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****PRESS RELEASE****

THE MONTANA WOOL GROWERS ASSOCIATION ANNOUNCES NEW OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

DECEMBER 14, 2015--The Montana Wool Growers Association (MWGA) is pleased to report its new officers and directors. The new directors and officers were approved by MWGA's membership during the Association's 132nd Annual Convention, which was held in Billings on December 4th and 5th.

The weather was unusually nice this year which made travel to the convention easier than in years past. Participants at the convention discussed a wide range of topics impacting Montana's sheep and wool industry, including increased federal regulatory burdens on agriculture producers, sheep production and research developments, young producer involvement, Ag safety, H2A rule changes, and wool outlook and trends.

U.S. Representative Ryan Zinke attended the convention and provided MWGA's membership with an update on the EPA's proposed Waters of the United States rule and on the security threat posed by ISIS. In addition, gubernatorial candidate Greg Gianforte and Supreme Court candidate Kristen Juras also attended and were active participants in the speed shearing contest. The annual "Make It With Wool" Fashion Review and NFR Calcutta were held Saturday night at the banquet and provided convention goers with worthwhile entertainment to round out the event.

The MWGA also used the convention to recognize the important work provided by its members to Montana's rural communities, and took the opportunity to introduce its membership to its new Executive Secretary and President.

- **Dave McEwen** of Galata, was elected to take the reins as President of the MWGA:

Dave has several years of experience in the sheep industry and has now served in every office of the MWGA. Dave and Lenora moved to the Sweet Grass Hills in 1992 as 1st generation ranchers where they currently raise their cows and sheep. They have two children, Forrest and Johna, who actively participate in running the ranch. MWGA is fortunate to have Dave as a leader in the industry. Dave takes pride in the association and looks forward to promoting Montana's sheep and wool products and advocating for its producer's rights.

McEwen replaces Greg Wichman of Hilger as President. Wichman served the sheep industry faithfully for the previous two year period. McEwen had a few things to say in regards to Greg's time spent on the board.

“Greg, while adding a quiet sense of humor, kept us on the level as a business. His passion to be involved in our state and nation’s capital and with ASI were next to none. He took on the reconstruction of the Department of Livestock and still sits on the advisory board today. Greg will never be missed in the industry as his involvement in sheep, machinery, and hay will always be present. Thanks Greg.”

- **Kevin Halverson** of Big Timber was selected by the MWGA board members to assume the duties of the Vice President:

Kevin epitomizes MWGA’s mission of serving small Montana communities. He is a 4th generation sheep producer from Sweet Grass County. His family has run sheep there since 1883. Kevin, along with his wife, Shirley, run a cow/calf and sheep operation. They utilize their sheep for weed control and also have an H2A herder. Halverson is the past president of the Sweet Grass County Wool Marketing Association and part owner of Montana Natural Lamb. The 5th and 6th generation are also on the ranch, helping run the place and keeping Grandma and Grandpa busy.

- **Ben Lehfeldt** of Lavina becomes the newest member of MWGA’s Board.

Ben is a 5th generation Rambouillet sheep operator from Lavina. Ben is married to Jamie Lehfeldt and has two young boys - Luke and Cade. He currently represents ASI on the National Grazing Lands Coalition and sits on the National ASI Let's Grow Committee. Locally, he is a member of Wheatland/Golden Valley Farm Bureau board, Lavina school board, FSA county committee, and the Golden Valley weed board. MWGA welcomes the addition of Ben to the Board, where his long-time knowledge of Montana’s sheep and wool industry will be vital to the Association’s advocacy and membership services efforts.

The Montana Wool Growers Association has faithfully served Montana’s sheep producers and community banks for over one hundred and thirty years. MWGA gives our members the multi-level support they need to serve their local communities and to run successful sheep production operations. MWGA’s members are dedicated solely to meeting the nation’s food and fiber needs, and to providing the foundation for Montana’s local businesses and families to prosper.

More information on the convention can be found at the Montana Wool Growers Association’s web page at: <http://www.mtsheep.org/>

Questions: Please contact Jesse Wallewein, Executive Secretary of MWGA at (406) 450-3429 or Jim Brown, Public Relations Director at (406) 449-7444.