

2025 KHSI Youth Scholarship Winners



Matthew Simpson – Kearneysville, WV

My sheep experience began at an early age with caring for my family's Katahdin flock. The tasks began small then grew as I grew. The sheep have taught me many lessons over the years as I became more experienced in feeding, lambing, health care, and rotational grazing. Things like short kids need to lift the feed bucket higher, ewes will wear a bucket on their heads so do not leave it in the field and put the clips on the net if you do not want to chase sheep. My parents gave me a ewe lamb when I was 6 years old. She and her offspring kept me interested in the sheep and contributed to my savings account over the years. All aspects of caring for my sheep have trained me to be situationally aware. Caring for a living thing that cannot care for itself is not easy, but it is rewarding. Some of my lessons have been learned the hard way while others have come easy. They all contribute to my desire to serve others.

My experiences included more than just caring for our sheep; I participated in sheep events until covid shut the world down. I participated in Skill-A-Thons at the Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival, West Virginia Purebred Sheep Association, and the KHSI Expo receiving several top awards. I learned important skills while participating in the UMD Entrepreneur Project. We prepared, processed, and sold sheep hides from the flock of Katahdin cross lambs in the UMD Feed Test. Business planning, budgeting, and marketing were the skills we developed through this project. The second year of the project was a victim of covid.

When activities were halted in 2020, I began to pursue my dream of flying and a growing desire to serve in the United States Air Force. I joined my local Civil Air Patrol Squadron and began flight lessons in 2022. The money I made from my sheep helped pay for my lessons to reach my first solo flight on my sixteenth birthday! I received my Private Pilot License shortly after I turned seventeen.

I am a homeschool graduate with a high GPA and over 1500 hours of community service during high school, Cadet Lt Colonel and Cadet Commander in the Civil Air Patrol, and a leader in my church. Receiving the KHSI Scholarship would be an honor and valuable assistance to close the financial gap for my first semester of college.



Dawson Staley – Fredericktown, OH

I am Dawson Staley and I have lived on a hay and sheep farm my entire life, with my 2 brothers and parents. My main goal is to continue to live in a rural area and continue to raise sheep as well as work as an electrical lineman.

My family started raising commercial Katahdins in 2010. Later we transferred over to Registered Katahdins. We have enjoyed raising Katahdin hair sheep on our farm because of their great mothering ability, natural shedding, and because of the availability to market our sheep as breeding stock and at the Mt. Hope Auction. I have shown Katahdin market wethers at the Bellville Street Fair since I was 5 and have been able to educate the people in our community about this breed. In 2020, my brother and I showed the Grand Champion Ram in the Jr. show at the NAILE. We were able to work with John Shilt and Bob Shauck, two great people in the Katahdin Hair Sheep Association.

I have attended many KHSI national sales, where we have sold ewes and rams. I remember fondly attending the sales in Cookeville, TN and meeting many of the older members of the Katahdin association. My parents could never find me because I was always the first one to help move sheep and equipment for all the other consigners.

My family and I enjoy working together on our 124 acre farm, raising over 120 Katahdins, and making small, square, grass hay bales to sell nationwide. In high school, I was involved in Varsity baseball, where I was the catcher. I have been in 4-H and FFA, where I have been president and have attended many events that these agricultural groups have provided for students. The main events and CTEs that I have been successful in were 1st place in the state for Ag Mechanics, Parliamentary Procedure team, State and National Livestock Judging teams, and Ag Sales. I also own my own welding business. My welding and fabrication business has brought me great success. I was able to purchase my Suzuki mini-truck at age 14 and equip it with a welder, air compressor, and tools to fabricate for local Amish and farmers in my area.

Once I turned 16, my parents trusted me with our truck and trailer, where I was able to travel cross country and purchase flocks of Katahdins from Montana, Kansas, and Missouri. My brother and I were able to sift through the ewes, keeping the best quality genetics for our farm, Pine Drive Farm, and then selling recipient ewes to farms that needed them for embryo transfer. This year, I have purchased my own flock of 50 Katahdin ewes from Montana and rotational graze them at my neighbors farm as well as market them for recipient ewes in the show industry.

I have spent the summers showing cattle and market wethers, this year experiencing great success winning grand champion at multiple jackpot shows. Now I am preparing for the Ohio State Fair where I will show market sheep and market rabbits. This fall, I plan on showing sheep at American Royal, the NAILE, and Arizona Nationals.

My long term goal is to become an electrical lineman, own my own farm, and continue to weld for extra income. I will be attending Southeast Lineman School in Georgia starting in January 2026 that will help me earn my COL (Crane Operator License), pre-apprentice work for electrical lineman, and add to my drone certifications. I appreciate the Katahdin Association recognizing the youth that support the Ag industry and specifically young people that raise and exhibit Katahdin sheep.



Gracelyn Hancock – Noble, IL

My name is Gracelyn Hancock. I recently Graduated from Richland County high school. This fall I will be attending Olney central college to get my General Education out of the way.

My Katahdin hair sheep journey started when I was 5-years old. When my brother (Rhett Hancock) got a ram and a ewe from Steve Landerth. 2 years later, Steve begged my dad to take Rhett to the Midwest Stud Ram Sale in Sedalia,MO to show at the LeRoy Boyd Jr Show. My dad gave in since Rhett didn't do very good and the county fair. My dad said "there is a pee wee showmanship class so should we let Gracelyn show "Brownie" in the class. At 7 years old I showed Brownie and I grew my passion for the sheep industry at that moment.

We were getting the help from Steve for several years. He took us to the Indiana State Fair where Rhett got reserve champion ram.

Then in 2019 we branched out and bought a ram off of Mike & Leslie Nelsh from Rivera Katahdins at the Ohio Showcase in Greenville Ohio. Hammer has improved are flock in many different ways. In 2020 we went back to Mike & Leslie Nelsh's house and bought 3 ewes and 2 rams. We showed them that summer at Youth Sheep Expo at Greenfield IN and a show in Springfield IL. Then in 2021 we bought 3 more fall ewe lambs 2 of which we showed all summer. We showed the 2 lambs at the Leroy Boyd Jr Show and YSE. "Mardi Gras" is the ewe I showed as a yearling. I brought her to the Leroy Boyd Jr Show and I won the yearling ewe class with her. Then she got Grand Champion in the jr show in 2022. I was really excited!

This last year I purchased 2 ewe lambs at the Midwest Stud Ram Sale. I bought two January ewe lambs, one painted up ewe from Dave & Jane Smith and a solid brown ewe from Lasater Livestock. I now have 3 stud rams and around 50 head of ewes where they are all registered katahdins. My main focus is to sell at stock shows/sales for breeding stock around the country. In 2019, I branched out and started a small flock of Southdowns. But my love and passion is for the katahdin breed because this is where I started and I've met some of my very best friends in the stock show world.

The last couple of years Leslie Neish & Dale Davis have taught me how to show a breeding sheep style. Where I've succeeded at the county and national level. I won Senior showmanship at the LeRoy Boyd Jr Show in 2024. I also took that knowledge that I learned and taught the young kids in my county or the surrounding counties. My life would be completely different if I didn't have sheep because I would have never met some of my good friends and I would have a lot more free time. That being said, I think I deserve the KHSI scholarship for the reason I am involved in showing the breed all across the Midwest. Also I help the younger generations with their own sheep projects. Overall I think that I have done a great job representing the breed throughout my years with the Katahdins and deserve the scholarship for my representation in the breed. Thank you for this consideration for the scholarship.



Ella McDonald – Fredrick, MD

The one thing that has been a constant for the past 17 years of my life are my animals. Ever since I can remember, my life has revolved around taking care of our pets, whether its five dogs or my flock of fifty Katahdin sheep.

My weekends are spent working at the farm, feeding and taking care of animals between school and sports. Each year I select a number of registered Katahdin sheep to show at my local county fair. Taking care of animals has taught me patience, how to control my emotions, and how to overcome loss. Breeding and raising livestock has helped me become a well rounded person and has molded me into who I am today.

Raising sheep is a great way to learn patience because it requires you to slow down and go at the animal's pace. I might spend hours cleaning the barn or vaccinating them which can be frustrating. Plus, things like waiting for lambs to be born or training the sheep to follow certain routines takes time. Getting ready for shows can be tedious, I work daily with the sheep training them to walk next to me on a lead line. Over time, I realized that you can't rush things. Patience is key to taking care of the animals. It teaches you that good things take time and effort.

Showing sheep at the fair has been the best thing for me to control my emotions and deal with nerves. Being in front of a crowd with judges watching really puts the stress on. Sheep scare easily, so it's important to stay calm so they don't get uneasy or hard to manage. Competition is stressful but keeping calm is important for making a good impression and doing well presenting the animal. I've learned staying relaxed under pressure is also beneficial when giving presentations or going on a job interview.

Consistently interacting with the public, educating them on sheep, and being in the spotlight showing sheep had helped my confidence and public speaking. Not only that, but it also taught me how to win and lose gracefully. To appreciate the hard work I put into the animals and to celebrate a victory without being rude or careless to the other competitors.

Overall, agriculture has created some of my greatest strengths and helped my weaknesses. It has taught me that nothing beats hard work, and you should always set your mind to doing what you want. This scholarship would help me be able to continue exploring the world of agriculture to be able to find my passion in it. Whether that's being a vet and working directly with animals, being a farmer that produces crops, or being an agricultural engineer that works on farm equipment and energy conservation. It would allow me to stay focused on building a career where I could give back to the farming communities that have shaped me.



Clint Mills – Peachland, NC

As a Katahdin breeder, I feel that I am a well deserving candidate to receive the KHSI scholarship. In our household, my parents are active members of the association. As a breeder and grower of Katahdin sheep, I never miss an opportunity to share with other breeders the pros to raising Katahdin hair sheep and seek to actively sell and recruit new members and breeders to the breed. With my sheep business I am constantly selling sheep to new breeders and expanding existing breeders' flocks.

I started out with around 6 commercial hair sheep ewes and then took out a loan from the FSA to buy my first pureblood Katahdin sheep in partnership with my parents and brother. After buying those, I bought another commercial hair sheep flock a year later and bred them to my pureblood rams to grow my flock even faster through percentage ewes I retain. All resulting offspring are registered and recorded with the KHSI. With my flock nearing full capacity for the number that I can run on my farm I started selling replacement ewe lambs to breeders. I remember I was so excited to see all my hard work pay off when I sold out of ewe lambs my first year. I sold to several brand new sheep breeders that year. Since then, I have sold out most every year of ewe lambs and have continued to sell to new sheep breeders and existing breeders yearly.

I continue to seek the best genetics and purchase the best rams to sire my lambs. I have been in the sheep business since 2019 and want to continue to promote and improve my own herd so I can better promote the breed. The sheep business has taught me many life skills that I can use in my future career as a realtor and when I obtain my auctioneer's license as I pursue an Associates of Arts degree in business and plan to transfer to a four year university to complete my business degree. I have learned how to make business sales, learned marketing strategies, how to build a customer base, and how to make profit margins.

The registered Katahdin business is a great business to get into and you will make connections that last a lifetime. In conclusion, I am deserving of the (KHSI) scholarship because I am an active sheep farmer that supports and promotes the breed daily in my farming operations.