



National Sheep Safety & Quality Assurance Program

The U. S. agriculture and meat industry is being rediscovered in light of the CONSUMER— and consumers are demanding safe, wholesome, high quality meat products. Even though the demand for most meat products has increased over the past couple of years, these industries could lose consumer demand by losing sight of quality and focusing solely on quantity. Also, with imported meat products available at typically lower prices, producers need to create a competitive advantage for domestic product. Quality assurance is one-step in establishing that competitive advantage. Not only will livestock producers who focus on quality build consumer confidence in U.S. products, but they will also be able to improve animal care and management practices, thereby decreasing production cost. Quality assurance refers to the measures or actions producers take to ensure the production of safe, wholesome, and high quality animal food products that *meet or exceed consumer expectations*. The goals of a quality assurance program are to produce food products that contain no drug residues, minimize the risk of harmful organisms and minimize carcass blemishes and bruises.

The American Sheep Industry Association (ASI), in cooperation with Colorado State University, has developed the Sheep Safety and Quality Assurance (SSQA) program to apply quality assurance principles to the raising of sheep and harvest of sheep products. The three step program involves education, design and outside verifications. Level one involves training producers in quality assurance concepts. Producers completing an on-site mission statement, flowcharts and inspection plan will be certified as Level II (two) producers. After the plans have been implemented, producers may request an outside assessment by ASI-trained auditors to be certified as SSQA Level III. **Producers and stakeholders attending the Washington State Sheep Producers (WSSP) Annual Convention on November 2nd will be trained in this national program and will be certified as SSQA Level 1.** Cost for the training is \$10.00. Make plans now to attend the convention and become certified in the national SSQA program. For more information on the national SSQA program contact Sarah M. Smith, WSU Cooperative Extension, 1-800-572-0119.