

# THE CANADIAN WOOL COUNCIL

## The Shearing Plan

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CANADIAN WOOL  
COUNCIL



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# INTRODUCTION

## FOREWORD

Belonging to a structured shearing organization and obtaining recognized accreditation can provide a successful foundation for a shearer's professional career. Wool-producing nations worldwide have benefited from more structured programs in their industry. Accredited shearers believe that having a certificate helps to bolster their career, knowledge, and satisfaction.

Canada has a unique opportunity to positively impact the Canadian wool supply chain by creating its own harmonized, standardized nationwide shearing training body and governing organization. The Shearing Plan takes inspiration from several wool producing industries like, New Zealand, Australia, United Kingdom, South Africa, United States and Finland.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Shearing Plan was developed with the support of a Shearing Advisory Circle, a twelve-person steering committee assembled to respond to proposals and suggestions.

In addition to members of the Shearing Advisory Circle, The Canadian Wool Council leveraged its membership in the Global Campaign for Wool and the International Wool Textile Organization to invite feedback from recognized authorities in shearing, wool handling and manufacturing. We gratefully acknowledge these outstanding professionals.



## SHEARING ADVISORY CIRCLE

- Sarah Nettleton, Shearer and Teacher – Nova Scotia
- Fiona Brakenridge, Shearer – Nova Scotia & New Zealand
- Amber Petersen, Shearer – Prince Edward Island
- Don Metherall, Shearer and Teacher - Ontario
- Ruco Braat, Shearer – Ontario
- Jenny Carnaghan, Producer – Ontario
- Russell Eddy, Shearer and Producer – Manitoba
- Graham Rannie, Shearer – Manitoba
- Dr. Lisa Surber, Sheep Industry Expert – Alberta and United States
- Alex Baker, Shearer – Alberta
- Pieter De Mooy, Shearer – British Columbia

## GLOBAL SHEARING ADVISORS

- Andrew Hogley, British Wool – United Kingdom
- Bo Gardner, New Zealand Wool Board – New Zealand
- Deon Saayman, Cape Wools – South Africa
- Gavin Rowland, Elite Wool Industry Training Ltd – New Zealand
- Michael Pora, Master Shearer and Wool Classifier – Australia
- Pam Barker, Calgary Stampede Shearing Competition – Canada
- Richard Schofield, British Wool – United Kingdom
- Satu Kumpulainen, Shearer – Finland
- Tom Wilson, Elite Wool Industry Training Ltd – New Zealand

## SPECIAL THANKS

Special thanks to the 260+ members of the Shearing Canada Facebook page for their questions, feedback, and insight. Having the rare chance to listen, read, learn and participate in group discussions was instrumental in helping capture the essence of the Canadian industry.

# SUMMARY

The Shearing Plan was commissioned by The Canadian Wool Council as part of a larger strategy to address common obstacles in the Canadian wool industry. It follows on the heels of The Campaign for Wool Canada's five-year strategic plan. In the plan, five roadblocks were identified as focus areas that must be addressed in order to rebrand and revalue Canadian wool.



## FUNDING

Funding for The Shearing Plan was made possible by these partners.

### Financially Supported by:



## AUDIENCE

The Shearing Plan places shearers at the centre of the Canadian wool conversation. The plan was designed by shearers for shearers. This plan sets the stage for a cohesive, skilled shearing workforce for future generations who hope to see Canadian wool and the Canadian sheep industry flourish.

## AUTHORSHIP

The Shearing Plan proposal was drafted by Jane Underhill of Wool Advocates; an independently contracted consulting firm based in Montreal, Canada. Wool Advocates is an agri-textile consultancy specializing in supply chain mapping, feasibility studies, product development and implementation plans in the Canadian wool industry. It has been in operation since 2016. Thanks and appreciation for the support team: Alissa Segal, Program and Communications Coordinator, Canadian Wool Council, Catherine Maltais, Intern, Canadian Wool Council/University of Guelph.

## RESEARCH AND PLANNING APPROACH

There were five primary angles that were used to develop The Shearing Plan model.

- Formation of a shearing Advisory Circle consisting of the 12 representatives of the Canadian sheep, wool and shearing industries.
- Leveraging The Canadian Wool Council's global relationships to gather knowledge from leading wool producing countries.
- Engagement of shearing professionals of all levels through social media chat groups to understand what matters to them.
- Reading, research, and interviews with stakeholders along the value chain.
- Reading, research, and interviews with professional accreditation programs and governing organizations outside agriculture.

# CANADA'S SHEARING PROFILE

## THE CURRENT SHEARING MODEL

Currently, Canada has a modest but well-functioning and highly respected shearing industry. According to the Canadian Cooperative Wool Growers website, there are 95 shearers working across the country. Estimates by industry insiders believe the actual number is between 150 to 200 shearers, when part-time shearers are taken into account.

Canada has a large landmass with a relatively small sheep population. The country is more than 5,000 km wide with most agricultural production happening within 500 km of the US border. This is the equivalent of 2.5 million square kilometers of land. Not only is Canada a large landmass with a small sheep population, but farm flock sizes can range from less than ten head to several hundred head. Canada is home to 62 registered breeds. Breeding crosses are commonplace on farms and multiple breeds can be found within one flock. Thus, Canada faces unique obstacles with some interesting opportunities..

Canada's shearing education system is set up in an independent fashion using a community-based approach. When a community decides to offer a shearing training course, they reach out to qualified teachers and schedule a course. They advertise to their community and wait for students to sign up. Once the course is completed, the student leaves with new skills and a network of trusted mentors. From there, it's up to the student to practice the technique, find clients to shear for, and forge their own path.

## A STANDARDIZED SHEARING MODEL

A standardized model involves adopting a standardized approach to training that is delivered nationwide, using a consistent curriculum and consistent methods for evaluation. It employs predictable schedules and expectations. A standardized model considers the importance of amplified opportunities for further training and speciality training, in shearing, wool handling and producer education. Competitions, exchanges and organized mentorship figure prominently in a successful model. The organization's finances are bolstered by enrolment fees, membership fees, retail sales and industry investment.

## BENEFITS OF STANDARDIZATION

*Third-party validation of skills is always more powerful than self-promotion of knowledge. Here are just some of the benefits offered by a standardized shearing industry.*

- Quality education developed, tested, and delivered by experienced Teacher-Trainers.
- Annual Teacher-Trainer peer review ensures curriculum is the current world-standard.
- Accreditation offers recognizable skill sets.
- Open borders for work, travel, and adventure with easy access to visas and permits globally.
- Modular training formats offered across Canada that can fit into busy schedules.
- Online support, tutorials and feedback on skills when students are living/working remotely.
- Subsidies for acquiring the right equipment.
- Services to support your business and your lifestyle.
- An opportunity to grow personally and professionally to a world class level.

*Elevating the shearing industry elevates the entire Canadian wool value chain. Here are just some of the benefits that standardization offers to the entire wool industry.*

- Gives the industry the opportunity to reclaim and rebuild lost wool skills (production, handling, classing, grading, transformation.)
- Consistent application of wool presentation, packing, and baling protocols improve the national wool clip.
- Improved national wool clip leads to better wool prices domestically.
- Demonstrates supply chain stability/reliability.
- Remedies investor insecurity.
- Changes to industry protocol are easily transmitted through the industry for quick and agile implementation.
- Every stakeholder contributions and benefits with the increased efficiency of a united supply chain.

## **SOCIAL COLLABORATION**

### **Why is it important to have Social Collaboration?**

With the business world evolving quickly and constantly, particularly on topics related to sustainability and social responsibility, our communities appreciate when their leaders show accountability, transparency and assurances that they are operating to the highest standard.

While we know Canadian producers and shearers are operating in the best interest of the industry, building a unified, nationwide organization with standardized policies or “declarations” on key subjects is a powerful tool to distinguish its offer, raise its profile and demonstrate credibility.

**A socially collaborative organization has an opportunity to lead the industry**



### **on key issues**

In addition to offering the highest standards in shearing, wool handling, and producer training, a standardized nationwide shearing organization has an opportunity to be a thought-leader on important global topics, such as:

- Animal welfare
- Land and water management
- A Canadian wool standard
- Social giveback values
- Diversity, parity and inclusion

Many wool producing nations and organizations already make clear where they stand on these issues and how they work to mitigate injustices. If Canada addressed these issues as well, they would be seen as standing shoulder to shoulder with other forward-thinking nations.

## SWOT ANALYSIS

Evaluating the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of a national shearing initiative.



### STRENGTHS

- Small industry therefore implementation could be easier to manage - more agile. Easier to bring shearers around the table. Easier to find common accord.
- Putting shearers in the driver's seat offers control and agency over their future. Lets them express and implement what is important for their vision.
- Offers previously unavailable support to individuals and families who make their livelihood from shearing.



### WEAKNESSES

- Some resistance to a standardized shearing model by existing shearers - this could complicate buy-in. With a well thought out plan and good communication with stakeholders, and taking-in shearers and industry opinion, buy-in is possible.
- Many different education models to choose from. Could create divide among shearers.
- With a small shearing industry/ low shearer population, more investment is required upfront. Growth must be modest and measured for the programme to have impact and longevity.



### OPPORTUNITIES

- Shearers control their own industry and can implement their own vision.
- Set up the next generation for success.
- Makes the industry fair and cohesive across the country.
- Opens doors to more international opportunities such as travel, work, training, adventure.
- Captures/maintains traditional skills and ensures new techniques are well-researched and introduced systematically.
- Elevates the entire wool industry by offering consistent methods and messages across the country.
- Guides producers and wool handlers to work together with the shearer for improved wool preparation into the pipeline.
- Reassures investors and supply chain that Canadian wool is harvested in an ethical, credible, standardized way.



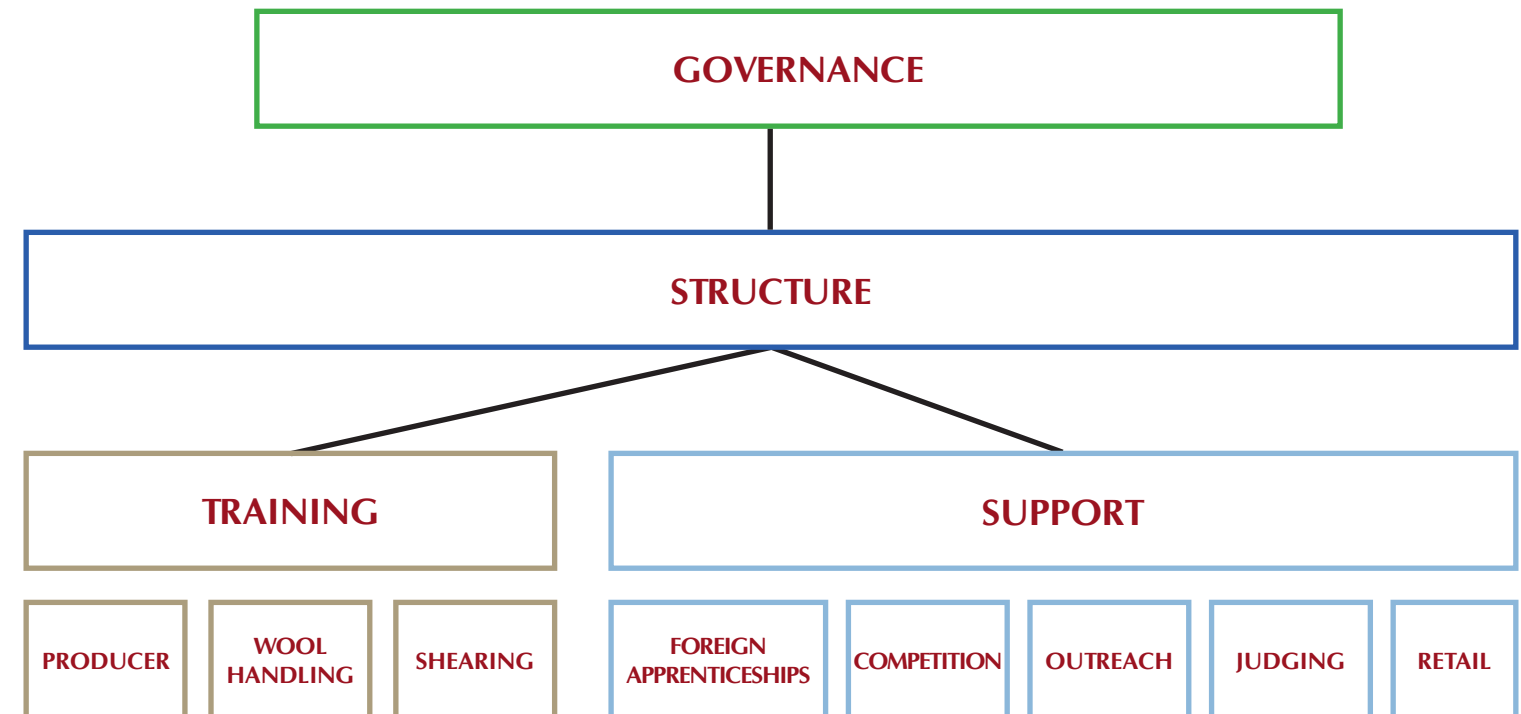
### THREATS

- Potential for outside bodies to start regulating shearers.
- The industry could be further diminished or disappear if Canada's wool reputation isn't corrected.

# REIMAGINING CANADA'S SHEARING PROFILE

## SUGGESTED STRUCTURE

A sketch of how a simple standardized shearing organization could be structured.



## SUGGESTED LEADERSHIP

### Governance

Governance is carried out through a volunteer board who implements and abides by a constitution. To ensure impartiality and create buy-in, the constitution should be drafted by a specially formed industry body who remains independent from the governance board.

Responsibilities may include:

- Implementation of the constitution
- Oversight of the organization's various activities
- Approval of budgets, spending, hiring, and awards

### Management

Two seats on the board will be reserved for "clerks". The clerk's role is a volunteer position. This is necessary until a budget is created for a paid clerk/General Manager. The clerks oversee the day-to-day operations of the organization. This role may be quite demanding so it is recommended that as much of the processes around operations be automated. The volunteer clerk's post should be for a limited timetime, such as one to two years.

Responsibilities may include:

- Managing operations of the organization.
- Course enrollments and memberships.
- Overseeing the implementation of strategies, marketing, and innovation.

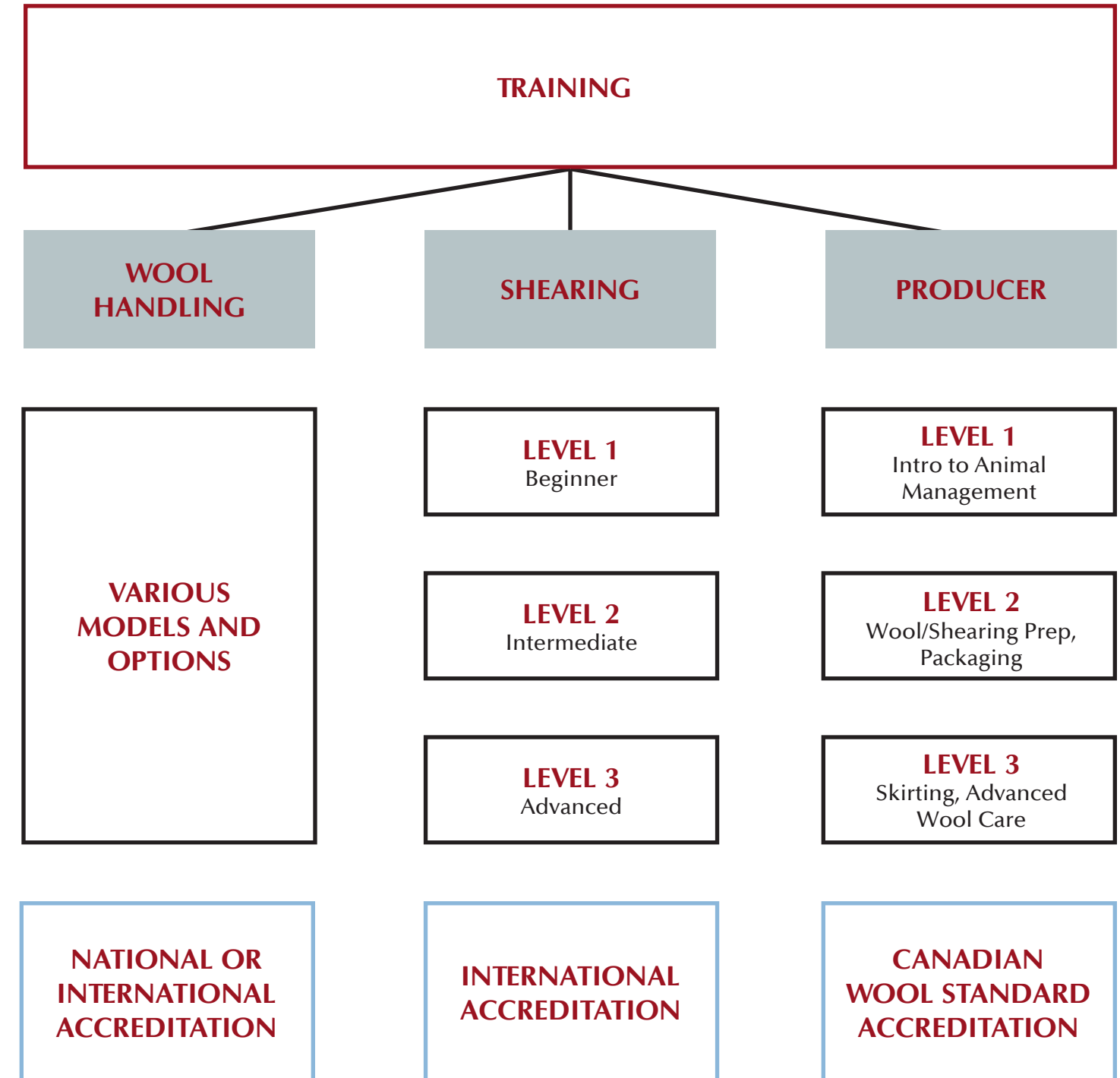
## SUGGESTED PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

The model considers offering two distinct services with accompanying products in each service category. The service categories include training services and organization services.

The table below shows the accompanying products at-a-glance.

Training Services	Organizational Services
Shearing Training	Exchanges
Wool Handling Training	Competitions
Producer Education	Outreach
Extra: Train-The-Trainers	Retail

# TRAINING SERVICES



## Shearing Training

A shearing training school is more than just an opportunity to learn how to plug in your gear and go. It's a chance to dive deeper into what you love about shearing and to elevate the entire wool industry. It's a chance to build cutting edge curricula that will safely open doors to more learning, travel, opportunity and adventure.

A national shearing program begins with foundation courses that are globally recognized: beginner, intermediate and advanced courses in a technique that is universally applicable. This ensures that across Canada and across the globe we are applying the same protocols for improved wool clip, animal welfare and efficiency.

Building on a solid foundation, the school can create specialty training workshops that bring new value and meaning to a shearer's work. If there is an interest in the history of shearing, there's an opportunity to create training workshops that address traditional shearing methods. If there are athletes looking to compete with the best, there is an opportunity to build workshops that put shearers in the mindset of an Olympian. If shearers want to run their own successful company and crew with the know-how to manage a payroll and run a fleet of trucks? There are opportunities within the framework of a national school that have the potential to make Canadian shearers the most highly regarded business leaders in the industry.

### Course Examples

- Beginner - Learn to shear a sheep
- Intermediate - Learn how to be a shearer
- Advanced - Perfecting skills
- Seal Levels - Blue, Bronze, Silver, and Gold

### Testing Examples

- Criteria for recognizing achievement (quality/efficiency testing)
- Coloured Seal Requirements
- Leveled Shearing Requirements
- International Accreditation
- Other

### Specialty Workshops / Programming Examples

- On-Farm Courses
- Gear Maintenance
- Shearing for Various/Challenging Breeds
- Various Alternative Techniques (ex: Blade Shearing)
- On-Farm Challenges
- Health - Fitness - Athletic Training
- Business - Operations - Management - Finances
- Other...

## Wool Handling

A wool handling curriculum can follow an internationally accepted format, which there are many to choose from. Canada already offers a variety of courses by various experts. They range from wool handling experts who possess connected expertise in sheep management, to wool handling experts with connected expertise in handspinning and production.

It is important to select a curriculum and a delivery system that is able to work in tandem with the protocols



that are taught to shearers and producers. Consistency in messaging and programming ensure the entire Canadian wool value chain is in step with one another and working shoulder to shoulder.

### Producer Education

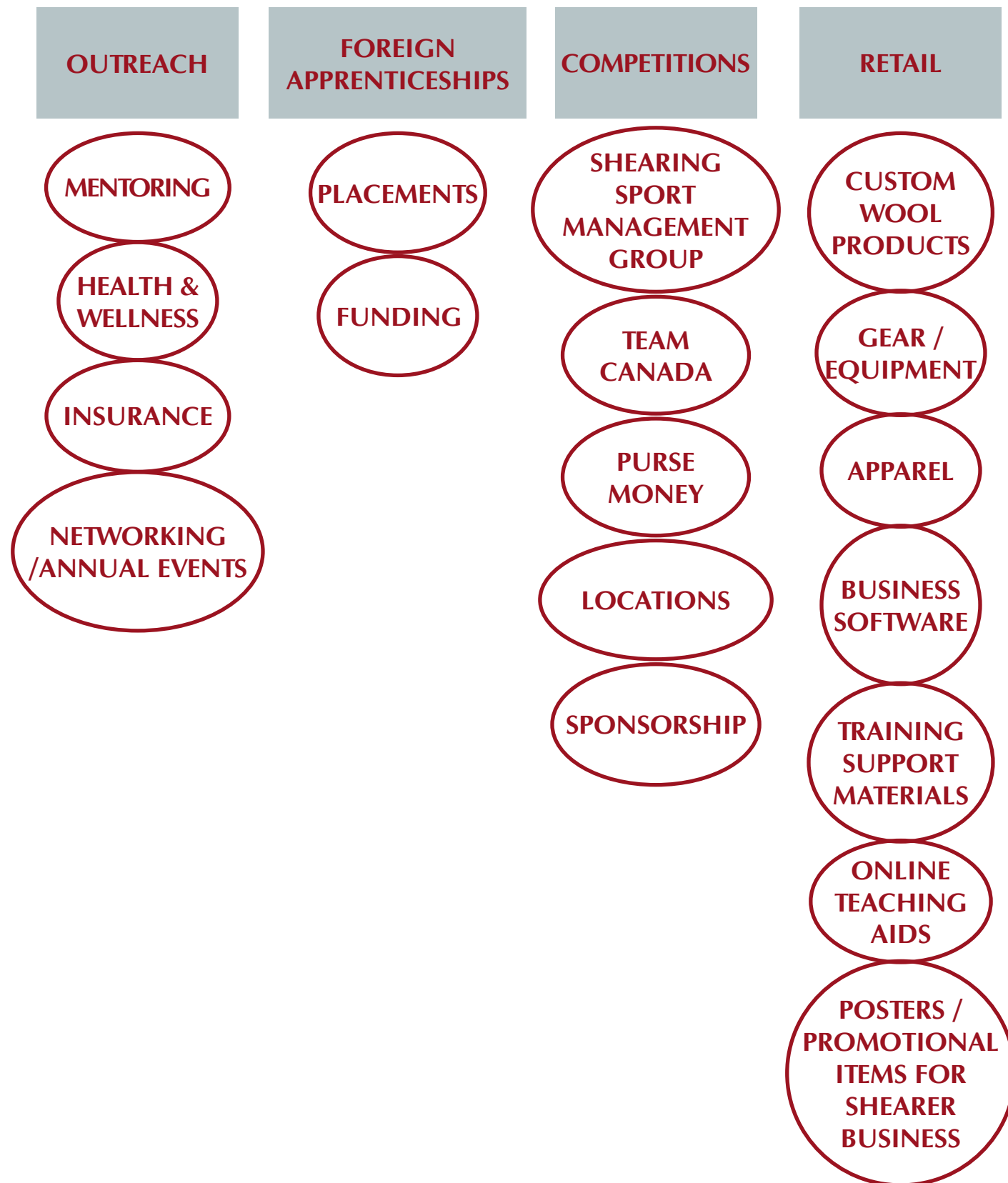
Canada already benefits from some producer education training. In particular, Ontario has an Introduction to *Small Ruminant Program* as well as a *Master Shepherd* program. Alberta is following closely to implement programs of its own. A good opportunity exists to build in shearing preparation and wool handling components into these programs.

Alternatively, The American Wool Quality Assurance Program offers a three-level producer accreditation program that teaches and certifies producers to prepare their wool clip to a national standard.

When selecting and implementing a producer education component, the following points should be considered:

- Does the curriculum comply with Canadian farming laws, protocols, and practices?
- Does the curriculum address Canadian breeds, wool types, and common Canadian wool issues?
- Does the curriculum understand and speak the producer's language?

# ORGANIZATIONAL SERVICES



The organization is the leadership group that supports the Canadian shearing profession. It's the hub through which all opportunities and initiatives are rolled out. It can be structured and named in many ways, however the most important considerations remain fixed. The organization must:

- Build and maintain social license.
- Operate as an ethical and fair industry thought leader.
- Ensure standards are met or exceeded.
- Honour and protect the credibility and investment made by shearers.

Like any organization, there should be membership fees that enable the organization to carry out the work of representing the industry. Revenue generation activities will off-set operational costs so that membership fees remain affordable while also delivering good benefits and advantages.

Memberships bond members into a cohesive, powerful group of negotiators.

- Membership fees formalize the responsibilities of the organization towards its members.
- Fees are used to subsidize all organizational activities.
- Fees are used to negotiate competitive prices and group rates on certain products and services.
- Fees are used to maintain the quality of the organization which ultimately protects its members.

The organization has a tremendous opportunity to impact the quality of life of shearers. The model above shows some of the services, activities, and events that offer support.

**Outreach** is the area where The Guild can provide the greatest service. It is the extended family that every worker needs and deserves. From collective insurance, health and wellness plans, networking opportunities, job referrals and an outreach component for those who are facing difficult times in their work or personal lives.

**Exchanges and Competitions** are events and activities where The Guild can lend support. They can leverage international relations and sponsorships to help Canadian shearers train, compete and apprentice at home and abroad.

**Retail** sales offer product revenue streams that support the organization's activities. Products can include equipment, apparel, books, manuals, videos and online streaming products. It can also include professionally prepared collateral material like business cards, postcards, website templates, booking software and other back-office support.





## MARKETING

The marketing approach for a national shearing program should center on the concepts of **Unity**, **Standardization**, and **Predictability**.

### Unity

Connecting all of wool's industries and sub industries from coast to coast. By uniting all of the interconnected stakeholders into a cohesive unit, the organization will have more negotiating power in all areas of the industry. From lobbying for workers rights, training subsidies, preferred pricing on insurance or equipment, to working with government agencies to improve policy, a united industry is a powerful, professional force.

### Standardization

Coordinating all wool practices across the country to international standards. This will improve wool quality, consistency and uniformity. If all producers, shearers, and handlers are working towards the same standards with the same protocols, it will create an important opportunity to make Canadian wool more attractive to the supply chain.

### Predictability

Predictability means that the industry knows what to expect from you. They can predict that wool will arrive in the same type of press packed square totes with quality skirting and sorting. They can predict that each year in April a beginner shearing course happens in three locations across Canada. They know where to go for information that is clear and easy to understand.

Offering/selling a high level of **unity**, **standardization**, and **predictability** to the industry enables you, the governing organization, to forecast and plan with greater accuracy up to three years in advance. It also demonstrates accountability when the organization is negotiating with investors, legislators and government.

### Marketing Strategy for The School

#### Target Audience

Tomorrow's leaders. Up-and-coming shearers. Individuals aged 16 to 35. The objective is to attract and support them throughout their career, building shearing and wool skills alongside business and leadership skills.

#### Courses

- **Location:** Varying the locations/provinces where shearing courses are held makes them accessible and opens the programme to subsidies and support at the local level. Setting the course schedule 18 - 36 months in advance gives people time to plan and budget.
- **On-Farm Hosting:** Bringing the courses on-farm/on-demand can create a diversified revenue opportunity and attract more serious shearers into the leveled accreditation program.
- **Specialty Workshops:** Adding value and driving interest by offering creative or connected workshops to shearing. This could be set up as a voluntary continuing education program. These workshops may include shearing workshops, skills improvement, business training, leadership training, and working toward becoming a Teacher-Trainer.

## Marketing for the Organization

### Target Audience

- Existing Canadian shearers and members of a profession or skilled trade connected to wool.
- Past Canadian shearers and members of a profession or skilled trade connected to wool.
- Future Canadian shearers and members of a profession or skilled trade connected to wool.
- Foreign nationals who work in Canada as shearers or members of a profession or skilled trade connected to wool.
- Individuals of any age or stage of their career from beginner to retired shearer.

### Membership

The organization could operate in many ways but the most popular set up is a membership format with voting rights, supplemented by alternative revenue sources from subsidies, sponsorship, retail sales, and event fees.<sup>1</sup>

## FINANCE

### Assumptions

Annual Courses	Occurrences	Attendees	Fee	Totals
Introductory	2	5	800	8,000
Intermediate	2	5	800	8,000
Advanced	1	6	800	4,800
Workshops	3	8	350	7,200
On-Site	1	1	3,000	3,000
				<b>31,000</b>

Annual Attestations	Candidates	Fee	Totals
Blue	6	170	1,020
Bronze	6	200	1,200
Silver	2	240	480
Gold	2	240	480
			<b>3,180</b>

Annual Memberships	Members	Fee	Totals
Student - No Seal	12	50	600
Shearer - No Seal	15	200	3,000
Shearer - Blue	20	50	1,000
Shearer - Bronze	20	100	2,000
Shearer - Silver	5	150	750
Shearer - Gold	5	200	1,000
Producer	30	50	1,500
Handler	20	50	1,000
Artisan	20	50	1,000
Corporate Membership	5	500	2,500
			<b>14,350</b>

Annual Events	Attendees	Fee	Totals
Ex. Annual Lamb Dinner (3 regions)	60	60	3,600
Ex. Raffle Tickets on equipment	100	10	1,000
Ex: Networking Events at Stampede/ Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, Etc.	30	25	750
Ex: Other	50	10	500
			<b>5,850</b>

### Training Assumptions

Course	Days	#/Yr	Total Days
Introductory	4	2	8
Intermediate	4	2	8
Advanced	2	1	2
Workshop	1	3	3
On-Site / On-Farm	4	1	4
Testing	2	2	4
			<b>29</b>

Course Expenses	Total Days	Cost / Day	Total
Teacher-Trainer Salary	30	800	24,000

Travel Expenses	Total Days	Cost / Day	Total
Travel (Air)	1	3,000	3,000
Travel (Ground)	2	1,000	2,000
Accommodation	30	200	6,000
			<b>35,000</b>

### Forecast

Potential Revenue Source	Revenue
Course Revenue	31,000
Attestation Fees	3,180
Membership Fees	14,350
Event Fees	5,850
Provincial Sponsorship	12,000
Other Sponsorship	10,000
Retail Revenue	10,000
<b>Annual Revenue</b>	<b>86,380</b>

Potential Expenses	Cost
Teacher-Trainer Salary	24,000
Office Expenses	200
Location Rentals	2,000
Travel	35,000
Cost of Goods Sold	5,000
Exchange Budget	9,000
Competition Budget	9,000
<b>Annual Expenses</b>	<b>84,200</b>



**ANNEXES**

**I - GLOBAL SHEEP INDUSTRY**

The countries selected for analysis represent fair and interesting comparisons for the Canadian industry based on landmass, sheep populations and number of breeds, and other profiles.

Country	Sheep pop. aprox.	Landmass in KM <sup>2</sup>	Number of Breeds
Finland	131,00	338,440	3
Falkland Islands	504,620	12,173	4
Canada	827,200	9,985,000	62
Norway	932,841	385,207	3
Germany	1,508,000	357,588	50
United States	5,210,000	9,840,000	47
France	6,994,000	551,695	25
United Kingdom	14,600,000	209,331	60
South Africa	21,600,000	1,200,000	20
New Zealand	25,700,000	268,021	28
Australia	68,700,000	7,688,000	22

**II - EDUCATION MODALITIES**

**Shearing Education Modalities**

The Shearing Plan compared other global industry training modalities.. While each nation had something interesting to teach us, we narrowed our comparison to the three most viable countries; the United States, United Kingdom, and New Zealand. Note that while Australia is the global powerhouse, the size and profile of our industry makes it too challenging to scale down to Canada’s needs. With this in mind, there are travelling Teacher-Trainers who teach training courses according to Australian standards while meeting the distinct needs of the Canadian market.

Commonalities between the United States, United Kingdom, and New Zealand are as follows:

- Each nation has a long tradition and a deep understanding of sheep and wool.
- Each nation already has a standardized wool strategy in place.
- Each nation has a sizable and strong wool sector.
- Each nation has industry buy-in and investment.
- Each nation demonstrates a good understanding of the current Canadian industry.
- Each nation has a compelling service offer that is scalable to meet Canadian needs.
- Each nation shows a willingness for collaboration with Canada and an interest in forming a training partnership for mutual benefit.

Country	Provider	Number of Days	Levels	Industry Recognized	Online Booking	Hands-on Training	Support Materials Available	Certificate Issued Upon Course Completion	Student-Teacher Ratio	List of Courses Offered
United Kingdom	British Wool	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coloured Seal<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Blue</li> <li>• Bronze</li> <li>• Silver</li> <li>• Gold</li> </ul>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4:5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Machine Shearing</li> <li>• Blade Shearing</li> <li>• Wool Handling</li> <li>• Crutching</li> <li>• Gear Courses</li> <li>• Sharpening/grinding</li> </ul>
United States	American Sheep Industry	5 days 5 days 2 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intro 1</li> <li>• Intro 2</li> <li>• Advanced</li> </ul>	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes	N/A	8-10 depends on # of stands. 4-stand set up can take 8 students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beginner to Advanced. Shearing. ASI supports several Teacher-Trainers. The Shearing Plan worked most closely with Michael Pora who teaches an internationally respected method.</li> <li>• 4-Level Certified Wool Classing</li> </ul>
New Zealand	Elite Wool Industry Training		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coloured Seal</li> <li>• Blue</li> <li>• Red</li> <li>• Green</li> <li>• Gold</li> </ul>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beginner</li> <li>• Advanced</li> <li>• Wool Handling</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup>Blue Seal - shear three sheep in 15-30 minutes. Bronze Seal - 12-15 sheep per hour. Silver Seal 18-24 sheep per hour. Gold Seal - 30+ sheep per hour.

## UNITED KINGDOM SHEARING SUMMARY

British Wool is the official provider of the UK's shearing program. It has many attractive features, including:

- The British Wool model is widely exported with a proven track record of improving the shearing and wool producing industries in foreign countries.
- British Wool provides exceptional back-office support in marketing, publicity, communications pieces
- Opportunities exist for negotiating support for Canada.
- Various training scenarios offer versatility.
- Nationally recognized "Landbased" designation offers training and subsidies through colleges. Canada could seek the same designation under the Red Skilled Trades<sup>4</sup> program.
- Globally recognized programs mean students trained in this method have easier access to world visas and work permits.

<sup>4</sup>Red Seal Trades Programme Canada: [https://www.red-seal.ca/eng/trades/tr.1d.2s\\_1.3st.shtml](https://www.red-seal.ca/eng/trades/tr.1d.2s_1.3st.shtml)

Example of a typical course outline:

Day 1	Day 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introductions, risk assessment and introduction to equipment</li> <li>• Demonstration 1 – shearing and wool preparation</li> <li>• Student practice</li> <li>• Demonstration 2</li> <li>• Student practice</li> <li>• Questions and answers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction and risk assessment</li> <li>• Demonstration 1</li> <li>• Student practice</li> <li>• Demonstration 2</li> <li>• Student practice</li> <li>• Demonstration 3</li> <li>• Student practice</li> <li>• Safe storage of equipment</li> <li>• Questions and answers</li> </ul>

## NEW ZEALAND SHEARING SUMMARY

New Zealand has many different shearing companies that certify students. In recent years, Elite Wool Industry Training has emerged ahead of the competition. They have many attractive features, including:

- A highly skilled leadership team and good relationships with government and the public, and social license.
- Lobbying efforts for fairness in the industry, more student funding ,and programs for women and youth.<sup>4</sup>
- Spokespeople to speak about the importance of standardization to improve opportunities for the entire industry.
- A variety of courses offered in modular formats such as *Pathway to Gold* and *Wool Handling*.
- The curriculum is reviewed annually for updates to ensure all Teacher-Trainers teach the same program.

<sup>4</sup>Call for Funding to Train Shearers and Woolhandlers. <https://www.odt.co.nz/rural-life/rural-life-other/call-funding-train-shearers-and-woolhandler>

Example of a typical course outline

Beginner Shearing 4-day course	Advanced Shearing 3-day course open to those who have achieved Blue Seal Status	Wool Handling 2-day course
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and Safety in the Industry and Woolshed environment.</li> <li>• Animal Welfare and Animal Handling</li> <li>• Team Work</li> <li>• Handpiece set up and comb selection</li> <li>• Machine and Handpiece Maintenance</li> <li>• Grinding (sharpening) Combs and Cutters</li> <li>• Basic Woolhandling</li> <li>• Introduction to Woolpress and pressing</li> <li>• All crutching methods</li> <li>• Introductory Shearing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and Safety in the Industry and Woolshed environment</li> <li>• Animal Welfare and Animal Handling</li> <li>• Team Work</li> <li>• Comb selection and gear experting</li> <li>• Machine and Handpiece Maintenance</li> <li>• Grinding (sharpening) Combs and Cutters</li> <li>• A high level of instruction on pattern, and helping improve quality and tallies</li> <li>• A pathway to the next level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health &amp; Safety</li> <li>• Preparation guidelines for crossbred - full wool/second shear and merino</li> <li>• Wool terminology</li> <li>• Non-technical exercises</li> <li>• Theory exercises</li> <li>• Practical assessment for the National Certificate in Woolhandling</li> </ul>

## AMERICAN SHEARING SUMMARY

The American Sheep Industry Association is the national organization that represents the American sheep industry. Their American Wool Quality Assurance Program offers shearing and wool classing training. In addition to this model, they endorse independent Teacher-Trainers. Features of this industry include:

- Industry buy-in and social license.
- Innovative subsidies and student incentivization.
- Program roll out through appointed shearing teachers.



### III - COMPETITION MODALITIES

The countries selected for analysis represent fair and interesting comparisons for the Canadian industry based on landmass, sheep populations and number of breeds, and other profiles.

#### SPEED SHEARING

Speed shearing competitions are held regularly in several countries around the world. They are most popular in Ireland, UK, South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia. In speed shearing, competitors are timed against each other to determine who can shear the fastest. The fleece of competition sheep is kept at a uniform length before competition. While there are various adaptations of the rules, the World Speedshear Committee states that sheep are handed to competitors through a chute. The sheep are held between the legs of the competitor when the timer begins. Sheep must be completely shorn as quickly as possible. After, the sheep will be inspected for quality by the judges. Penalties may be given for various reasons including false starts and plucking wool after the timer button is pushed by the competitor. The categories in speed shearing currently recognized by the world speedshear committee are strong wool ewe, strong wool lamb, crossbred ewe, crossbred lamb, merino ewe, merino lamb, and merino lamb shorn by hand (with blade).

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- [http://www.shearingworld.com/worldspeedshears/world\\_speedshear\\_committee\\_rules.htm](http://www.shearingworld.com/worldspeedshears/world_speedshear_committee_rules.htm)
  - <https://www.sportsshear.com.au/rules/shearing-rules/>
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zz2AnTujxPc>
  - <https://www.mytrundle.com.au/index.php/strategic-plan/70-trundle-show/other-competition-through-the-year/other-competitions>

#### QUALITY SHEARING

Competitions are also held that judge on the quality of shear. These competitions are similar to the ones judged upon timing, but quality forms the basis of the evaluation over speed. Level of quality is divided into two categories: board and pen. Any mistakes will negatively impact the shearer's score. Board penalties include second cuts, imperfections regarding how the fleece was removed, failure to remove any belly wool, poor handling of the sheep or the wool, and any damage to the fleece. Pen penalties include any wool left on the sheep and if the sheep is cut or hurt. The pen score also weighs the number of strokes against the number of animals shorn. There is a time component in quality shearing of one point per 20 seconds assessed on the total number of sheep each shearer shears. In Quality Shearing, the board and pen points are added together, divided by the number of sheep sheared, and added to the time score. The lowest score wins.

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- <https://www.sportsshear.com.au/rules/shearing-rules/>
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0gHfpGmpt8Y>

#### WOOL HANDLING

Wool handling competitions are held for contestants to show their expertise and demonstrate proper handling of fleece. These competitions are mainly held in New Zealand, Australia, UK and South Africa. *The Golden Shears* is the largest wool handling competition worldwide held annually in New Zealand. There are four grades in the wool handling championships: Novice, Junior, Senior and Open. Contestants are required to sort out and organize the different parts of the fleece into separate boxes and present the cleaned wool for assessment. They must sort the fleece types into their respective boxes knowing that any fleece placed in the incorrect box will earn them penalty points. Depending on the grade of competition, each competitor has multiple sheep shorn and fleeces to prepare. The shearer must not interact with contestants in any way and has to shear sheep consistently with the other shearers in competition.

Contestants must sort and prepare the fleece over a table for assessment while keeping their station floor clean as well as keep the area where shearing is occurring tidy. Once the fleece is finished it is rolled and placed into a bag for judging. At the end of competition, each fleece will be examined by a judge for any oddities. Boxes will also be checked for any incorrectly sorted fleece. Penalties will be given if oddities and incorrectly sorted fleeces are found. Contestants may also receive floor penalties if their station is not kept clean. Time penalties are also distributed if wool handlers throw their fleece over the table. Penalties are totaled for each contestant and then divided by the total number of fleeces. They are then added to the time penalties. A winner is decided based on the lowest score.

- <https://www.sportsshear.com.au/rules/wool-handling-rules/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Amv02y-ToqE>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBRqyEMtVik>
- <https://www.goldenshears.co.nz/about>

## IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZED COMPETITIONS NATIONWIDE

Recommendations have been made for local/regional shearing competitions at annual fairs or exhibitions. A reasonable purse should be offered to incentivize participants. Purse money should come from local organizations connected to the sheep industry such as an agricultural retailer, yarn store, mill, transporter, or governing board.

Competitions should be for Quality Shearing at the local level until it makes sense to introduce Speed Competitions. Wool Handling Competitions should also be offered at the regional level with an aim to grow the sport.

Given the actual size of the Canadian industry, four to six regional competitions seemed reasonable. We suggest these competitions be sorted by regions:

- Atlantic Provinces
- Quebec
- Ontario
- Western Provinces
- Alberta/BC

Local/Regional Competition leaders should advance to a semi-final held in two Canadian regions (East and West) with a final competition already in existence at Holstein Expo, Calgary Stampede or Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. Increased purses with publicity and other prizes should continue to incentivize potential participants.

It is strongly recommended that a separate management group be established to lead Canada's "Shearing Sport" initiatives. The management group include shearers who have international competition experience.

## OVERVIEW OF MAJOR COMPETITIONS BY COUNTRY FOR FURTHER REVIEW

### CANADA - 2 competitions annually pre-pandemic

Competitions	Style	Levels	Purse
Holstein Expo	Speed	Novice, Intermediate, Pro, Senior	\$10,000
North American Sheep Shearing Challenge (Calgary Stampede - paused due to Covid)	Quality & Speed	Intermediate, Open	\$11,500 in prize money First place \$2,400  Largest and most expensive shearing competition in North America. All competitors receive some money. Intermediate division created to keep newer Canadian competitors engaged.  Heat money paid for placings in each heat + shearing gear, blankets, and gift certificates redeemable from vendors on site.

Purse is based on numbers from 2019 competitions.

### NEW ZEALAND - PGG Wrightson National Shearing Circuit

Competitions	Style	Levels	Purse	Notes
The Golden Shears	Speed and Quality	Student, Young Farmers, Novice, Junior, Intermediate, Senior, Open, National, International, NIWC, Māori/Pakeha, Trans-Tasman, Men's, Women's, Pairs, Triathlon, Quality	\$24,010 total, increases every year	One of the largest shearing events in the world, includes Wool Handling
New Zealand Corriedale Shearing/Wool Handling Championships	Speed	Novice, Junior, Senior, Open	Not specified	For Corriedale breeds, includes Wool Handling
New Zealand Merino Shearing Championships	Speed	Novice, Junior, Senior, Open	\$13,700 total	For Merino breeds, includes Wool Handling
New Zealand Spring Shears, Waimate	Speed	Young Farmers, Novice, Junior, Intermediate, Senior, Open, Women's	\$9,235 total	For Romney breeds, includes Wool Handling
Pahiatua Shears	Speed	Novice, Junior, Intermediate, Senior, Open	\$5,610 total	For Romney Second Shear breeds
Rangitikei Shears	Speed	Novice, Junior, Intermediate, Senior, Open	\$10,000 total	For Romney Lamb breeds, includes Wool Handling

Purse is based on numbers from 2016/2017 competitions, except for the Rangitikei Shears which is from 2023.

## UNITED KINGDOM

Competitions	Style	Levels	Purse	Notes
Royal Ulster Agricultural Society (Balmoral Show)	Speed	Novice, Junior, Intermediate, Senior, Open, Champion, Traditional, Six Nations, Women's Veterans	£4,985 total	Includes Wool Handling
Bath & West Show	Speed	Junior, Novice, Intermediate, Open, National, Six Nations	£4,20 total	
Royal Highland Show	Speed	Young Farmers, Novice, Junior, Intermediate, Senior, Open, National	£4,170 total	Includes Wool Handling
Great Yorkshire Show	Speed	Young Farmers, Junior, Intermediate, Open, Senior, Veterans, Women's Blade Shearing	£1,410 total	Includes Wool Handling
Royal Welsh Show	Speed	Junior, Champion	£2,060 total	Part of the Wool Handling competition
Royal Welsh Smallholding & Countryside Festival	Speed	Novice, Intermediate, Open	£1,085 total	
Royal Cornwall Show	Speed	Novice, Junior, Intermediate, Senior, Open, Champion, Traditional, Six Nations, Women's Veterans	£9,070 total	
Staffordshire County Show	Quality & Speed	Novice, Junior, Intermediate, Senior, Open	£2,015 total	Includes Wool Handling
Northumberland County Show	Speed	Junior, Intermediate, Senior, Open, Blade Shearing, Women's	£470 total	Includes Wool Handling
Three Counties Show	N/A	Novice, Junior, Intermediate, Senior, Open, Senior, Open	£885 total	

Purse is based on numbers from 2022 competitions.

## II - SUCCESS STORIES

### FINLAND SHEARING - SUOMEN KERISTSIJÄT RY

#### In conversation with Satu Kumpulainen

Less than a decade ago, Finnish wool was struggling with its identity. The global coarse wool industry was in decline and Finland's flock was deemed too "insignificant" to garner major investment. Breeding was meat-quality focused and wool had high VM contamination.

A few shearers and producers felt differently about Finnish wool's potential and took matters into their own hands. They contacted leading wool nations for advice and were initially quite discouraged by the response. With perseverance, it was British Wool who proved to be the most helpful. British Wool suggested Finland form a shearers' association and begin organizing training at the Blue Seal level. Year after year, the producer and shearer came up together in the Finnish wool industry. Their dedication and commitment have led to a success story.

Today, Finland's wool industry is organized around Suomen Keristsijät Ry (The Association of Finnish Pickers). They have a small roster of shearers and teacher-trainers who are qualified to offer courses at the Blue Seal and Bronze Seal level. They maintain a close relationship with British Wool for Silver Seal and Gold Seal training. They have regular competitions including a blade shearing team. They have to collaborate with producers in order to manage VM and prepare fleeces to a certain standard. All Finnish wool has a destination within Finland. Most of the clip is even processed within Finland in something akin to national vertical integration. They send wool to the UK for scouring but all other transformation processes happen in Finland and are destined to Finnish products. Finnish wool is identified by a small Finnish Flag as their logo. During Covid, Finland saw four new mills open (two mini-mills and two larger processors).

### OUTCOMES

- Producers saw their wool prices go from €0.50 - €1.50/kilo to an average of €5.00/kilo for greasy wool.

- There are 10 higher level shearers who manage the national flock of 131,000 sheep with 60,000 breeding ewes and lambs.
- The association manages their own Blue Seal and Bronze Seal courses under British Wool.
- Shearers regularly travel to the UK for further training in shearing and wool handling.
- Lamb's wool is bagged separately because it now fetches a higher price per kilo than ewe wool.
- Increased attention in wool prep by producers and shearers has made the clip more predictable.
- Predictability in wool quality and volume has attracted new infrastructure.
- In the last three years, Finland has seen 4 new mills open. Two mini-mills and two larger capacity mills.
- Three clean/dry wool depots nationally accept wool and press-pack for efficient shipping to scourer.



Photo courtesy of Finnish Wool Pickers Association



## WOOLGROWERS MERRIMAN SHEARING SCHOOL

[www.woolmark.com/fibre/woolgrowers/nsw-merriman-shearing-school/](http://www.woolmark.com/fibre/woolgrowers/nsw-merriman-shearing-school/)



In the far northwest of New South Wales, in the Australian outback, lies the sleepy town of Brewarrina. Located on the banks of the Barwon River, Bre, as it is known by the locals, has a long Indigenous Australian history and was once the meeting grounds for more than 5,000 people. Even though its population has shrunk to just 1,000 people, the town is managing, through the activities taking place on its outskirts, to make a big difference to both the local community and one of Australia's biggest industries.

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewers are advised that the following content contains images and quotes of people who have died.*

The wool industry has been an integral part of the heritage of Australia and its families for many generations. At the Merriman Shearing School in Brewarrina, one man is determined to keep the shearing tradition alive while also providing his students with an opportunity for a better future. Established in 2010, and sitting on a 16,000-hectare property, the Merriman Shearing School has changed the lives of more than 150 students, mostly aged between 15 and 30. Owned by the Indigenous Land Corporation, which receives funding from Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet for the operation of the school, and supported by Australian Wool Innovation, the school runs two 16-week courses each year. The school offers a Certificate Two in Rural Operations, and aims to find jobs for young Indigenous Australians within the wool industry.

With more than 50 years' shearing experience, Ian Bateman, or 'Boof' as he is known in the industry, is the school's head trainer. An Indigenous man himself, he knows just how important it is for young Indigenous Australians to be offered training that can lead to employment opportunities. "More than half of our students have gained full-time employment after graduating," says a proud Bateman. "In addition to shearing, the students are taught everything that's done on a sheep property: fencing, fixing troughs, building yards, wool handling, pressing and stock management. Not all of them want to continue as a shearer, but by the time they finish they have so many other skills."



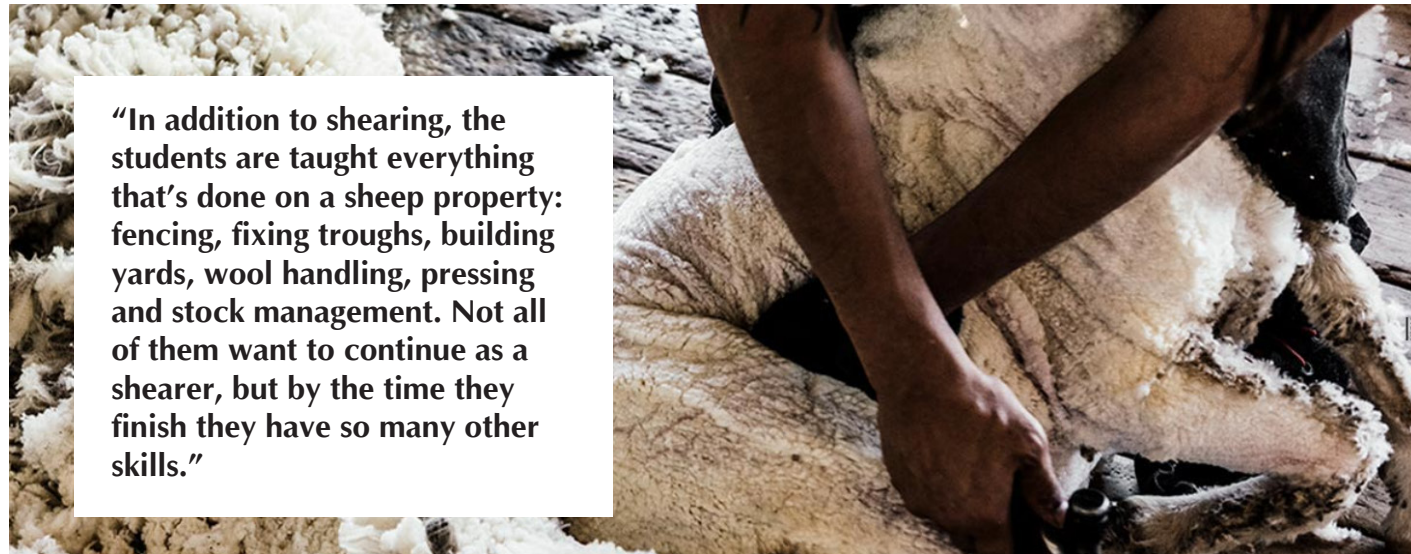
According to Bateman, one of the biggest challenges at the start of each course is motivating the young students to get up out of bed, get fit and get healthy. This is why every morning starts with a nine-kilometre run, walk or jog, and the school's live-in cook prepares nutritious meals for the students on-site. Each fortnight, an exercise scientist from Bourke & Brewarrina Aboriginal Health Services visits the school for gym classes and to measure the students' progress across the 16 weeks for strength and endurance. "Getting the students out of bed is one of the biggest drawbacks we have when we start," explains Bateman. "The kids are used to walking the street all night and watching TV and going to bed at 6 A.M. So, you've got to reverse the cycle. It's hard work on both us and the kids but we achieve it and many ex-trainees ring me up from time-to-time to let me know where they are working and that they have continued on with their health plan."

A shearing school might seem like a strange place for youth to obtain skills that can earn them such a significant wage. And yet, the training provided by the Merriman Shearing School has given many



graduates the opportunity to work full-time, and to travel the world. Australian shearers are not only employed on home soil, they are also contracted for jobs in the USA, the UK, and Europe. For the duration of the 16-week course, the trainees are expected to work industry hours and are paid wages under the national training award. By the end of their time at Merriman, trainees are expected to be able to shear the industry minimum of 80 sheep per day. More than 50 per cent of graduates are immediately placed into ongoing employment upon graduation, with many now able to support their families and purchase a house.

“I saw this as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” says 22-year-old trainee Morgan Wrigley. “I grew up surrounded by the wool industry, my [dad’s] a shearer and my brothers work in the wool industry, so I thought I’d try to keep it in the family. Apart from the farm skills, I’ve learned that nutrition and fitness are important, as is healthy eating so you can keep up with your work.”



**“In addition to shearing, the students are taught everything that’s done on a sheep property: fencing, fixing troughs, building yards, wool handling, pressing and stock management. Not all of them want to continue as a shearer, but by the time they finish they have so many other skills.”**

Unlike Morgan, 16-year-old Sophie Noble decided early on in the course that shearing wasn’t for her. What she did take a liking to, however, was wool handling – something she hopes to continue after graduation. Hailing from the tiny town of Walcha in New South Wales’ northern tablelands, Noble decided to attend the Merriman Shearing School to learn new skills and try something different. “I was open to learn anything when I arrived,” she explained. “I’ve learned fencing, wool classing, shearing and crutching, but my favourite part has been wool handling and I intend to stay in the wool industry and get more skills when I finish here. I’ve made some good friends here and my advice to anyone would be to try your hardest and not to give up.”

The change in the students’ physical and mental health after the live-in course is amazing, notes Bateman, who’s like a proud father to each and every student. “This is the only shearer training facility in Australia that takes youth off the street and turns them into good, young responsible people, who can go out and earn meaningful employment and live by themselves. That, to me, is a success.”

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About the Author: **Lisa Griplas** has more than ten years experience in the media and communications industry. A journalist by trade, she spent a number of years working at a daily newspaper before moving to The Woolmark Company to take up the role of Global Editor, a title she holds today.



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