



## Rhody Warm Wool Blanket Project



What's grey and white and warm all over!

-  
Wool blankets made of locally grown, natural wool!

-  
The Rhode Island Resource Conservation & Development Area Council, the RIDEM – Division of Agriculture, and the Rhode Island Sheep Cooperative are working together to create a market for wool blankets made with Rhode Island wool.

### Purpose

Develop an approach to market raw commercial grade wool and bring more income to sheep farmers from what is becoming a waste product. The Rhode Island Resource Conservation & Development Council (RI RC&D) is taking advantage of this opportunity to create a beautiful blanket while at the same time promoting the sustainability of local agriculture and agricultural products.

### Background

Rhode Island sheep farmers are having difficulty selling their wool. The decline of wool textile mills in New England and low wool prices have turned much raw wool into a nuisance rather than a product. As a result excess raw wool is often stored on the farm, used as compost, buried, or disposed of at local landfills.



**Members of the RI Sheep Cooperative gathered at the Urban Edge Farm in Cranston, RI for the 1st Rhody Warm Wool Collection**

Rhode Island sheep producers approached RI RC&D with a request to investigate options for the local use of their raw wool. There are approximately 45 -60 sheep farmers registered with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management – Division of Agriculture (RIDEM) and the Rhode Island Sheep Cooperative (RISC). Back yard farms and 4H programs comprise many other smaller operations.

An initial meeting was held on January 18, 2006 to ascertain the level of interest in this project within the Rhode Island sheep farming community. Twenty (20) sheep farmers attended the meeting and were enthusiastic about participation.

Similar projects in Massachusetts, Connecticut and Oregon served as examples of successful approaches to this issue.

### The Process



**Raw wool collection**

RI RC&D facilitated the formation of a steering committee to move the project forward. Committee members include representatives from the Rhode Island Sheep Cooperative, RI RC&D, URI, USDA-NRCS and private citizens. The Committee’s short-term project goal is to produce wool blankets by fall of 2006 for sale during the upcoming holiday season. The long term goal is to document the process, develop quality standards for wool blanket production, and produce quality wool blankets to bring more income to farmers.



**Cleaning/carding  
Faribault, MN**

Wool collection day was held on June 17, 2006. Producers collected over 1,400 pounds of wool at the Southside Community Land Trust’s Urban Edge Farm in Cranston, Rhode Island. The group then collaborated with the Connecticut Sheep Breeders Association to ship the wool to Faribault Mills in Minnesota for cleaning and processing before returning to southern New England for blanket production.

Clean wool arrived back in New England for processing onto a finished blanket in late August 2006.

Final processing into blankets is expected to be completed by mid-October 2006 for sale during the upcoming holiday season.



**S&D Spinnery, Millbury, MA**



**Spinning Machines**



**Weaving**



**Finishing in West Warwick, RI**

---

### Current Partners

RIDEM – Division of Agriculture,  
USDA-NRCS  
Rhode Island Sheep Cooperative,  
University of Rhode Island-Department of  
Textiles & Fashion Merchandising,  
Connecticut Sheep Breeders Association

### Financing Requirements

RI RC&D has received a USDA-Rural Development Rural Business Enterprise Grant funds to provide technical assistance, professional services, and training necessary for the planning, development and economic/marketing feasibility analysis for the project. RIDEM has offered to develop and print a marketing brochure for the project, and URI has offered technical assistance with a blanket design.

---

### For More Information Contact:

**Chris Modisette, RC&D Coordinator, USDA-NRCS**, 60 Quaker Lane ▪ Suite 45, Warwick, Rhode Island • 02886  
Tel: 401-822-8877, Fax: 401-828-0433, Email: [chris.modisette@ri.usda.gov](mailto:chris.modisette@ri.usda.gov); or  
**Barbara Thompson, President, RI Sheep Cooperative**, Seldom Seen Farm, 406 Evans Road, Glocester, RI 02814  
(401) 949-0264-, Email: [mthompson5@cox.net](mailto:mthompson5@cox.net).