

Eradicating Scrapie in Sheep

What Every Young Sheep Producer Needs to Know

? WHY IS SCRAPIE SUCH A CONCERN?

Scrapie costs millions of dollars to people in the sheep industry. It causes issues with sending animals to other countries, extra work for producers and sheep handlers, like auction markets. There is also an increased cost to dispose of dead sheep. Getting the U.S. free of scrapie, called eradication, is very important. You and everyone in the sheep industry are needed to finish the fight to eradicate scrapie.

? WHAT IS THE U.S. DOING TO BE SCRAPIE-FREE?

The National Scrapie Eradication Program (NSEP) is hard at work but needs your help.

Since 2002, the incidence of scrapie in the U.S. has decreased a lot, mostly because of testing and tracing animals to where they came from through records. But, to be officially scrapie-free, we must prove to the world that we have conducted a testing program that represents the U.S. sheep flock and not have any scrapie for 7 years. This is why sending samples from dead sheep more than 18 months of age on your farm is extremely important.

? WHAT IS A SCRAPIE “TAG” AND WHAT ANIMALS MUST HAVE IT?

The U.S. scrapie health regulation requires that most sheep be identified to their flock of birth when they leave your property for sale, shows, events or are mixed with other sheep. The best way is to put an official scrapie program ear tag in sheep and goats. Plus, keep good records of tagging and where your animals have traveled. Talk to your veterinarian to get more details. The number for adults to call to get official scrapie tags is 1-866-USDA-TAG.

? HOW CAN I PROTECT MY FLOCK FROM SCRAPIE?

Consider developing a flock which is genetically resistant to scrapie. Keeping a closed flock, adding only genetically resistant animals or those from a farm certified in the Scrapie-free Flock Certification Program (SFCP) are also ways.

Observe your entire flock carefully. Contact your State Veterinarian or the USDA Veterinary Services office for your state if your sheep older than 12 months show signs of scrapie. Testing suspect animals is the best way to find sheep infected with scrapie.

? HOW MUCH PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE IN THE ERADICATION OF SCRAPIE?

In 2002, scrapie numbers reached a high, with approximately 1 in 500 sheep identified as infected with the disease. Fast-forward to 2021-2023, when only 1 in 50,000 sheep tested positive for scrapie. The last case of classical scrapie was found in January 2021, which means if no additional cases are found, the United States may be able to declare freedom in 2028.

? WHERE DO I GET MORE INFORMATION?

Contact the American Sheep Industry Association.



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