

The Youth Conservationist Program

2026 Information



What is it?

The Youth Conservationist Program (YCP) strives to connect aspiring youth with established shepherds to promote the preservation of heritage breed sheep. It is an important tool in building the next generation of shepherds in the United States. Hosted annually at the Maryland Sheep & Wool Festival, the YCP has been the foundation of many successful young flocks around the country. Many of those youth go on to be heavily involved in the industry and donate back to the program when their flocks are on their feet.

Breeder Responsibilities

Breeders donate a registered yearling ewe to the youth of their choice, based upon application answers and letters of recommendation. The program goes beyond just the physical donation of a sheep though; breeders are asked to mentor their young shepherd over the following year and beyond. From advising on management decisions to assisting in locating additional suitable breeding stock, the mentoring breeder's value is immeasurable.

Don't have a spare ewe to donate? Consider offering breeding services to a youth who may not have the resources to purchase an unrelated quality registered ram.

Youth Responsibilities

Open to all youth between the ages of 9 and 18.

Recipients agree to the following:

- They must exhibit their ewe a minimum of two times in the receiving year, preferably one of which being their state fair;
- They must breed their ewe to a registered ram of the same breed in the fall of the receiving year;
- They must utilize the ewe's fleece, either by processing it themselves or by selling it to another crafter;
- They must prepare a report with pictures for the donor, to be displayed the following year at the Maryland Sheep & Wool Festival;
- They must promote the YCP and their breed at least once, whether through an article in their local paper or through a breed association newsletter;
- They must be present at the Maryland Sheep & Wool Festival on Sunday, May 3rd 2026 to receive their ewe.

Applications from interested youth, along with a one-page letter of recommendation, must be submitted by April 1st, 2026. Applications must be filled out completely and signed by both the youth and their parent/guardian. To submit applications or inquire about the 2025 breed list, please email Lydia Smith at: ycpsheep@gmail.com. Applications must be typed or neatly written and submitted in PDF or Word format.