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****PRESS RELEASE****

NORTH CENTRAL MONTANA SHEEP SEMINAR EDUCATES PRODUCERS ON A VARIETY OF TOPICS

DECEMBER 14, 2015--Ranchers and sheep producers from Galata to Wolf Creek gathered together on Tuesday, December 8th, 2015 at the Moose Lodge in Conrad, for the North Central Montana Sheep Seminar. Pete Cornell, the Front Range Wool Pool President, started things off with a warm welcome. Dave McEwen, recently elected President for the Montana Woolgrowers Association (MWGA), gave an update on the association's happenings. Dave made it clear that he wants to focus the next two years on getting the younger generation into the sheep industry, not only by getting them involved, but showing them the importance of the economics, sustainability, and environmental impacts of raising sheep. MWGA just recently held their 132nd Annual Convention in Billings December 4th and 5th. Between the speed shear competition Friday night and the MIWW Fashion review and NFR Calcutta on Saturday night, I'd say that everyone who attended had a fantastic time with some great company, industry updates, and good conversation mixed in. Everyone is already talking about next year's convention!

I, Jesse Wallewein, filled everyone in on the Young Entrepreneur Program. There is currently a scholarship available for young sheep producers, ages 25-40, to attend the ASI (American Sheep Industry) Convention in Scottsdale, Arizona January 27-30th. I was recently hired on December 1, taking over the position of the Executive Secretary of MWGA from Brent Roeder. Brent took over the Teton County Ag Extension position on October 1st. He has been the Executive Secretary for the MWGA for 3 years and will be greatly missed. As Brent said, "I'm not leaving the association, I'm just not being paid anymore." Having worked with him over the last couple weeks and through the annual convention, I can say with confidence that Brent set the bar pretty high for me and I've have some big shoes to fill!

Dr. Whit Stewart, the MSU Extension Sheep Specialist, introduced himself and conducted a clicker survey with the crowd to see how he could better serve the sheep producers in this area. Next time Whit comes back to the area, he has a better idea of what topics producers want to learn about and the production issues they are facing with their operations. Monica Ebert, the new Montana Wool Lab Director, gave us a background on her history in the wool industry. She looks forward to working with producers and helping them with their wool.

Dr. Emily Glunk, MSU Forage Specialist, gave a talk on Grazing Alfalfa Aftermath and Alternate Forages. Glunk stressed that after a light frost, and immediately after a killing frost, alfalfa still poses a bloat hazard to grazing ruminants. She recommends waiting to graze 3-5 days until after a killing frost, or if only a light frost, until the alfalfa plant is fully mature to decrease the likelihood of bloat. She also spoke about cereal forages and alternative forages and how they are excellent alternative grazing sources for livestock. They produce acceptable animal gains and performance, as well as being highly palatable to the grazing animal. Care must be taken with some cereal forage species, as there are potential anti-

quality factors such as nitrate toxicity and prussic acid poisoning (warm season grasses) that may occur if not properly managed.

Shaelyn Meyer, Pondera County Ag Extension Agent since April 2015, gave a talk on the Basics of Intensive Grazing. Shaelyn grew up in eastern Montana and much of the pictures she used were from her family ranch near Ekalaka. Her family utilizes intensive grazing on their ranch so she has first-hand experience with this practice. It was great to hear her experiences with it, as well as the trials and tribulations that her family went through. Her final word of advice was to find someone who has made all the mistakes and keep them on speed dial!

Devon Ragen, Research Associate from MSU, was next up with her presentation "Feedlot on Fields." Most of her research has been conducted at the Fort Ellis Research Facility in Bozeman. Her study has been focused on trying to finish lambs on wheat stubble fields instead of in the feedlot. They compared these lambs that are being finished out on the wheat stubble field to lambs that are fed out in a feedlot setting using the Grow Safe system. Having recently given this same presentation to the Montana Organic Association, she said that they were very enthusiastic about the idea of finishing lambs on wheat stubble but their biggest problem is where they could find the lambs to do this. Multiple components to this study included sampling soil microbial communities to test for microbial activity and soil organic matter content, DNA extracting and sequencing, direct manure application, soil compaction and soil bulk density, soil nitrogen content, average daily gain of lambs finished in the field vs. confinement, cost of gain, rib eye area, meat tenderness, meat quality grade, parasite burden, weed management, cover crop grazing, and possible elimination of extensive tillage practices that cause erosion.

Lisa Surber, WestFeeds nutritionist, focused on flock supplementation throughout the year and the effects of nutrition related to reproduction and performance. Surber stressed the importance of protein supplementation for the flock, and encouraged producers to use a sound mineral program throughout the year, but particularly in the third trimester of gestation and early lactation. Surber also explained WestFeed's is now the sister company of Northern Seed, and is excited about the cereal varieties that they'll be offering in the future to growers that will fit well in a grazing system.

To finish things off for the night, Kraig Glazier from Wildlife Services, gave us an update on what they've been up to. Dave M. and Brent R. donated the lamb that they cooked throughout the day and served up a delicious dinner. Producers that attended the meeting brought salads, rolls, and dessert. The Front Range Wool Pool conducted their meeting afterwards and presented Jim Hadley with an Award of Appreciation for all the years he has served the wool pool. I think it safe to say that everyone who attended the North Central Montana Sheep Seminar had good conversation with friends, gained a wealth of knowledge from the speakers, and went home on a full stomach.