

Shaniko's Jeanne Carver receives major award from US sheep industry

Jeanne Carver, president and founder of Shaniko Wool Company, has won the American Sheep Industry Association's 2023 Innovation Award, which recognizes the outstanding accomplishments of an individual or organization that has improved the US sheep industry in a game-changing way.

The American Sheep Industry Association (ASI) represents the interests of more than 100,000 sheep producers in the US and a federation of 45 state sheep associations.

Carver has been pioneering her own path in the industry for 25 years, prevailing against tough odds when offshoring of wool in the late 1990's began decimating the same US sheep markets that ranchers had relied on for over 100 years.

"During the 1990's, when our industry was feeling the pressure of offshoring in textile processing and manufacturing, along with consolidation in the food sector and import pressures on lamb, Jeanne led her family out of commodity wool and lamb sales to direct sale and marketing of wool and lamb products," said Anthony Theos of Theos Swallow Fork Ranch.

"They maintained that momentum for more than 20 years, expanding and growing their marketing efforts. Around 2015, when the international textile market was moving toward third-party certification of wool, Jeanne led [her family ranch] forward, becoming the first ranch in the world certified to what has become the leading wool certification in the world – the Responsible Wool Standard (RWS)."

Developed by Textile Exchange, the RWS sets strict standards for the handling of sheep stock, land conservation and worker safety.

In 2018, Carver took what she had learned during the RWS certification of her own ranch and formed Shaniko Wool Company (SWC) to scale the supply of RWS-certified US Merino wool available to US apparel brands.

Currently, SWC includes 10 sheep producers located in the American West, grazing on over 2.6 million acres and shearing an estimated 500,000 pounds of fine Merino wool every year. All have been audited and are certified under the RWS. Other ranches are waiting in the wings to join her farm group.

"These growers are the reason I am winning this award," said Carver of the sheep ranches that are now RWS-certified and part of the Shaniko Wool Company farm

group. Today, Shaniko Wool is the only North American provider of Merino/Rambouillet wool certified under the RWS. “I am speechless, but very honored and humbled by the recognition,” said Carver. “The ranchers who are part of Shaniko Wool are industry leaders at both the state and national level.”

Her sheep producers receive an annual 20 to 25 percent premium price for their wool, which reflects increased demand from consumers for authenticity and transparency with regard to sustainability, humane treatment of sheep stock and worker welfare.

Not one to rest on a laurel, in early 2020, Carver formed a research team and launched a Carbon Measurement Initiative for the Shaniko Wool farm group to determine the ecosystem and climate impacts of each ranching operation. “With three years of verified data and having baseline measures across more than 2 million acres, the preliminary results are impressive,” said Julie Hansmire of Campbell Hansmire Sheep. “Jeanne has shown visionary leadership in supporting the research and investment in measurement that proves the ecosystem value of progressive sheep grazing operations.”

In 2022, Carver further expanded the reach of Shaniko Wool Company by signing an exclusive licensing agreement with the Paris-based Chargeurs Group, which is one of one of the largest wool suppliers in the world.

The new Chargeurs-Shaniko Wool Company joint regenerative wool program was formally introduced to global apparel markets in November of 2022 under the name, NATIVA™ Regen-Shaniko. Backed by Blockchain technology, NATIVA™ Regen-Shaniko is fully traceable from farm to end product and dual certified under the RWS and NATIVA™ Regen, a third-party certified standard developed by Chargeurs.

This is the only wool grown in North America that is certified under the RWS at both farm and mill levels. Chargeurs’ US wool scouring mill in Jamestown, SC, earned RWS certification in 2022.

“The work I am doing today with these family sheep operations is the most rewarding work I’ve ever done,” said Carver. “They are good people doing great work, supporting rural communities and our U.S. textile industry. Together, we are stronger. It’s a great privilege.”