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Sheep, fiber management subject of two-day Casper symposium

More sheep on Wyoming small acreages adding income to families and local economies is the vision behind the Small Flock and Fiber Symposium in Casper Wednesday and Thursday, Sept. 23 and 24.

Financing options, basic flock feeding and predator control are among the topics.

“A fiber project operator or small-flock owner can leave this symposium with contacts for national marketing, new niche ideas and decades’ worth of knowledge earned the hard way by wool producers,” said Scott Cotton, University of Wyoming Extension educator.

The symposium is at the Natrona County Extension Agricultural Resource and Learning Center, 2011 Fairgrounds Road. Registration is required by 2 p.m. Friday, Sept. 18. The \$25 fee includes two lunches and materials. Go to <http://bit.ly/fibercasper>.

Wyoming small acreage owners, including fiber crafters and entrepreneurs, can learn all aspects of flock and fiber management from a range of experts.

“This symposium is the first I know of where national and state experts will provide guidance for landowners on raising the sheep, caring for the fiber and using the fiber to create individual market items,” said Cotton.

Sessions address the needs and interests of small-acreage owners and home-based business owners and help them build valuable relationships, he said.

Besides UW Extension, other groups represented are the Wyoming Wool Growers Association, the American Sheep Industry Association, *The Shepherd* magazine and Mountain Meadow Wool in Buffalo.

“Wyoming wool has quality factors which are the premium for garments in the U.S.,” said Cotton. “Australia competes directly with Wyoming wool for products such as socks, military uniforms and fine apparel marketed by companies such as Filson, Lands’ End and L.L. Bean.”

He said more than 30,000 new small-acreage owners in the state are looking for opportunities to enhance income from their land.

“The flock and fiber symposium is designed to help them produce the best product while engaging in appropriate land stewardship practices,” he said.

Wyoming had 3.75 million sheep in 1940. Sheep and lambs numbered 345,000 in 2015, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Office, with the wool produced in the state worth more than \$4.5 million.

If as few as 2-5 percent of small-acreage owners added small flocks or fiber production, their efforts could generate a significant enterprise within the state, said Cotton.

“In central Wyoming alone, 300 small acreage owners could introduce over a quarter million into local economies,” he said, “plus add to a growing partnership between traditional and new agriculture.”

The vision isn't limited to sheep.

The fiber care principles demonstrated at the symposium also apply to alpacas, rabbits, goats and other fiber animals, Cotton stressed, and the marketing guidance applies to anyone wishing to start a new business.

For more information, contact Cotton at 307-235-9400 or secotton@natronacounty-wy.gov.

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