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ASI Honors 2026 Award Winners Recognizing Service, Innovation, and Industry Impact

Presented during ASI's Annual Convention in Reno, the awards highlight the full spectrum of leadership that keeps U.S. sheep production strong, from volunteer service and applied research to data-driven breeding and year-round producer communication.

RENO, Nev. (Jan. 31, 2026) – The American Sheep Industry Association (ASI) recognized six award winners during its 2026 Annual Convention, held Jan. 28-31 in Reno, NV. Convention week brought together approximately 425 attendees for 60+ meetings and working sessions, convening producers, partners, researchers, and industry leaders from across the country.

“Convention is where our best ideas get pressure-tested and then sent back home to work,” said Ben Lehfeldt, ASI President.

ASI's annual awards honor individuals and organizations whose work strengthens the sheep industry in tangible ways through steady leadership, producer-first problem solving, applied research, progressive production practices, and trusted communication that helps producers stay informed and visible.

“When sheep people step up, at home, in their communities, and for the industry, we all move forward. This is what leadership looks like in action,” said Brad Boner, ASI Executive Board Member and Past President.

2026 ASI Award Recipients

McClure Silver Ram Award: Bob Buchholz

Bob Buchholz was recognized for long-term service and steady leadership rooted in the Texas Hill Country, where his family's ranching history dates back to the 1850s. He has served in leadership roles at both the state and national levels, including ASI executive board service, and has provided Farm Bill testimony.

Additional background: Buchholz and his family are also known for practical stewardship and resilience through changing conditions, including predator pressure and adaptive management practices.

Industry Innovation Award: Dr. Reid Redden

The Industry Innovation Award honored Reid Redden, PhD, for producer-first work that tackles

real livestock-management challenges. Redden served as a state sheep extension specialist and professor at North Dakota State University and Texas A&M University for a combined 15 years, becoming widely known for practical, on-the-ground problem solving.

Peter Orwick Campender Award: Dr. Christopher Schauer

The Peter Orwick Campender Award recognized Christopher Schauer, PhD, one of the sheep industry's most published scientists. Best known for his work in sheep nutrition with research extending into reproduction, genetics, and more, Schauer was honored for a collaborative approach that delivers real value to producers and researchers nationwide.

Distinguished Producer Award: Brian, Carolyn, and Brandon Bitner

The Distinguished Producer Award went to Brian, Carolyn, and Brandon Bitner, a family recognized for progressive, data-driven production and leadership in Utah and nationally. Each maintains their own herd, together representing a significant portion of Utah's commercial ewes. They use National Sheep Improvement Program (NSIP) elite rams and performance data to guide selection, while remaining deeply involved in industry leadership and producer issues.

Wool Excellence Award: Dan Gutzman

The 2026 Wool Excellence Award honored longtime Pendleton Woolen Mills wool buyer Dan Gutzman, recognized for decades of service to American wool and U.S. wool producers. A former ASI Wool Roundtable Chair, Gutzman was celebrated for steady leadership and strong relationships with growers, following in the footsteps of his father, a past recipient.

Shepherd's Voice Award for Media: Andy Schwab / Northern Ag Network

ASI presented its Shepherd's Voice Award for Media to Andy Schwab and Northern Ag Network for year-round coverage that keeps sheep producers visible and informed across the West. Schwab was recognized for consistent interviews, sponsorships, and on-site presence, because "size is no barrier" when it comes to telling producers' stories.

About ASI

The American Sheep Industry Association (ASI) is the national organization representing the interests of U.S. sheep producers, advancing the sheep industry through targeted work in policy, animal health, market development, education, and producer-driven leadership.

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