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Open Letter to USDA-ARS Concerning USSES

From: American Society of Animal Science Board of Directors

The American Society of Animal Science (ASAS) Board of Directors (BOD) is writing with respect to the future of the USDA Sheep Experiment Station in Dubois, ID. The USSES has a rich history of important contributions to the industry not only in the United States, but globally. These contributions obviously include activities and efforts related to research. However the contributions and importance also extend to education and outreach efforts. USSES has been integral in the advancement of both applied and basic science geared towards dissemination and use in animal agriculture. In addition, to being a vital research unit, the USSES has served as a needed training ground for animal scientists and veterinarians. The sheep industry remains a vital part of production agriculture throughout much of the western United States and serves as a vital economic unit in many rural communities in this region.

Closing this unit and or directing funds from this unit away from animal agriculture would result in immeasurable losses to the sheep industry, animal agriculture, and animal science.

The research, extension, and educational prolificacy of the USSES is directly related to the unique nature of the station. USSES is one of the few units left in the US with a critical mass of scientists, adequate land, diversity of land, animal numbers and a production environmment to produce meaningful results related to issues within animal agriculture and particularly in terms of sheep production. The overriding example of research that depends on the coalescence within this facility are lifetime accomplishments in genetics. Genetics accomplishments range from economically important breed creation to genetic determination of disease transmission in economically and biologically relevant diseases.

The scientific contributions and applications to applied sheep production since creation are too numerous to list; however, it is important to list some of the most influential:

- Development of the Columbia, Targhee, and Polypay sheep breeds
- Nationwide meat-sire evaluation programs
- Nationwide wool-sire evaluation programs
- Determining Q-Feber genetic markers in sheep
- Describing and identifying bighorn sheep pneumonia-associated pathogens that are shed from domestic sheep to enable identification of genetic markers associated with “nonshedding” domestic sheep.
- Work to eradicate scrapie in the US

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2014 Annual Meeting: July 20-24, Kansas City, Kansas
• Work to eradicate OPP

In addition, work that can only be accomplished at the USSES is highlighted in the current USDA Strategic Plan. Closing the USSES or diverting funds from this unit away from animal agriculture would create a research, education, and outreach void that we could not fill in the next 25 years.

The American Society of Animal Science Board of Directors* respectfully recommends that the US Sheep Experiment Station remains open, fully funded, and continuing to operate in a manner that best serves the sheep industry and all of animal agriculture.

On behalf of the ASAS BOD,

Debra Aaron
ASAS President

*Please note, several members of the ASAS BOD are employees of USDA. To avoid conflict of interest issues, they were excluded from discussion, preparation, and review of this statement and request.