



tales from

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# The Kentucky Fiber Trail

## Weaving Art with Agriculture *by Sarabeth Parido*

**K**entucky has an amazing heritage of agriculture across the state, and through our Appalachian roots, we have a wonderful history in the arts. With the Kentucky Fiber Trail- we wish to weave these two wonderful traditions together and shine a light on the fiber producers, local retailers, agritourism locations and fiber related events across the Bluegrass.

According to the 2012 Agriculture Census, Kentucky has 10,175 sheep, goat and alpaca producers. Of these, approximately 4,070 derive income from raw natural fiber production and/or finished local fiber products. The natural fiber arts and craft industry is steadily growing and the consumer driven trend of shopping locally is booming. Consumers are increasingly concerned with where their product originated because they want assurance that the animals have been raised ethically and locally. Natural fibers, wool, alpaca, angora, mohair and more, are in higher demand as the value of the end product proves to be higher than those made with synthetic, artificial fibers. With the demand growing for natural and local fibers, Kentucky producers can capitalize on their profits through the networking, advertising and educational potential of the Kentucky Fiber Trail.

Through our research, we have found several break downs in Kentucky's natural fiber value chain. We have found that many of our producers simply do not know the value of the fiber on their animals. As some producers have brought fleeces to the Kentucky Sheep and Fiber Festival in Masterson Station Park each spring, they have found that what they could bring from multiple fleeces sold by the pound at shearing, they could sell a single fleece for to a private buyer at the festival. Several of our far Eastern Kentucky producers expressed frustration that they simply had no outlet to market themselves in their regions. On the retail side, we found that many local retailers were simply not aware of locally produced product in their areas, many of who were purchasing similar fibers from out of state and from out of country. We have several historic locations across the state which display fiber processing techniques from our rich culture, and agritourism locations are growing throughout the state to allow people to connect to the agriculture around them. We seek to help each of these locations to be highlighted and found by those in and travelling through our beautiful state.

As we build the Kentucky Fiber Trail, we seek to create a virtual and physical trail

to be visited. We seek to provide networking opportunities between producers and retailers and help to rebuild the value chain structure. We will host wholesale events throughout the year to connect producers to locally based retailers to improve their marketing reach and host classes and workshops through the established Kentucky Sheep and Fiber Festival on small business and marketing strategies. We will also provide consumers with incentives to travel the trail and increase traffic to Kentucky agritourism locations and fiber related events.

To build the trail, we need participation and members. The Kentucky Fiber Trail is open to all fiber producers across all breeds and species of fiber animals, all retailers selling and utilizing Kentucky raised fibers, all agritourism locations and all fiber related events and festivals in our state. Membership to the trail provides advertising for each participant, directory listings, direct website links, marketing, continuing education opportunities, and custom availability to utilize the site for individual advertising needs. Two membership levels are available- Annual Membership and Annual Gold.

Help us to forge a new trail in Kentucky! Join us, spread the word and let's show our state what we can grow!