

Rochester Producer receives Shepherd of the Year Award

In an effort to award innovative, progressive or otherwise uniquely successful shepherds in the state, the Indiana Sheep Association (ISA) grants the Shepherd of the Year Award each year to individuals who presently own sheep and are members of ISA. Those awarded must be involved in local and state associations and agriculture-related activities, along with having shown innovation and/or excellence in their operations. This year, ISA found Glen Jones of Rochester to match these criteria by producing the top NSIP Polypay ram in the country.

Jones and his wife, Chris, own and operate Hidden Valley Farm, which is home to 100 Polypay breeding ewes. The Jones's specialize in raising replacement Polypay ewes and breeding rams. This year, their crop of lambs were sold into eight states, from Maryland to Western Iowa, and according to the National Sheep Improvement Program (NSIP), Hidden Valley produced the nation's current top Polypay ram.

NSIP—a program which serves as a stock evaluation tool to sheep producers—tests the DNA of enrolled flocks in order to select for desirable traits such as resistance to parasites, higher weaning weights and faster post-weaning growth. Estimated breeding values are then established for those and other economically-important traits to a commercial flock. The Polypay breed in particular has established a maternal index in this way. Based on that index, Hidden Valley's HV7022 is currently the highest maternal index of the breed, and several of his offspring have also made the upper part of that list. HV7022 was born on Hidden Valley Farm in 2017, after which he was purchased by the University of Wisconsin.

“As soon as his daughters started producing, it became clear that he was not an ordinary ram,” Jones said. “Those daughters were weaning more lambs with greater weaning weights, faster post-weaning growth, and greater parasite resistance.”

After producing many offspring for the University flock, the ram was sold to Diamond K Sheep Co., where Jones said he subsequently improved the performance of that flock. ISA commends Hidden Valley Farm for this tremendous achievement on a national level, and encourages Indiana producers to learn more about NSIP by visiting <http://nsip.org/>.