

## Joseph O. “Joe” Harper

Joseph O. “Joe” Harper of Seneca Rocks is the eighth generation to own and operate the family farm. As a youth, he was involved in 4-H and FFA, and raised sheep and cattle. After graduation from Circleville High School, he earned a B.S. Degree (January, 1965) and M.S. Degree (June, 1966) in Animal Science at West Virginia University.

Since 1971, he has built a flock that averages 400 ewes, built and operated a lamb feed lot, became a wool buyer in the area, and utilized a number of innovations in marketing, breeding and predator control. He raises guard donkeys to use and sell, and utilizes guard dogs on mountain pastures. As a leader in the West Virginia Farm Bureau, Mr. Harper led support for a self-help Predator Control Program, which took effect in 2005. He was appointed to three terms to the USDA National Wildlife Advisory Committee. He has received seven appointments from the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture.

In addition to his sheep enterprises, Mr. Harper runs 500 head of feeder cattle each summer, and served two terms as President of the West Virginia Cattlemen’s Association. During his second term, the West Virginia Legislature passed a Beef Check-Off to promote West Virginia feeder cattle. At the time, West Virginia feeder cattle were selling for three to six cents less than in neighboring states.

Mr. Harper served as a director in the National Cattlemen’s Association and was appointed to the first West Virginia Beef Council. He led the development of a market lamb show and sale at the Tri-county Fair, which grew from nine to nearly 200 lambs in its first five years.

He was a leader in the development of the Eastern Lamb Producers’ Co-op in the 1970s, serving as the West Virginia representative and as Vice President on its Board of Directors. He has been President and Vice President of the West Virginia Shepherd’s Federation, which he helped to establish in 1989.

He was appointed to the National Farm Bureau Sheep Advisory Committee and served as national chairman one term. He regularly attends the annual American Sheep Industry conventions, served two terms on the ASI Lamb council, and was on the “2001 Committee.” Mr. Harper served as an original member of the Lamb Board (2002-2005), and served a second term in 2006-2008. For three years, he was the spokesman for the Lamb Board at the National Convention of Farm Broadcasters in Kansas City. In January 2010, he was presented with the McClure Silver Ram Award at the ASI National Convention, presented annually to an individual who has invested a lifetime of service to the nation’s sheep industry.

Mr. Harper and wife, Carolyn operate a country store built by his great-grandfather at Seneca Rocks. They have maintained its early 1900s style, but have added a specialty restaurant where they proudly serve American lamb during the busy summer tourist season. At the store, they market sheepskins from their flock and the pelts of coyotes caught in their pastures. He regularly contributes to the ASI Guard Dog Program.

In 2006, WVU presented Mr. Harper with the Distinguished Alumni Award from the College of Agriculture, Forestry and Consumer Sciences. In addition, the WVU chapter of Gamma Sigma Delta chose him to receive their Award for Distinguished Service to West Virginia Agriculture in April 2006. Mr. Harper also routinely hosts classes from West Virginia University for farm tours to share his knowledge of the sheep and beef cattle industries.

