March 25, 2015

To: Sheep Producers

From: Scott P. Greiner, Extension Sheep Specialist, Virginia Tech
Lee Wright, Southwest AREC Superintendent, Virginia Tech

Dear Sheep Producer:

We are excited to share with you the details of this year’s Virginia Tech Southwest AREC Ram Test. We appreciate the strong participation and interest this program has generated from breeders around the region. This unique forage-based ram performance test, designed specifically to quantify growth and parasite resistance in rams, has created much discussion and interest across the industry.

The entire program details as well as consignment forms (due May 10) are attached. Rams will be taken up at the station on Monday, June 1. We will utilize a three week acclimation period, during which time we will adapt the rams to our forage and management system, as well as assess parasite status. The goal will be to reduce parasites to very low levels, and ensure rams do not harbor drug-resistant parasites. After this acclimation period, the rams will start the test period and be evaluated for 70 days (ending early September). Rams will have continuous access to high quality fescue-based pasture, and supplemented on a daily basis with concentrate. We believe this combination offers the best opportunity to both properly grow and develop the rams as potential breeders, as well as measure performance potential. At the start of the test, the rams will also be administered a controlled dose of parasites. Frequent measurements of weight gain, fecal egg count, and FAMACHA scores will allow us to differentiate ability of the rams to cope with parasites, while simultaneously provide us with the information to prevent parasitism from having serious detrimental impact on the rams’ performance.

Please read through the Rules & Regulations carefully. We would like to call to your attention a few highlights:

- **Ram Age-** Rams born January 15-March 15 are eligible. Registered rams- see rules for details.
- **Number-** We have a maximum capacity of 100 rams, with limitation of 10 per consignor (sire groups of 2 or more recommended). Note that individual consignors will be allowed to sell a maximum of half their rams through the sale.
- **Pre-Test Management-** Rams should be acclimated to feed, however rams fed for high rates of gain prior to delivery will likely not perform as well on test. Additionally, rams that have not had prior exposure to internal parasites may not be able to fully express their potential for parasite resistance.
- **Sale-** A sale will be held in conjunction with the program again this year, and accordingly we have established protocols and policies for the sale (see details in Rules and Regulations). Our target is to offer no more than 40 rams through the sale. Only half of an individual breeders’ rams will be sold through the sale (maximum). This policy provides an opportunity to manage sale numbers, and encourage the educational and demonstration components of the program, with the hope that a portion of each breeder consignment will be taken home and retained in the flock or marketed through additional venues. We will work closely with consignors to identify sale rams based on test performance and marketing wishes of the breeder. There is no requirement or obligation to participate in the sale (you may take all your rams home if so desired).

We encourage you to consider consigning rams. This opportunity is open to any breeder from the U.S. We very much look forward to the opportunity to work with you.

Should you have any questions, or would like more information, feel free to contact one of us: Lee Wright at (276)944-2200, e-mail lrite@vt.edu, or Scott Greiner at (540)231-9159, e-mail sgreiner@vt.edu.