**Finnsheep As The Source Of Creativity**

The Finnsheep Breeders Association is pleased to announce that Jill Christensen, past president of Finland's Finnsheep Breeders Association will be speaking on Finnsheep as the Source of Creativity this September on both the east and west coast. Jill raises Finnsheep on her farm, Stentorp in SW Finland by the sea in the Turku archipelago. Her sheep graze on nearby islands throughout the summer.

Finnsheep, a northern, short tail primitive sheep known for fertility and prolificacy, also produce soft wool in a variety of natural colors. From the very beginning in 1987, Stentorp's ambition for their small scale business has been to produce fine, soft, gently treated wool with lanolin. Among their products are hand knitted pullovers, hats and shawls, as well as curly skins for fur vests and smaller accessories. Unique hand-knitted and loom-woven products incorporate patterns based on traditions from different cultures, mythology and saga.

Stentorp's goal is sustainable development, with ethical and ecological methods from lamb to ready product. A two person farm, they work with other sheep farmers breeding the same fine quality wool. Local hand knitters, craftsmen, local schools with focus on art, craft and agriculture are Stentorp's partners. Because of its surrounding nature, Stentorp is suitable for visiting tourists and courses; during the summer, artists and musicians join in with summer exhibitions and concerts.

Jill will be sharing her enthusiasm for Finnsheep with this presentation that includes 40 pictures, and facts about Finnsheep in Finland. On the west coast, the presentation will be on Monday, September 19, 2016 from 1-4 p.m. at Dancing Waters Farm in Rochester, WA. Call Debra Perry at 360/273-9077 or email her at mountaintrailwalker@yahoo.com. On the east coast, the presentation will be on Friday, September 23, 2016 from 1-4 p.m. at Honeysuckle Farm in Silver Spring, MD. Call Mary O'Malley at 301/421-9520 or email her at johnandmaryomalley@yahoo.com for more information.

**Finnsheep Breeder...**

**Brian Magee: An Outstanding Shepherd**

By Mary O'Malley

Few of us know what our life's work will be at a young age, but for Brian Magee the path was set when at age 6 or 7, he received orphan lambs from his veterinarian neighbor. Assuming responsibility for the lambs, Brian developed the skills that would lay the foundation for a lifelong career as an animal scientist, shepherd and teacher. In addition to receiving the lambs, Brian was given a subscription to *The Shepherd* magazine, which he devoured. He readily applied the knowledge he gleaned from reading articles to the practical art of raising sheep.

Magee's initial shepherding experience was in Colorado, but his family returned to their native Ohio by the time he was in high school. He continued his interest in raising sheep, as well as livestock, and was active in 4-H. After high school he attended Wilmington College in Ohio, majoring in chemistry and biology.

After working in Maryland in soybean research, Magee and his bride applied to the Peace Corps and were sent to Ecuador. Here, in the land of the equator, where the length of days is 12-14 hours, Brian observed that the native sheep bred year round, in short as a 7-month lambing interval. This was quite different than the yearly cycle of breeding in the fall and lambing in the spring, typical of the United States and northern Europe. Observing this pattern gave Magee the confidence to develop what would eventually become known as the STAR system.

Returning to the U.S. after his time in the Peace Corps, Magee landed a job at the U.S. Sheep Experiment Station in Dubois, Idaho. His primary responsibilities lay in research of coyote predation of sheep. During this time, he further developed his understanding of accelerated lambing with Polypay sheep and learned the concerns of farmers and shepherds on the western range.

In 1978, Magee completed a Master's Degree and accepted a position at Cornell University as Sheep Superintendent and Sheep Extensionist for New York State. Here, in collaboration with Professor Doug Hogue, he designed the STAR System of lamb production. Magee's colleagues were at first skeptical of increasing the frequency of lambing, as most American and European breeds of sheep are bred once a year, during the fall, to lamb in the spring. However, an increase in production is an asset to the financial stability of the shepherd and the consistent availability of lamb to discerning clients, and therefore worthy of study.

Magee and Hogue found that in addition to increasing frequency of yearly lamb production with 7.2 or 9.7 monthly intervals, the Cornell Dorsets combined with Finnsheep increased accelerated lambing to nearly 300%. Ewes come in to heat based on the mating light pattern in the fall. However, there are some primitive breeds like Finnsheep, native to Finland that are known for fertility and producing "off-season." The chance discovery of an outstanding Dorset ram whose daughters lambed consis-tently at 7-month intervals and the observation that the ram's scrotal circumference increased slightly during the spring made this phenotypic measurement a selective parameter on the sire side for Dorsets and Finnsheep.

Through colleagues at Penn State, Magee learned of a ram with an unusually high fertility. By studying this and other rams, the realization that the size of the testes impacts fertility was added to the mix. In addition, the daughters of the ram with an increased testes size showed an increase in fertility. This knowledge combined with his South American sheep observations and awareness of Finnsheep and their natural off-season breeding, encouraged Magee to continue to study an increased lambing frequency and develop the STAR system. If you have access to the internet, you can learn more about the STAR system at this website: http://blogs.cornell.edu/newsheep/management/

In May 2016, the Finnsheep Breeders Association inducted Brian into the Finnsheep Hall of Fame at their Annual Meeting held in Wooster, Ohio. The award was in recognition of
all that Magee has accomplished as an outstanding shepherd, breeder and promoter of Finnsheep. While Magee is perhaps best known for the STAR system of accelerated lamb production, he also developed an effective method to address foot rot and was instrumental in tackling Ovine Progressive Pneumonia when it infected the Cornell flock. According to the OPP society, "when Cornell's Finns and his own flock were found to be infected with the OPP virus, Brian's writings made their way into the popular press, generating a great deal of respect for one of the first breeds to openly tackle OPP." (1)

For breeders of purebred Finnsheep and members of the Finnsheep Breeders Association, his clarity and understanding of inbreeding vs. outbreeding helped the organization maintain the integrity of the breed when the proposal to re-open the flock books was presented in 2011. He pointed to the depressive effect on prolificacy that outbreeding had had on half Finn, half Dorset research flocks at Cornell University in the early 1980s. In the late 1970s, the Finnsheep Breeders Association had still allowed "upbreeding," the introduction of another parent line into the breed. When a sheep reached 15/16ths Finn, they were allowed to be registered as purebred Finnsheep. This subtle shift in parentage resulted in a significantly lower lamb crop. The half Finn, half Dorset flock produced a 197% lamb crop as opposed to the average 260% lamb crop for Dorset and Finnsheep. In the 1980s, Finnsheep breeders worked hard to recover the unique genetic traits of the Finnsheep by allowing registration of only the traditional short tail lamb; and by strongly encouraging registration of lambs only from mature ewes who gave birth to four or more lambs annually, and raised three lambs or more without supplemental milk. A careful breeding program, where the sheep with best conformity are selected for breeding and lambs with negative recessive traits, as well as their parents, are sent to market, can greatly reduce the undesirable traits and strengthen the foundation flock. This careful breeding allowed the Finnsheep Breeders Association to maintain the unique genetic traits of the purebred Finnsheep that support prolificacy and other strong maternal traits. (2)

Though Magee retired from Cornell in 2009, he has not retired from shepherding. He implements the STAR system on his own flock of Finn/Dorset crossbred sheep, providing whole carcass lamb year round to a culinary institute. His Finn/Dorset crossbreds produce the carcass size and fat content desired by chefs. He can be found at community events demonstrating shearing for the public. Soft spoken, with a dry wit and keen intellect, Magee is well known in sheep circles and well thought of by all who have had the good fortune to "talk sheep" with him.

(1) OPP Concerned Sheep Breeders Society Newsletter. April 2011
(2) Inbreeding vs Outbreeding The Banner Sheep Magazine, vol. 36 No. 6 July/August 2013

Mary O'Malley raises FBA registered Finnsheep and Finn-cross sheep in Maryland. She is the current president of the Finnsheep Breeders Association.