

Master Shepherds rely on breeding program

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BEAR CREEK

Bob and Penny Leder view their Bear Creek Sheep Station enterprise from a truly commercial perspective. With an eye to health issues, they rely on a breeding program that delivers both prolificacy and profitability.

The Leders, N8714 County Trunk T, Bear Creek, serve as Wisconsin's Master Shepherds in the commercial division, an honor bestowed upon them by the Wisconsin Sheep Breeders Cooperative.

Penny's sheep experience began when she met Bob as a University of Wisconsin-River Falls freshman. She showed a lamb at the school's Royal Show with Bob's help, then later took an advanced sheep-production class.

Bob's grandfather had had a small flock of ewes on his Lincoln County farm. Although he grew up on a dairy farm, Bob started his own flock of registered Oxfords when he was in high school. When he was accepted to veterinary school, he sold his flock to his brother Mark, and his younger siblings kept the flock going as part of their 4-H project work.

Bob and Penny were married in 1979.

After Bob graduated from the University of Minnesota School of Veterinary Medicine in 1982, he joined Clintonville Veterinary Services, now a five-person practice, as a dairy veterinarian, and within a few years, he and Penny started raising sheep. In 1986, they bought back the flock of Oxfords Bob had started in high school from Mark, who still farms near Gleason in Lincoln County. The next year, with a foundation flock of about 10 "quite old" ewes, the Leders



MASTER SHEPHERDS – Bob and Penny Leder of Bear Creek are the state commercial Master Shepherds.

(Photo by Jane Metcalf)

bought two ewes and a ram at the national Oxford show.

Early on, they decided they wanted to safeguard against ovine progressive

pneumonia (OPP). They first tested for OPP in 1988. Since it was a drought year and forage supplies were short, they decided it was a good time to reduce their flock by selling all positive animals, then they retested for OPP.

Now, to protect the health of their flock, all new flock additions are checked for foot rot, tested for OPP and quarantined for two weeks.