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Sheep industry shares farm bill priorities

The American Sheep Industry Association recently shared with the members of the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee and the House of Representatives Agriculture Committee the industry's priorities for the next farm bill.

"The industry's provisions in the farm bill are very modest in the scope of agriculture spending but provide the only risk management available for America's sheep producers," commented Peter Orwick, ASI executive director. "The industry priorities essentially extend the programs each as authorized in the 2008 farm bill."

The National Sheep Industry Improvement Center was authorized in the current farm bill with \$1 million in mandatory funds and up to \$10 million in appropriations authorized per year of the legislation. A formal regulation to implement the center for grant-making capability was published in late 2010, and the board of directors was appointed by the secretary with its inaugural meeting held in January 2011. The program is eligible for at least \$10 million in mandated spending in the farm bill and is considered critical to the top national priority of increasing the U.S. sheep inventory.

The Loan Deficiency Program for wool and unshorn pelts with nine categories of graded wool-loan rates based on a national rate of \$1.15 per pound grease and a non-graded rate of \$0.40 per pound. The Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute analysis supports a national rate of \$1.20 to make graded loans actually available to the industry. Since 2002, there have only been a few months for very limited categories where a graded loan was usable versus the non-graded category. The non-graded category was intended to provide marketing assistance to flocks too small to justify quality grading of wool with laboratory testing. The 2009 crop-year loan deficiency payments total was approximately \$8.5 million with nearly 15,000 sheep producers participating. The 2010 LDP total was \$7.5 million. The wool market increased

worldwide in 2011, so there were no payments for the year. Approximately 10 percent of applicants are producers from the Navajo Nation.

ASI was a strong supporter of the Disaster Trust Fund and found the Livestock Indemnity Program created in the 2008 legislation to be a lifesaver for many farms and ranch families in the intermountain west and northern plains that lost tens of thousands of sheep in the severe spring and winter storms of 2008 and 2009. Report language addressing storm losses on range lambing operations would be helpful to program administration.

The spending cap currently in place for livestock insurance at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Risk Management Agency is \$20 million. With the inclusion of a new dairy insurance program, the cap will not be sufficient in the future for the needs of the Livestock Risk Program for lamb. The cap must be increased substantially in the next farm bill.

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