



## MENTOR – / – WOOL OUTREACH EVENT

*(Please Specify Whether it is Mentor or Wool Outreach)*

Event: 2025 KY Farm Launch- Wool Production and Processing

*(Please use separate form for each event and specify which event took place)*

Date: March 2025-August 2025

Total money spent for event: \$8437.70

(Mentor) or (Wool) Outreach money spent for event: Wool

Approximately how many producers, consumers or registrants were involved? 6,523 people

What happened at this event?

KSWPA focused on comprehensive wool production and processing education for a co-hort group of beginning farmers and conducted a fiber festival for fiber enthusiasts.

KY Farm Launch is a co-hort of beginning farmers (5 years or less in production) that want to start or move their sheep farms (or start a sheep farm) into producing \$1000 of revenue within the next year. This program is conducted with the University of Kentucky and the Kentucky Center for Agriculture Rural Development. To aid in understanding wool production and processing, the co-hort participated in the following events:

- 1) Shearing School- two day event hosted by Schwartz Meat Company and Show Stock, Zack and Taylow Schwartz. Taylor shears sheep across Kentucky as a part-time job. Participants learned how to handle and maintain shearing equipment, and practiced shearing on a stand and on the floor. 10 people participated in the event. (Zack and Taylor were paid for conducting the event)
- 2) The wool sheared from the school was then turned into pellets. Co-hort members were provided samples and asked to use them on their own farms in different capacities. Information will be gathered from the use to determine if pelletizing wool on a larger scale is a project KSWPA can do in the future.
- 3) Co-hort members were also encouraged to workshops and the fleece sale at the Kentucky Sheep and Fiber Festival. First, participants were taken through the fleece sale where they were able to see and touch different microns of wool, learn about the breeds of sheep that make those fleeces, and learn marketing techniques for raw fiber. Then, they participated in workshops where they learned how to take the raw fiber and turn it

into value added products like rugs, felted animals, and spun yarn. (Tent was rented to conduct the fleece sale and education)

- 4) In June, the co-hort members attended a class at a local fiber mill to learn how to wash and process fleeces on a small versus large scale. Participants were taught how to grade fleeces, followed by lectures on how to produce quality fiber animals. The Kentucky Department of Agriculture also gave a presentation on agritourism to show another way to expand profits for wool production. (Instructors were paid for the class and materials- Sarabeth Parido, Cheryl Kersey, and Melissa King)
- 5) Lastly, co-hort members worked with the Kentucky Center for Agriculture Rural Development to develop business and marketing plans for their sheep operations.

KY Sheep and Fiber Festival- Our 15th annual Kentucky Sheep and Fiber Festival was one for the record books! Held at Masterson Station Park in Lexington, this year's festival welcomed our largest crowd ever, with over 6,500 attendees joining us for a weekend packed with creativity, education, and hands-on fiber fun.

Not only did we set records at the gate—we're proud to report that many of our vendors experienced their highest sales to date. The energy and enthusiasm from attendees created a vibrant marketplace where local artisans and fiber producers thrived. The festival has truly become a must-attend event for fiber lovers from Kentucky and beyond.

Our Fleece Competition and Sale returned with its own dedicated tent this year, which once again boosted visibility and sales for Kentucky-grown fleeces. This curated space drew special attention from handspinners and makers seeking locally sourced wool and fiber, and we're excited to continue this successful model in future years. We had our best sales to date this year for our Kentucky producers. Fleece sales totaled over \$3300.

One of the most exciting additions this year was the expanded livestock tent, which brought new life and learning opportunities to the festival. We were delighted to welcome new exhibitors, including cashmere goats and even a working honeybee exhibit, alongside the returning favorites—sheep, alpacas, and angora rabbits. The tent was a hub of activity all weekend long, sparking curiosity and connection between visitors and the hardworking farmers and animals behind the fiber.

We are deeply grateful to the incredible volunteers, educators, and community members who made this event such a success. From setup to tear-down, and every demo and smiling face in between—thank you for helping us celebrate 15 years of Kentucky fiber in such a meaningful way.

Looking ahead, planning for 2026 is already underway! If you're passionate about fiber and want to get involved, we'd love to welcome you to the organizing team. Vendor applications for 2026 are already open, stay tuned for more details at [www.kentuckysheepandfiber.com](http://www.kentuckysheepandfiber.com).

(Tents were rented to conduct the fleece sale and allow vendors of different breeds of sheep to display)

What was accomplished at this event to further (Mentor) or (Wool) Outreach?

By having a co-hort group of people progress through education on wool production and processing, we were able to help them identify where they needed to start and/or improve. A couple of the participants were already into wool sheep production when they entered the co-hort, however, they did not understand the potential for the wool they were producing. We were able to help them understand the quality of fiber they could expect from the breeds they already owned and determine what value added products they could plan to produce. All the participants embraced cross breeding practices and plan to implement this breeding season. By attending the KY Sheep and Fiber Festival, these producers better understood how to market their raw fleeces and also connected with other fiber artists who were interested in using their future fiber to create end products thus creating future potential income. By attending a local mill, all the participants gained a better appreciation for the value a mill could bring to their businesses. The amount of time needed to do your own washing, picking, and carding compared to the mill equipment really helped these beginning farmers understand that the cost of the mill outweighs the down time they would experience in trying to hit seasonal festivals. Lastly, we had a producer determine that producing and shearing his own sheep is not conducive to his full time job. However, he teamed up with other participants in the co-hort and the local mill to begin making seed mats that he could sell to landscape companies.

For the festival, the amount of participation in the gate and sales reported by vendors shows that 2025 was a great experience for fiber artists and enthusiasts.

What perception did a participant walk away with?

Overall the co-hort participants have stated the comprehensive education has allowed them to hone down their hobby to make it more like a business. Plans are being made to produce a certain quality of wool for specific projects. A network has been created between these producers and future market outlets giving the new producers confidence in moving forward.

*Attached to this form are copies of checks, receipts, and invoices to cover the financial output for this event.*