



## ASI'S PRIORITY POLICY ISSUES

ASI is the national organization representing the interests of the 100,000 sheep producers located throughout the United States. From East to West, farm flocks to range operations, ASI works to represent the interests of all producers.

### **REAUTHORIZATION OF A NEW FARM BILL**

- The current farm economy is in a dire state where U.S. sheep producers are dealing with record high input costs and depressed or flat markets for lamb and wool. The infrastructure a farm bill provides is paramount for the survival of the industry and continued ability to feed and clothe the U.S.
- The 2018 Farm Bill was enacted nearly seven years ago, and farm country is in desperate need of a new five-year farm bill that provides producers with a reasonable safety net that reflects current market prices and conditions, encourages rural growth, and supports the production of U.S. food and fiber.
- ASI strongly supports the reauthorization of the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Bill) with the inclusion of funding for Title XII orphan programs. Other farm bill priorities important to the sheep industry include:
  - Increase the Wool Marketing Assistance Loan rate
  - Prioritize funding for orphan programs such as the Wool Apparel Manufacturers Trust Fund, U.S. Wool Research and U.S. Pima Cotton (Agricultural Fiber Products Trust) and Sheep Production and Marketing Grant Program (SPMGP)
  - Request for USDA to develop a risk management tool for the sheep industry
  - Support for animal disease prevention and management initiatives and programs
  - Support for Minor Use Minor Species (MUMS) Animal Pharmaceuticals
  - Increase funding for USDA Foreign Agriculture Service (FAS) export programs
  - Reauthorize the Livestock Mandatory Reporting (LMR) Act

### **H2-A TEMPORARY AGRICULTURAL WORKERS**

- Sheep farmers and ranchers depend on a workable temporary foreign labor program to help care for more than one-third of the ewes and lambs in the U.S. and, for over 50 years, have used and helped craft the current provisions of the H2A program.
- Any guest worker program MUST maintain special procedures for sheep producers and give our members a fighting chance to compete in an increasingly difficult financial environment, while protecting both domestic and foreign ag workers.
- The "Limited Allocation for Certain Special Procedures Industries" in any final legislation must include not less than 2,500 annual visas and a codification of key special procedures.

### **LEVEL THE TRADE PLAYING FIELD**

- In 2024, imported lamb and mutton accounted for 73% of total U.S. lamb and mutton consumption, a share that has steadily increased over the last 25 years to reach this critical point. The livelihood of America's sheep and lamb producers and sustainability of the broader industry is literally at risk.
- Australia accounts for 74% of lamb imports, followed by New Zealand at 25%, representing 99% of the imported lamb that has displaced American lamb in our own market. Imports only serve to further compound the damage our own federal and state governments regulations have on our ability to compete.
- ASI encourages Congress and the Administration to address the concerning the surge in foreign lamb imports using tariffs on Australia and New Zealand. ASI asks for your support in addressing the surge in foreign lamb and including lamb imports in the agriculture/food tariff plan expected to be announced on April 2, 2025.

For more information, please visit the ASI website at [www.sheepusa.org](http://www.sheepusa.org).  
Please contact Jim Richards at [jrichards@cgagroup.com](mailto:jrichards@cgagroup.com) or (202) 448-9509 for more information.



### **BLACK VULTURE RELIEF**

- Vultures are increasingly depredating on lambs across regions of the country further adding to the predator losses and costs sheep producers are already incurring.
- ASI strongly supports the reintroduction of H.R.1437 – the [Black Vulture Relief Act of 2023](#) which benefits the sheep industry by authorizing livestock producers and their employees to take black vultures without a permit to prevent death, injury, or destruction to livestock, and for other purposes.

### **MINOR USE MINOR SPECIES ANIMAL PHARMACEUTICALS**

- U.S. sheep producers have limited means to protect and prevent disease in their animals which is critical for ensuring a socially responsible and sustainable U.S. sheep industry and the safety of the national food supply.
- The current Food and Drug Administration (FDA) animal drug-approval process is unworkable for the sheep industry. It is prohibitively expensive, discouraging research, development, and data submission that could lead to new products for the prevention and treatment of sheep diseases.
- ASI requests a study by the General Accountability Office (GAO) to evaluate the effectiveness of The Minor Use and Minor Species Animal Health Act of 2004 (MUMS Act) for the U.S. sheep industry.

### **ESTATE TAX REPEAL**

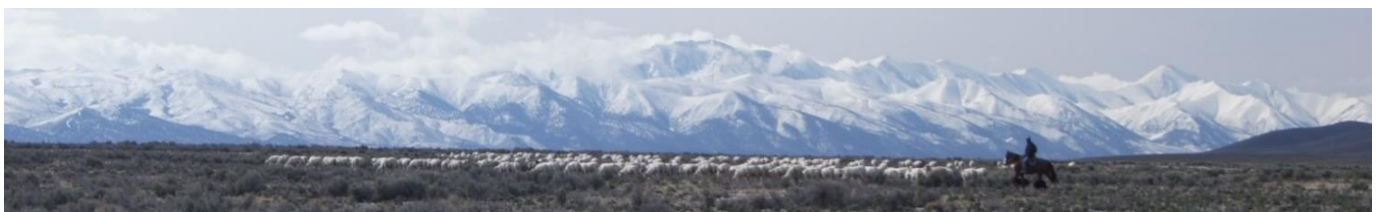
- Nearly 99% of the country's two million farms and ranches are owned and operated by individuals, family partnerships and family corporations, and the sheep industry is a prime example of traditionally being run by generational family farmers and ranchers.
- Multigenerational operations tend to be disproportionately impacted by the death tax and repealing the current estate tax code helps protect the integrity and extend the life of family-owned farms and ranches.
- ASI supports the reintroduction of H.R.7035 – the [Death Tax Repeal Act](#) and tax policy that works to support the family farmers and ranchers in this country that are relied upon to grow America's food and fiber.

### **PROTECTING COMMODITY CHECKOFF PROGRAMS**

- Since 2002, the American Lamb Checkoff has played a pivotal role in progressing national promotion and research which has resulted in invaluable return on investment for all sectors of the sheep industry.
- ASI strongly opposes any attempts to pass anti-checkoff legislation that undermines the foundation of checkoff programs and their intended purpose to benefit both producers and consumers.

### **FY2026 APPROPRIATIONS REQUESTS**

- USDA APHIS Wildlife Services
- U.S. Sheep Experiment Station (USSES)
- Bighorn Sheep in Domestic Sheep Allotments
- Scrapie Eradication



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## FARM BILL

ASI strongly supports reauthorization of the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Bill) with the inclusion of funding for orphan programs. A farm bill should provide producers a reasonable safety net, encourage rural growth, and support the production of U.S. food and fiber. The 2018 Farm Bill safety net must be modernized to address current market conditions, inflated input costs and supply chain disruptions.

### **WOOL APPAREL MANUFACTURERS TRUST FUND, U.S. WOOL RESEARCH, AND U.S. PIMA COTTON (ORPHAN PROGRAM)**

- Over the past few decades our trade laws have had a devastating impact on America's tailored clothing and textile industries and the American sheep farmers and ranchers who produce the wool they rely on.
  - Tariffs on imported fabrics used in tailored clothing (25% on worsted fabrics; 11% on cotton fabrics) far exceed the duties imposed on imported tailored clothing. This "tariff inversion" operates as a "Made in America" tax.
  - A special rule in several trade agreements grants tailored clothing made in numerous countries duty-free entry, further compounding the negative impact of the underlying "tariff inversion."
- These programs are consistent with recent Congressional efforts to strengthen American manufacturing and reduce the offshoring of jobs. Many of the programs' beneficiaries are spinners, fabric makers, and cut-and-sew operators who pivoted to become part of a vital PPE supply chain during the initial COVID outbreak. They are also the same folks who grow and raise the fibers and produce the fabric and apparel worn by our Warfighters.
- For more than two decades these programs have helped American farmers and ranchers, factories and jobs survive.
- Collectively, these programs' beneficiaries still pay more in tariffs than they receive in payments. However, the programs' designs fairly balance the interests of each stakeholder in the production chain and creates a more level playing field against foreign competitors.
- **ASI strongly supports the related provisions contained in H.R. 8467 – the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2024 – in the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress. Specifically, the Agricultural Fiber Trust Fund and its permanent funding baseline. Or, at the very least, the inclusion of funding for orphan programs in any short-term extension.**

### **SHEEP PRODUCTION AND MARKETING GRANT PROGRAM (ORPHAN PROGRAM)**

- The Sheep Production and Marketing Grant Program (SPMGP) (section 209 of the AMA of 1946 as amended by section 12102 of the 2018 farm bill) is intimately connected to the National Sheep Industry Improvement Center (NSIIC).
- The SPMGP provides funds on a competitive basis to national organizations whose mission is to strengthen and enhance the production and marketing of sheep and sheep products in the United States, including the improvement of infrastructure business, resource development, and the development of innovative approaches to solve long-term needs.
- **ASI strongly supports reauthorization and funding of the Sheep Production and Marketing Grant Program or extension and funding as an orphan program in any short-term extension.**

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### **WOOL MARKETING ASSISTANCE LOAN AND LOAN DEFICIENCY PAYMENT**

- The 2018 Farm Bill authorizes nonrecourse marketing assistance loans (MALs) and loan deficiency payments (LDPs) for wool to eligible producers who grow and shear wool.
- The national loan rate for graded wool established in 2002 is \$1.15/pound. The nongraded wool rate established in 2002 is \$0.40 per pound. With almost 25 years having gone by, these rates have not kept pace with markets and producer costs, which have been further exacerbated by inflation.
- **With the recent low levels of producer income, ASI supports a re-examination of the wool loan rate and requests an update that provides an effective risk management tool for sheep producers and supports the loan rates included in H.R. 8467 – the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2024.**

### **SHEEP INDUSTRY RISK MANAGEMENT TOOL**

- In February of 2024, Watts & Associates (at the behest of USDA's Risk Management Agency) issued a report evaluating risk management tools available to the sheep industry, or lack thereof. The report acknowledged the need for a quality risk management tool for lamb but ultimately did not provide any recommendations.
- **ASI strongly supports inserting language into the next farm bill directing USDA to develop a program or insurance tool that offers and provides risk management protection to domestic lamb producers.**

### **ANIMAL DISEASE PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT**

- National Animal Vaccine and Veterinary Countermeasures Bank (NAVVCB) – Established in the 2018 Farm Bill, is the U.S.-only vaccine bank allows USDA to stockpile animal vaccines and related products to use in the event of an outbreak of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) or other high-impact foreign animal diseases
- National Animal Disease Preparedness and Response Program (NADPRP) - This program allows APHIS to collaborate with animal health partners throughout the nation.
- National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) – The NAHLN is a laboratory network that collaborates with the National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) on disease monitoring.
- The National Veterinary Stockpile (NVS) – The NVS provides the veterinary countermeasures that states, tribes, and territories need to respond to animal disease outbreaks.
- **ASI strongly supports continued funding of these programs as established in the 2018 Farm Bill under Title 7, Chapter 109, Section 8308a.**

### **MINOR USES, MINOR SPECIES ANIMAL PHARMACEUTICALS**

- U.S. sheep producers have limited means to protect and prevent disease in their animals as animal health and welfare are critical aspects in ensuring a socially responsible and sustainable U.S. sheep industry and the safety of the national food supply.
- The cost to bring a new animal drug to market is rising and many pharmaceutical companies are not investing in bringing new drugs for sheep or other minor species to the U.S. market.
- **ASI requests a study by the General Accountability Office (GAO) to evaluate the effectiveness of The Minor Use and Minor Species Animal Health Act of 2004 (MUMS Act) for the U.S. sheep industry and recommendations on the steps required to provide access to the same disease management tools utilized by our foreign competitors.**

### **EXPORT PROGRAMS OF THE USDA / FOREIGN AGRICULTURE SERVICE (FAS)**

- With approximately 60% of all U.S. wool exported, access to foreign markets is critical for the sheep industry.
- **ASI supports the House and Senate proposals from last Congress to double funding for USDA's FAS Market Access Program (MAP), the Foreign Market Development Program (FMD) programs as well as general support for the Quality Samples Program (QSP). These are critical to the export of American wool.**

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## H2A AND TEMPORARY AG WORKER PROGRAMS

The H-2A foreign worker program has been essential to the sheep farmers and ranchers who depend on temporary foreign labor to help care for more than one third of the ewes and lambs in the U. S. and, for over 50 years, have used and helped craft the current provisions of the program. While it has worked to fulfill that purpose, it has become incredibly burdensome for employers from a regulatory and cost standpoint. More alarmingly, the artificially inflated mandated minimum wages demanded of employer's have crippled American sheep producers' ability to compete with lamb imports and have made the program outright cost prohibitive for many producers. While the program itself is critical for a secure food supply in the United States, regulatory and potential statutory changes would shore up livestock producer's ability to produce a high quality, affordable product for consumers while ensuring a more stable labor force. The Department of Labor and Department of Homeland Security should review and address the following topics to achieve this mission.

### Requests to Dept. of Labor for Regulatory Changes to Improve the Existing H-2A Program

1. **The Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR).** The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) delegates authority to Department of Labor to (1) determine there are not sufficient able, willing and qualified United States workers available to perform the agricultural labor or services of a temporary or seasonal nature for which an employer desires to hire temporary foreign workers; and (2) the employment of the H-2A worker(s) will not adversely affect the wages and working conditions of workers in the United States similarly employed. The INA is silent as to how the Secretary of Labor is to determine the effect of U.S. employers hiring H-2A foreign employees, whether adverse or not. However, it clearly places an affirmative duty to the Secretary of Labor to ensure any effect is not adverse.

Current regulations promulgated by the Department of Labor use irrelevant surveys and wage formulas to force mandated minimum wages on H-2A employers that do not reflect real market conditions and are artificially escalated. These are referred to as the Adverse Effect Wage Rates. Ironically, these mandated minimum wages do not prove there has in fact been any adverse impact resulting from the employment of H-2A employees. Rather than performing accurate evaluation of the potential effects of employing H-2A employees, the Department of Labor forces an arbitrary minimum wage on employers that is devoid of economic rationale. The livestock industry petitions the Department and the Secretary to amend or repeal existing regulations to conform to the INA requirement. If an adverse effect is determined, all current regulatory methods of determining the different levels of the AEWR should be amended to reflect applicable market conditions and sound economic rationale.

2. **Farmworker Protection Final Rule.** Released in early 2024, this regulation has been subjected to legal action resulting in preliminary injunction rulings. The cost to implement an obviously contentious and possibly unconstitutional regulation has been very burdensome for employers and the Department of Labor. The regulation as finalized is a maze of repetitive and questionable rules that may be beyond the agency's authority. For example, the rule mandates "progressive discipline" procedures and access to worker housing (on ranch or on the open range) by worker advocates or union representatives that seem to be lifted directly from NLRB union rules rather than farmworker or herding regulations. There are three partial preliminary injunctions that have been issued against the final rule, each of which cites potential unconstitutional provisions of the rule. The Farmworker Protection Final Rule should be repealed entirely.

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- 3. Special Procedures.** A portion of the livestock industry utilizes special provisions within the broad H-2A programs. The ability to hire temporary foreign herders dates back to World War 2, years before the INA, and when the current H2A was created in 1986, Congress directed that DOL use “special procedures,” in recognition that herding is significantly different than crop agriculture. DOL issued special provisions beginning in 1989. Their existence is a direct result of the unique requirements to care for livestock in range production and shear sheep. Adjustments and updates to the current special procedures are needed to better serve the needs of today’s livestock producers. Some of the more urgent needs would be:

  - An adjustment of the required “on call” work schedule to qualify for a range herder occupation.
  - Afford Sheep Shearers the exemption from filing deadlines that range herders already have.
  - Recognize the exemption from Migrant and Seasonal Protection Act given to Sheep Shearers and remove the requirement for employers to carry multiple and overlapping surety bonds.

**Requests to Dept. of Homeland Security for Regulatory Changes to Improve the Existing H-2A program.**

- 1. Asylum Fees.** As of April 1, 2024, USCIS assesses an “Asylum Fee” to each petition form submitted for approval to employ H-2A workers. In addition to the regular fee increases, the cumulative cost impact ranges from an 83% increase for a small employer to 268% increase for large employers. While USCIS cites increasing cost of processing forms to justify the increase in fees, it’s not clear that there is a nexus to form processing expenses. Employers are assessed a fee (\$300 per form for small employers/ \$600 per form for employers with more than 25 fe) each time they file a nonimmigrant form. DHS fees should reflect actual costs and increases should result in improvements and efficiency. It is unfair to shift the cost of other immigration programs to H-2A program users by adding onerous fees. The asylum fee should be removed from the form fees immediately.
- 2. Modernizing H-2A Program Requirements, Oversight, and Worker Protections Regulation.** USCIS released this regulation on 12/18/2024 with an effective date of 01/17/2025. Despite its title, the final rule does nothing to modernize the program but focuses heavily on expanding DHS oversight of H-2 program use. The rule mandates that employers will be liable for any prohibited fees paid by employees, whether the employer was aware of such transactions or not. Further, DHS is granted additional authority to conduct surprise inspections accessing employer’s property and even penalizes any employer the investigator deems “uncooperative”. Along the lines of the Department of Labor’s Worker Protection Regulation, this final rule was not made in good faith, penalizes employers making every effort to comply and does very little to actually protect H-2A workers. The Modernizing H-2A Program Requirements, Oversight, and Worker Protections Regulation should be repealed entirely.
- 3. Modernizing processing of H-2A petitions.** Beyond negligible case status updates on their website, USCIS has made no effort to improve or modernize the processing of H-2A petitions. Paper forms must be mailed to the processing center. Forms will be denied or returned without an actual ink signature. All notices are mailed via USPS. When those notices are lost by USPS, the agency will not answer inquiries. If a form is delayed beyond the agency purported 15-day processing time, employers must contact a congressional member to request help through the congressional liaison. Emailing notices would provide substantial cost savings for USCIS, shorten processing times and result in more reliable communication. A review of USCIS procedures and use of more economical resources and processes is urgently needed.

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## **Proposed Statutory Changes to the H2A Temporary Ag Worker Program Via New Legislation**

**Create a Workable H2A Temporary Ag Guestworker Program.** The current program is broken, it is expensive, flawed and plagued with red tape. A guestworker program should help sheep producers who are willing to pay a fair wage, employ law abiding, dependable noncitizen workers when no American workers are available or in the case of range herders, do not exist.

Instead, H2A employers are burdened with costly mandates and exposed to frivolous litigation. Employers must pay an artificially inflated wage rate (some states require additional overtime payments) that is higher than the prevailing wage in their region as well as housing, food, clothing and transportation for their workers at their own expense. These unnecessarily burdensome requirements place H2A employers at a competitive disadvantage in the marketplace and threaten the future of over one third of U.S. sheep producers.

A new H2A guestworker program must be reliable, efficient and fair, ensuring sheep farmers and ranchers will have access to a legal, stable supply of workers for seasonal as well as year-round work. Key components of any legislation should include the following industry specific provisions:

- **A fair wage rate based on production cost limitations and marketplace realities that is not artificially inflated or subject to unreasonable overtime payment requirements and accounts for all costs borne by the employer.**
- **Codification of the specific Special Procedures for Herders.**
- **A streamlined process to allow Herders to return to the same farm or ranch year after year.**
- **Extended stays for Herders up to 3 years.**
- **Allocation of a minimum of 2500 visas for “range herders” subject to the Special Procedures.**
- **Elimination of unnecessary fees and advertisement requirements.**



## BIGHORN SHEEP IN DOMESTIC SHEEP GRAZING ALLOTMENTS

In the Payette National Forest in Idaho, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) prohibited 13,000 sheep from grazing on their historic grazing allotments, driving one ranch out of business entirely and drastically reducing the operations of three others. The declared reason for this reduction was an obscure regulation of the National Forest Management Act allegedly requiring each national forest to maintain “minimum viable” populations of all vertebrate species found there.

Forest Service officials continue to make decisions on the future use of “*high risk*” allotments grazed by domestic sheep using the Payette decision, even though only 3 percent of federal sheep allotments overlap with occupied bighorn habitat. At a minimum 400,000 domestic sheep, and the families who raise and care for them, may be affected. The impacts are serious, affecting not only sheep operators and their employees, but meat packing plants, woolen mills, and even the military, which purchases twenty percent of the nation’s wool production to help equip America’s service men and women.

- Domestic sheep and bighorns have co-existed in many of the same areas for decades without, apparently, decimating bighorn herds.
- While *M. ovipneumoniae* (Movi) is often identified as the pathogen that causes respiratory disease in bighorns, there is no single pathogen responsible for causing the most common respiratory diseases in bighorn sheep clearly tied to domestic sheep contact on the open range. In fact, there are documented die-offs of bighorns in areas far removed from any domestic sheep, not to mention healthy bighorn populations that carry Movi.
- *M. ovipneumoniae* has been confirmed present in moose, caribou, mule and white-tailed deer, bison and other species. In many cases Movi has shown to be endemic if several species.
- USDA is heavily involved in research to identify the causes of bighorn diseases and transmission vectors and the sheep industry strongly supports this research. Yet, research conducted by USDA’s intramural science agency, the Agricultural Research Service, has specifically being *ignored* by USFS. In abject contravention to previous congressional direction.

ASI recognizes the legal obligations of the Forest Service and BLM to analyze all threats to the viability of bighorn sheep. However, ASI does not recognize “single species viability” as trumping all legal obligations for multiple use of federal lands, including grazing. Calls for closing various allotments and removing domestic sheep despite clear scientific cause and effect, have already occurred. Given this, ASI requests a simple, equitable exchange: provide suitable alternative allotments for those sheep operators whose permits in bighorn habitat have been reduced as a result of arbitrarily applied “science”.

This exchange represents more than just good intentions—making alternative allotments available will require completion of an environmental analysis and other clearances, and this can take some time. Therefore, translocations of domestic sheep to alternative allotments should not be mandated until NEPA is complete and all challenges to the use of those allotments by domestic sheep are resolved. ASI strongly supports this equitable approach allowing for the survival of the domestic sheep industry in the face of mounting challenges related to bighorn habitat.

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## **FY2026 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Request**

### **Proposed FY2026 Report Language:**

*Bighorn Sheep Conservation.*—The Committee directs the BLM and the Forest Service to complete Risk of Contact analyses using the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' occupied bighorn habitat maps, telemetry data, and recent bighorn observations. The Service is further directed to transparently and promptly share findings with other federal land management agencies, state and local governments, state wildlife agencies, and state and federal animal health professionals, including the Agricultural Research Service, permittees, and stakeholders. The Committee directs the Forest Service to engage the Agricultural Research Service and the aforementioned cooperating agencies and participants to ensure the best professional scientific understanding of where and if disease transmission occurs, and the degree of that risk, before making further management decisions that impact permittees. In direct acknowledgment of the fact that the presence of the pathogen most commonly blamed for causing respiratory disease in bighorn sheep, *M. ovipneumoniae*, has been confirmed as endemic in other wildlife species, the Committee directs the Service to sample other wildlife in occupied bighorn habitat for the presence of *M. ovipneumoniae*. The Forest Service is further directed, if warranted, to use this base of information to identify and implement actions to resolve high-risk of disease transmission allotments, including if agreeable to the permittee, the relocation of domestic sheep to lower-risk allotments, with minimal disruption and displacement of permittees. However, translocation of a permittee cannot be ordered until a proper analysis, in direct coordination with the Agricultural Research Service, of the risk of pathogen conveyance from species other than domestic sheep has been conducted. The Forest Service is directed to provide quarterly briefings to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations, both in writing and in person, on its progress and adherence to the directives contained herein.

### **Proposed FY2026 Bill Language:**

SEC. XXX. The Secretary of the Interior, with respect to public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management, and the Secretary of Agriculture, with respect to National Forest System lands, shall make vacant grazing allotments available to a holder of a grazing permit or lease issued by either Secretary if the lands covered by the permit or lease are unusable because of drought, wildfire, or conflict with wildlife, as determined by the Secretary concerned. *Provided*, That the terms and conditions contained in a permit or lease made available pursuant to this section shall be the same as the terms and conditions of the most recent permit or lease that was applicable to the vacant grazing allotment made available. *Provided further*, That Section 102 of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4332) shall not apply with respect to any Federal agency action under this section.



## SCRAPIE ERADICATION

Scrapie is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) affecting sheep and goats. It is a degenerative and eventually fatal brain disease and is in the same class of diseases as BSE in cattle and Chronic Wasting Disease in elk and deer. The presence of classical scrapie in the U.S. sheep and goat population affects industry economically through production losses, lost exports, and increased production and disposal costs. Following changes in the eradication efforts that focused on surveillance, genetic resistance and traceability, the US has finally come within three years of being declared free of scrapie.

- Scrapie was first discovered in US sheep in 1947, and has been diagnosed in thousands of flocks throughout the United States. In 2004, the sheep industry asked USDA to revamp its eradication program to accelerate the eradication effort with an emphasis on surveillance, development of genetic resistance in sheep and traceability.
- In 2004, one in 359 sheep were found to be positive for Scrapie. Since that time, the NSEP has nearly eliminated scrapie. In fact, the program has directly led to a reduced prevalence rate of 99%. The US is now finally within three years of being declared scrapie free.
- Scrapie has a long incubation period of approximately 5 years, which makes it necessary to wait at least seven years after the last case to declare the disease fully eradicated. The last case of scrapie identified in the US was in 2021.
- USDA's mandated identification, surveillance, and traceability of both sheep and goats has been critical to achieving the goal of Scrapie elimination. Scrapie eradication will help to preserve and open current and future export markets for US sheep products.
- For nearly 80 years, the U.S. sheep industry, working collaboratively with USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and state partners through the National Scrapie Eradication Program (NSEP).
- In order to ensure the goal of eradicating scrapie from U.S. sheep and goats is achieved, it is essential that federal spending on scrapie eradication within the Equine, Cervid and Small Ruminant Health Line be maintained at no less than FY2024 levels. **Accordingly, ASI urges Congress to fund the National Scrapie Eradication Program (NSEP) at \$19 million in FY2026 within APHIS' Equine, Cervid and Small Ruminant Health Line.**



## **Appropriations Bill**

Agriculture

### **Agency**

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

### **Account**

Salaries and Expenses

### **Program**

Equine, Cervid, and Small Ruminant Health Program

### **FY2025 Requested Amount and Language**

The Committee directs that not less than \$19 million shall be reserved for the **National Scrapie Eradication Program**.

### **Description**

Scrapie is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) affecting sheep and goats. The presence of classical scrapie in the U.S. sheep and goat population affects industry economically through production losses, lost exports, and increased production and disposal costs. Public health concerns related to the transmission of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) to humans have resulted in efforts to eradicate all TSEs in food-producing animals.

Surveillance for scrapie in the United States is conducted through the National Scrapie Eradication Program (NSEP), a cooperative State-Federal-industry program. The surveillance components of the NSEP include:

1. Regulatory Scrapie Slaughter Surveillance;
2. Non-slaughter surveillance (e.g., trace investigations, on-farm testing); and
3. The Scrapie Free Flock Certification Program.

The program's goals are to eradicate classical scrapie from the United States and to meet World Organization for Animal Health criteria for disease freedom. Since 2002, the prevalence of scrapie has decreased significantly through existing eradication efforts, largely a result of effective slaughter surveillance.

Since slaughter surveillance started in FY 2003, the percent of cull sheep found positive at slaughter (once adjusted for face color) has decreased 99 percent. However, in order to declare the U.S. "scrapie free", we must be able to prove to the world that we have conducted testing in all sheep and goat populations. This is why your submission of samples from sheep/goats over 18 months of age found dead or euthanized on your farm is extremely important. Without your help, we will not be able to declare the US free of scrapie, costing the sheep and goat industries approximately \$10 to \$20 million, annually.

### **Authorization**

U.S.C. 8301-8317; 7 CFR 2.22, 2.80, and 371.4

### **President's FY 2026 Budget Request**

TBD

### **FY 2025 (CR – funded FY25 at FY24 levels)**

\$35,000,000

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## U.S. SHEEP EXPERIMENT STATION (USSES)

In FY 2026, Congressional recognition that USSES' unique role in ensuring valuable livestock, rangeland and wildlife research efforts and an irreplaceable field laboratory continue is appreciated. As such, ASI supports increasing the station's funding to \$5.141 million in FY2026 in order to meet the increased and unique demands and mission USSES faces.

This 100-year-old research station has long resulted in beneficial results, particularly for the nation's sheep industry. This one-of-a-kind USDA research "Living Laboratory" consists of a "real-world" fully functional research infrastructure situated on extensive land holdings of native rangelands and forests representative of the public and private lands that over 40% of US livestock (sheep and beef) ranchers depend on for their livelihood and to feed America. The USSES mission is to solve problems. To do so the USSES brings a unique and collaborative approach that has gathered a diverse group of stakeholders.

- **USSES Rangeland Collaboratory:** Incorporates over 50 interested parties directly into research from the livestock industry, conservation and environmental sector, university research and extension, rural communities, and federal and state land management agencies to co-produce new knowledge urgently needed to manage public lands for both food production and conservation goals. A key component is the ability to establish funded Research Support Agreements with partners, such as the University of Idaho.

- **Rangeland Fire & Grazing Research:** The USSES has 100 years of legacy rangeland, fire, and grazing research captured in its scientific records and in the actual fauna and flora dominating its research rangelands. USSES research in this arena provides **critical insights** about the effects of fire and grazing on forage quality, fuels management, soil health, biodiversity, wildlife habitat, and how grazing livestock can shape the structure and composition of rangeland plant communities, which serves livestock producers, land management agencies (like US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management), wildland and prescribed fire managers and operators, wildlife conservation groups, and university partners.

- **Land Use and Habitat Conflict Research:** Because of its unique location near Dubois, ID, the USSES is able to help address many key issues of the day, including habitat conflicts between wildlife and livestock, and resource conflicts between human recreation, sport, industry, and wildlife. Some examples of these types of conflict include species of concern like the sage grouse and bighorn sheep, and protected species such as grizzly bears.

- **Livestock & Wildlife Conflict Research:** *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* pathogens are at the heart of the conflict between bighorn sheep and domestic sheep on the rangeland. Its presence impacts the sustainability of both the domestic sheep industry and bighorn sheep. To date, the main method for protecting the health of bighorns from potential pathogen contamination is to separate the animals from domestic sheep, which has resulted in the considerable loss of sheep industry access to grazing allotments. The USSES is part of two key projects addressing this conflict:

- The *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* Project, is designed to identify appropriate and economic ways to prevent disease in livestock and wildlife and importantly to provide for shared land use promoting economic growth, and
- The Intelligent Virtual Fence Initiative, which is designed to aid in the separation of wild and domestic sheep on open range and could serve to allow the continued use of sheep grazing allotments. These two project examples are supported by ASI and their continuation will require all current staff positions to be retained.

The research at the USSES will ultimately reduce and possibly eliminate conflicts between the agriculture and conservation communities. Such an accomplishment would benefit both the livelihoods of sheep ranchers and enhance wild sheep conservation, benefiting rural communities and their continued viability.

For more information, please visit the ASI website at [www.sheepusa.org](http://www.sheepusa.org).

Please contact Jim Richards at [jrichards@cgagroup.com](mailto:jrichards@cgagroup.com) or (202) 448-9509 for more information.



## **Appropriations Bill**

Agriculture

### **Agency**

Agricultural Research Service

### **Account**

Salaries and Expenses

### **FY2026 Requested Amount**

\$5.141 million

### **Description**

ARS is the principal in house research agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Congress first authorized federally supported agricultural research in the Organic Act of 1862, which established what is now USDA. That statute directed the Commissioner of Agriculture “to acquire and preserve in his department all information he can obtain by means of books and correspondence, and by practical and scientific experiments.” The scope of USDA’s agricultural research programs has been expanded and extended more than 60 times since the Department was created.

The 100-year-old research station has demonstrated an impact on all of agriculture, especially the nation’s sheep industry. Its 48,000 acres of land provides a unique location and is exclusively positioned for collaborative large-scale integrated livestock, wildlife and rangeland research.

The mission of the USDA, ARS, Range Sheep Production Efficiency Research Unit, U.S. Sheep Experiment Station is to develop integrated methods for increasing production efficiency of sheep and to simultaneously improve the sustainability of rangeland ecosystems.

### **Proposed FY2026 Report Language**

The Committee recognizes the U.S. Sheep Experiment Station’s valuable and historical role in basic and applied research on grazing lands and sheep genetics. The Station is also the repository of over five decades of sage grouse research and data. It is not only valuable for the domestic livestock industry, but also the Western region’s wildlife interface. The Committee provides an additional \$1 million to enhance the viability and multi-species health resulting from wildlife and domestic sheep interaction on shared landscapes and urges ARS to continue engaging collaborators to ensure the station functions as an agricultural research facility while also evaluating opportunities through a domestic livestock / wildlife collaboration.

### **Authorization**

The Agricultural Research Service (ARS) was established on November 2, 1953, pursuant to authority vested in the Secretary of Agriculture by 5 U.S.C. 301 and Reorganization Plan No. 2 of 1953, and other authorities.

### **President’s FY 2025 Budget Request**

TBD



## WILDLIFE SERVICES

The American Sheep Industry Association (ASI) urges Congress to provide sufficient funding to the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Wildlife Services (WS) program. ASI opposes any effort to restrict or eliminate WS funding and strongly urges continued vigilance to stave off any potential WS program attacks during House/Senate consideration of the FY 2026 Agriculture Appropriations Bill.

Wildlife Services provides Federal leadership and expertise to resolve conflicts between people and wildlife, allowing them to coexist while protecting aircraft, pilots and the passengers they transport; agriculture; natural resources, including threatened and endangered species; property and infrastructure; and public health and safety. WS personnel and programs minimize the billions in losses incurred annually by producers of livestock, aquaculture, small grains, fruits, vegetables, and other agricultural products.

Wildlife causes more than **\$12.8 billion** in damage every year to natural resources, public infrastructure, private property, and agriculture. Additionally, wildlife predators cause more than **\$232 million** in death loss to livestock. WS prevents and reduces livestock predation through technical assistance (education and outreach) to producers and operational management programs.

In FY23, WS provided more than 20,800 technical assistance activities that enabled 6,061 livestock producers to implement improved husbandry and methods such as use of guard animals, exclusion, fencing, and predator dispersal. These activities included 53 predator management workshops attended by more than 2,700 individuals from 14 states.

WS supported USDA's Animal Plant Health Inspection Services' emergency response efforts to animal diseases, natural disasters, and hazardous spills. In FY23, WS deployed 102 personnel on 172 deployments for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) and African Swine Fever (ASF). WS personnel have physically deployed to assist 12 states in response to HPAI. WS responded to the ASF detection on the island of Hispaniola and since detection in July 2021, have removed a total of 4,921 feral swine and have sampled 3,042 for ASF on Puerto Rico and US Virgin Islands through FY23. The National Wildlife Disease Program (NWDP) also coordinated sample collection and evaluation or assisted state agencies with many other diseases in wildlife to include SARS-CoV-2, plague, tularemia, leptospirosis, rabies, chronic wasting disease, and rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus.

Wildlife Services is an Agency that is uniquely important to the livestock industry and has the knowledge and skill, as well as the equipment, to track, capture and remove predators when they cause serious damage. Livestock producers are not the only beneficiaries – every single American citizen also benefits.

**ASI supports an increase of \$5 million for Wildlife Damage Management to account for increased predation and wildlife interaction and reduced services as a result of WS' increased NEPA compliance costs.**

For more information, please visit the ASI website at [www.sheepusa.org](http://www.sheepusa.org).  
Please contact Jim Richards at [jrichards@cgagroup.com](mailto:jrichards@cgagroup.com) or (202) 448-9509 for more information.

**Appropriations Bill**

Agriculture

**Agency**Animal and Plant Health Inspection  
Service**Account**

Wildlife Services

**Program**

Wildlife Damage Management

**Requested Amount**

\$127,5000,000

**Description**

The Wildlife Damage Management (WDM) program resolves human/wildlife conflicts and protects agriculture, human health and safety, personal property, and natural resources from wildlife damage and wildlife-borne diseases in the United States. This program protects agriculture by protecting livestock from predators, managing invasive species such as feral swine and beaver damage, conducting a national rabies management program, and managing wildlife species and diseases.

Livestock losses attributed to predators cost producers more than \$178 million annually, according to the most recent surveys by National Agriculture Statistics Service. Cost-benefit analyses have shown that for each dollar spent on livestock protection, APHIS saves producers between \$2 and \$7 in losses. APHIS prevents and reduces livestock predation through education, technical assistance to producers, and management programs. In FY 2014, APHIS' WDM program helped more than 11,000 producers in the western United States with livestock valued at more than \$2.3 billion.

**Authorization**7 U.S.C 426-426d (Control of predatory  
and other wild animals)**President's FY 2026 Budget Request**

TBD

**FY 2025 (CR – funded FY25 at FY24  
levels)**

\$122,500,000

**Appropriations Bill**

Agriculture

**Agency**

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

**Account**

Wildlife Services

**Program**

Wildlife Services Methods Development

**Requested Amount**

\$25, 500, 000

**Description**

The Wildlife Services Methods Development (WSMD) program works with cooperators to conduct research and develop socially responsible methods to prevent and mitigate damage caused by wildlife and invasive species on agricultural productions, and to detect and prevent wildlife diseases that may impact animal health and agricultural biosecurity. This program provides scientific information to support the development and implementation of methods for managing wildlife damage. These methods enable APHIS, cooperators, and individuals to protect crops, livestock, natural resources, property, and public health and safety. The WSMD program serves as an international leader in non-lethal research to reduce wildlife damage.

**Authorization**7 U.S.C 426-426d (Control of predatory and  
other wild animals)**President's FY 2026 Budget Request**

TBD

**FY 2025 (CR – funded FY25 at FY24  
levels)**

\$25,500,000