

To Finish the Fight Against Scrapie We Need Brains!

You are probably thinking, yes, the government definitely can use some brains. This is your chance to contribute! The United States is nearing the goal line after a 70 year battle against scrapie, a fatal prion disease that affects the brain and spinal cord of sheep and goats. Sheep and goat producers can help the USDA achieve this goal. For a country to be declared free of scrapie, international standards require testing among all sheep and goat populations within a country with negative results for seven years. One of the most difficult aspects of an eradication program is making sure that the last few cases of the disease are found.

Each state is assigned a number of samples to be collected based on the sheep and goat populations. In 2020, thanks to cooperation from producers and veterinarians we in NJ exceeded our goals for sheep but missed these for goats. In fiscal year 2021 (ending on September 30, 2021), we need to sample 50 sheep and 17 goats hence we are asking for help from our New Jersey small ruminant producers to obtain these samples. As of February 8, 2021, we have sampled 21 NJ sheep and 10 NJ goats.

If you have an adult sheep or goat (>14 months of age) that dies, has to be euthanized, or is being culled please contact Dr. Linda Detwiler, USDA, APHIS, Veterinary Services at 609-738-5511. As you can see our target number is not large, but we struggle to get samples. There is no charge for the collection or testing of the samples. In addition, there are also funds for free plastic official eartags as an incentive for participating with on farm sampling.