

The Iowa Sheep & Wool Festival Then and Now (June 17th & 18th)

by Letty Klein

Iowa's only sheep and wool festival, sponsored by the Iowa Sheep Industry Association, was established in 2005. Over the past few years the Festival has been struggling, emphasis was more on the commercial end of sheep production, plus the venue sites had been inadequate. Then after 12 years and with the cloud of 'show cancellation' hanging over their heads, a new group decided to seek a new direction by "putting a new 'spin' on 2017". They found a new venue, the new state-of-the-art Hansen Agriculture Student Learning Center on the Iowa State University campus in Ames.

This environmentally friendly and energy efficient building was amazing, the arena was well lit with LED lighting and the ceiling was covered with 30-foot diameter paddle fans for the vendors, hall-of-breeds, sheep shearing and herding dog demos. The workshops, commercial sheep production talks, children's activities and the fleece show/silent auction were held in adjacent air-condition areas.

The Midwest commercial sheep production workshops were funded by a grant from the ASI Let's Grow program. Our own Dr. Richard Ehrhardt gave talks on 'extending lambing season' and 'grazing cover crops and crop stover', while Allen Culham gave support to discussions on NSIP and ASI Let's Grow initiative. Booths included two Michigan fiber vendors, Zeilinger's Wool Co. of Frankenmuth and Maple Row Stock Wool of Sherwood.

I was there to judge the Fleece Show, which was coordinated by Melissa Wubben of Norwalk, IA. Melissa got involved when she heard ISIA had voted to cancel the festival, she had ideas on how to improve the fleece show so she volunteered to take it over. There were 72 fleeces entered in the competition, with 49 fleeces offered in the silent auction. Producers as well as customers were eager to learn about wool, they pulled their chairs up to the judging table so they could hear comments, ask questions and enter in discussions. So much fun!

Dates for next year's festival are June 16th and 17th with author Deb Robson as the guest speaker/instructor. I'll be there too!



IS&WF Fleece show with Melissa Wubben show coordinator (standing) and Dee Hendrick assisting (seated)