch - CA

Sheryl Hagedorn - Nude Food Farms - MO

Garrett Palmer - North Lakes Farm - MN

Michael Weeks - Semanas Serenity Farm - SC

2022 Membership Report

January 1 - December 31, 2022

Renewed memberships: 65

New memberships: 41

New sheep registrations: 1,028

Sheep transfers: 494



photo credit: Crystal Criswell, Melwood Farm