

# The Master Shepherd's Course 2014: My Perspective

*William McIntosh, Master Shepherd Participant*

**W**ell, to begin with, I wish to give an introduction of why I decided to attend this course. It all began when I helped a farmer down the road from us. After taking care of his sheep, I realized how I enjoyed working with livestock and our family decided to purchase some ewes from him. However, I did not know much about sheep when we purchased them, and have since learned sheep are fragile creatures that need a shepherd who knows how to carefully handle them. So when we heard about the pilot course, I was excited to learn from experienced people in this industry! Thus we enrolled in the Master Shepherd's Course.

The first module was based on record keeping and business plans which, for our farm, was highly needful. One struggle on our farm was finding a reliable source for our records, so these sessions helped me to find reliable ways to keep records. Next came sessions about business plans, they were so full of information it left my head reeling! There was also an informal session where we farmers/students got to meet each other and see some photos of each other's farms, which was enjoyable. After this module, I was eager for the next module; to see everyone and learn more!

In module two, we went to a place called East Gen, for a tour of their building. We were shown incredible technology used for semen collection and shipment as well as slides of the processes used to collect from small ruminants. Seeing this helped us understand how everything worked. Although our flock is small, I could see



*William McIntosh at Leny and Wietze Raven's farm, one of the many farm tours scheduled for the Master Shepherd Course*

the potential benefits of AI for our farm in the future. As an added plus, by going to East Gen, I realized the major importance of biosecurity and the dangers if protocol was not met. Afterwards, we had a session on out of season breeding. Several different ideas were discussed, two being CIDRS and light manipulation. I found light manipulation a very economical and practical way for our own farm to implement out of season breeding.

Then came the sessions about genetics...one of my favorites! Lots to learn and very beneficial. It made me realize what a large part genetics plays in having strong, healthy lambs, as well as the importance of having a ram with proper physical conformation and strong genetics in the areas you are focused on. Near the end, we went to

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*Farm tour at Peter and Elly van der Veen's farm.*

a session at Ponsonby, a research station, where we heard a talk about the amazing accomplishments there. The importance of biosecurity was once again stressed. Ponsonby impressed me with their ability to accomplish great research from such small beginnings. After this we went on two farm tours, where I enjoyed not only learning from the farms, but also from chatting with the people you carpooled with along the way!

Module three was all about nutrition. A very needful module that I would recommend to any sheep farmer! It enlightened me to the reality of dietary deficiencies, and ways to provide plain and proper nutrition for your sheep. During the module, I began to see how easy it is to overlook something that seems simple, yet it can really be deadly! I was reminded of the great importance of fresh water, and we were told how to take proper samples of feed to get an accurate measurement of protein and minerals. After the in class sessions, we had farm tours again, one of which included a body condition scoring workshop. The workshop helped me to understand how to score our sheep more precisely.

Module four included the OMAFRA and OSMA annual meetings. This was the first time I had ever attended. There was a session on government bodies and websites that can assist farmers. Another session laid out the purpose of OSMA and what they do. So, in closing, I've found these first four modules of the Master Shepherd's Course have been a benefit to myself and to our farm. I am certainly looking forward to the rest! A truly beneficial course that I would recommend to anyone.

**More Information on the Master Shepherd Course:**

The registration cost for individual modules is \$250

MODULE	6	7	8	9	10	11
Date	January 7, 8, 2015	February 11, 12, 2015	March 4, 5, 2015	April 1, 2, 2015	July 8, 9, 2015	August 12, 13, 2015
Topic	Economics of Infrastructure	Effective Health Management	Lambing and Lamb Rearing	Predation	Lamb Feedlot Management and Dairy	Marketing Your Lambs
Location	Newmarket, Holiday Inn Express	Newmarket, Holiday Inn Express	Newmarket, Holiday Inn Express	Kingston	Alliston	Carleton Place
Registration Deadline	December 18, 2014	January 29, 2015	February 19, 2015	March 19, 2015	June 24, 2015	July 29, 2015

per person for two days of instruction. A late registration fee of \$350 applies after the registration deadlines. Send your request for individual module registration to [mastershepherdcourse@outlook.com](mailto:mastershepherdcourse@outlook.com). Don't miss this opportunity to take your farm business to the next level. Please make cheques payable to Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency, and mail them to 130 Malcolm Road Guelph, Ontario, N1K 1B1. **OSN**

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