

Dear breeder,

Thank you for taking the time to get to know more about the Youth Conservationist Program! Our program could not exist without the generosity of breeders like yourself. Before you commit, we want you to understand the logistics and realities of the program.

Selection Process: Applications are due 4/1. Applications will be sent to you based on breed preferences indicated within a day or so after applications are reviewed for completeness and organized. You will get to review their application responses and letters of recommendation to select a 1st & 2nd choice for your ewe. If a youth is selected by multiple breeders, they will be given the opportunity to decide which breed they prefer and the other ewe will be offered to the second choice applicant. Once applications go out, the selection process moves very quickly. We try to get things finalized to allow time for health papers, hotels, and travel plans to all be finalized as well. Your responsiveness greatly streamlines a very chaotic week.

Logistics: The ewe must be a registered yearling ewe. Due to festival rules, we cannot accept ewes with unweaned lambs at their side. While the youth are required to show the animal at least twice, we are not looking for “show sheep”. These should be healthy, good examples of their breed - the kind of sheep you wish you had started your flock from. The animal must have transportation to the Maryland Sheep & Wool Festival and arrive by Saturday (5/2). We can certainly help connect sheep with rides if we have enough of a heads up that you're unable to attend yourself. We love when our breeders are there in person though! Sheep must have a scrapie tag and current health certificate (made out to the youth recipient's address, not the festival) for entry to the grounds. The official YCP ceremony is Sunday (5/3) afternoon.

Each year, our applicants have varying levels of sheep experience. A central component of the program is mentorship. We hope that our donor breeders are willing to provide guidance for the year(s) following, but understand that sometimes distance and life can get in the way of that. If you want to donate a sheep, but are not in a place to offer mentorship, we will connect the youth with a mentor of the same breed and/or local to them to facilitate learning opportunities. The most important thing to ensure the success of each youth/sheep pairing is communication. This is a learning experience involving animals; sometimes things go wrong. Should those situations arise, we need all parties committed to communicating so the issue can be resolved to the breeder's satisfaction, animal's best interest, and in a way that educates rather than shames a young shepherd. We are here to facilitate that if needed.

Participating in YCP is investing in the future of your specific breed and the sheep industry as a whole. We greatly appreciate your consideration and are happy to answer any further questions you may have. Thank you!

Lydia & Heidi
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