

ASI Legislative Committee Report
October 20, 2025
Presented by Bill Decker

The Kentucky Sheep and Wool Producers Association (KSWPA) serves as the official state-level affiliate of the American Sheep Industry Association (ASI), which is the national organization representing over 100,000 U.S. sheep producers across 45 state associations. As part of this federated structure, KSWPA provides its members with a direct conduit to ASI's resources, advocacy, and programs focused on political representation, industry promotion, animal health, marketing, and research for sheep and wool producers.

Key aspects of their relationship include:

- **Membership Integration:** KSWPA membership automatically grants access to ASI affiliation benefits, such as the *Sheep Industry News* newsletter and representation in national policy matters.
- **Shared Mission Alignment:** Both organizations prioritize educational outreach, breeding improvement, health initiatives, and market development for sheep producers, with KSWPA handling state-specific activities in Kentucky while feeding into ASI's broader national efforts.
- **Collaborative Support:** Through KSWPA, Kentucky producers gain networked representation alongside groups like the Kentucky Farm Bureau, while ASI leverages state affiliates like KSWPA for grassroots input on federal issues affecting the industry.

This affiliate model ensures coordinated advocacy and support from local to national levels, enhancing the overall viability of the U.S. sheep sector.

The American Sheep Industry Association (ASI) actively advocates for U.S. sheep producers through its Legislative Action Council and lobbying efforts, focusing on trade protection, farm bill provisions, animal health, tax policies, and industry funding. Below is a list of key legislative initiatives based on ASI's recent and ongoing priorities (primarily 2023–2025). These are drawn from ASI's official announcements, testimony, and calls to action.

- **Support for Farm Bill "Orphan Programs":** ASI pushes for reauthorization and funding of specialized sheep industry programs in the Farm Bill, including those for wool research, marketing, and production support. This includes backing Section 12007 of the proposed 2024 Farm Bill text for enhanced producer assistance. ASI President Brad Boner highlighted this as critical for sheep producers during the 2024 Spring Trip to Washington, D.C.

- **Inclusion of Lamb Imports in Tariff Plans:** ASI advocates for tariffs on Australian and New Zealand lamb imports to protect domestic markets and ensure sustainability. This was a key request during the 2025 annual fly-in to D.C., with ASI President Ben Lehfeldt emphasizing its role in maintaining access to American lamb.
- **Delay of USDA Scrapie Rule Implementation (H.R. 6232 / S. 3354):** ASI issued a call to action urging support for bills to postpone a USDA rule on importing sheep and goats, aiming to prevent disease risks and protect U.S. flocks. This initiative addresses biosecurity concerns for sheep-derived products.
- **National Sheep Industry Improvement Center (NSIIC) Reauthorization and Funding:** ASI led efforts to re-establish and fund the NSIIC via the 2008 Farm Bill, with ongoing support for grant proposals (e.g., deadlines in 2024 and 2025) to enhance production and marketing infrastructure. The center was nominated by ASI and reauthorized in the 2018 Farm Bill.
- **Pro-Agriculture Tax Package (Estate Tax and Other Provisions):** In 2025, ASI joined a coalition letter to Senate leaders supporting tax legislation with estate tax exemptions and other benefits tailored to family farms, including sheep operations, to aid business continuity.
- **Regional Agricultural Promotion Program (RAPP) Funding for Wool Marketing:** ASI secured \$1.2 million in 2024 USDA funding to promote American wool in global markets over five years, focusing on high-potential regions to boost exports.
- **Opposition to Denver Slaughterhouse Ban Ballot Initiative:** ASI collaborated with the North American Meat Institute in 2023–2024 to oppose a Colorado ballot measure banning slaughterhouses, advocating for financial and awareness campaigns to preserve processing infrastructure for lamb.
- **Electronic Identification (EID) Tag Adoption and Secure Supply Plan:** ASI promotes legislation and policies for voluntary EID adoption, including the Secure Sheep and Wool Supply Plan (discussed in 2021 executive meetings) to facilitate traceability for animal health and trade.
- **Targeted Grazing and Resource Management Policies:** ASI supports bills enhancing public lands access and incentives for sheep in vegetation management (e.g., solar grazing and wildfire prevention), tied to broader resource management councils and Farm Bill provisions.

- **COVID-19 Assistance and General Disaster Relief:** ASI successfully lobbied for sheep-specific aid in the 2020 Coronavirus Food Assistance Program, securing funding for lambs, sheep, and wool during market disruptions.

ASI's advocacy often involves coalitions with state affiliates and groups like the National Lamb Feeders Association. For the latest updates, visit ASI's "Call to Action" page at sheepusa.org/issues-calltoaction.

I want to provide additional clarification on the term "Orphan Program" since that is one of the funding challenges with the sheep industry due to the fact we are not included in the main farm bill and therefore lack permanent funding. The Orphan Program funding always causes concern for the sheep industry each year the 2018 farm bill is reenacted, because there is the possibility we won't get funding which would cause all sorts of problems with implementing and working on the above initiatives.

The term "Orphan Programs" in the context of the Farm Bill refers to smaller, specialized agricultural programs that often lack permanent funding or mandatory budget allocations, making them vulnerable to expiration or underfunding. These programs are critical for niche sectors like the sheep industry, which the American Sheep Industry Association (ASI) actively supports through its legislative advocacy. Below are details on the Farm Bill "Orphan Programs" relevant to the sheep industry, based on ASI's priorities and recent Farm Bill discussions (2023–2025).

1. National Sheep Industry Improvement Center (NSIIC)

- **Purpose:** The NSIIC, established under the 1996 Farm Bill and reauthorized in the 2008 and 2018 Farm Bills, provides grants and support to enhance sheep and goat production, marketing, and infrastructure. It fosters innovation, research, and market development for wool, lamb, and related products.
- **Status:** Considered an "Orphan Program" because it lacks permanent baseline funding, relying on discretionary appropriations or periodic reauthorization. ASI has consistently pushed for its inclusion and funding in Farm Bill cycles.
- **ASI Advocacy:** During the 2024 Farm Bill negotiations, ASI emphasized NSIIC reauthorization with increased funding. The organization supported Section 12007 of the proposed 2024 Farm Bill text, which includes provisions for sheep-specific grants. ASI also facilitated NSIIC grant applications, with deadlines in 2024 and 2025, to fund projects like processing facilities and marketing campaigns.

- **Impact:** Grants support projects such as wool processing modernization, lamb market expansion, and producer education, directly benefiting small and mid-sized sheep operations.

2. Wool Research and Promotion Programs

- **Purpose:** These programs fund research, development, and promotion of American wool to improve quality, competitiveness, and market demand domestically and globally. They include initiatives like wool quality testing and marketing campaigns.
- **Status:** Wool programs are often "orphaned" due to their reliance on discretionary funding through the Farm Bill or related USDA programs. They lack the mandatory funding of larger commodity programs (e.g., corn or soybeans).
- **ASI Advocacy:** ASI has advocated for sustained funding in the 2024 Farm Bill, emphasizing wool's role in textiles and sustainability. In 2024, ASI secured \$1.2 million through the USDA's Regional Agricultural Promotion Program (RAPP) to promote wool exports, complementing Farm Bill efforts.
- **Impact:** Supports wool producers by funding research into fiber quality and marketing to compete with synthetic fibers and imported wool from Australia and New Zealand.

3. Sheep Production and Marketing Grant Program

- **Purpose:** This program provides grants to improve sheep and goat production, marketing, and infrastructure, such as processing facilities, supply chain development, and producer training.
- **Status:** Lacks permanent funding, making it an "Orphan Program" that requires reauthorization and appropriations in each Farm Bill cycle. It was included in the 2014 and 2018 Farm Bills but needs continued support in 2024.
- **ASI Advocacy:** ASI President Brad Boner highlighted this program during the 2024 Spring Trip to Washington, D.C., urging lawmakers to include it in the 2024 Farm Bill. ASI supports Section 12007, which strengthens funding for sheep-specific production and marketing initiatives.
- **Impact:** Helps producers overcome barriers like limited processing capacity and market access, particularly for small and regional operations.

4. Targeted Grazing and Resource Management Initiatives

- **Purpose:** Supports sheep grazing for vegetation management, wildfire prevention, and ecological benefits on public and private lands. These initiatives fund research and incentives for producers using sheep in conservation efforts.
- **Status:** Often included as discretionary programs under broader Farm Bill conservation titles, these lack guaranteed funding, qualifying them as "Orphan Programs."
- **ASI Advocacy:** ASI collaborates with resource management councils to advocate for grazing provisions in the Farm Bill, emphasizing sheep's role in sustainable land management (e.g., solar grazing). ASI's 2024 legislative efforts included pushing for increased access to public lands for grazing.
- **Impact:** Provides financial incentives for producers to use sheep in environmentally beneficial practices, enhancing both profitability and land stewardship.

Key Context and Challenges

- **Funding Vulnerability:** Orphan Programs lack "baseline funding" (automatic budget allocations), making them dependent on Congressional appropriations or periodic reauthorization. This creates uncertainty for sheep producers relying on these programs.
- **ASI's Role:** ASI's Legislative Action Council actively lobbies for these programs, as seen in their 2024 and 2025 fly-ins to D.C. They work with state affiliates and coalitions to ensure sheep industry needs are addressed in Farm Bill drafts.
- **2024 Farm Bill Context:** As of October 19, 2025, the 2024 Farm Bill remains under negotiation, with ASI urging swift passage to secure these programs. Section 12007, supported by ASI, consolidates funding for sheep-specific initiatives, addressing the "orphan" status by seeking more stable allocations.
- **Economic Impact:** These programs are vital for the sheep industry, which faces competition from imported lamb and wool. They support small producers, rural economies, and sustainable practices, aligning with ASI's mission.

Additional Notes

- ASI's advocacy often ties Orphan Programs to broader Farm Bill titles, such as Conservation, Research, and Specialty Crops, to maximize support.
- For the latest updates on ASI's Farm Bill priorities, check sheepusa.org or contact ASI directly. The organization's "Call to Action" page provides real-time legislative updates.