

SPANS 2023 Producer of the Year

Rock Loaf Farm – Sarah Nettleton



Sarah was born into an established sheep operation in Truro, Nova Scotia, as one of six children who were expected to contribute daily to the operations of the farm. Besides the sheep, the farm also had a herd of beef cattle and the usual menagerie of farm animals.

Sarah was introduced to shearing at the age of 13-14. Shearing was something that her father thought everyone should know how to do. She was introduced to dog handling around the same time and initially spent more time dog handling as a teenager than the shearing.

While a student at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College (where she graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture in 1987), Sarah refined her shearing abilities (and therefore ability to earn extra cash) by shearing with her sister Fiona. Since then, Sarah has carried her shearing skills forward and shearing is what kept her on farms while pursuing a career in the greenhouse industry in Ontario. Shearing also funded a Masters in Extension Studies (UoG 1998). Sarah has shorn sheep between here and Ontario and in the United States of America. She has shorn sheep in Papua New Guinea and New Zealand. Dedicated to improving, Sarah has taken shearing

courses whenever available and she has taught many new shearers taking them to a level where they can also shear independently. "Shearing has given me an opportunity to see what works on the farm for different people in different environments. This in turn has given me a solid foundation of knowledge about sheep and the sheep industry" says Sarah.

In 1998, Sarah and her husband, Paul MacLean, returned to Halifax, NS and then back to the family farm in 2001. Their four boys were raised on the farm and in close proximity to their grandparents.

The family farm was bought in 2006. Initially working closely with her mother, Martha, they have had anywhere from 50 to 80 ewes, but generally 50 is what seemed to work for them as was manageable while working part time and being available to their boys as they became more involved in school and extracurricular activities.

Over the years Sarah has had a more active role in SPANS, sitting as a Board member and holding the position of Secretary in the past. She is a member of the Cape Breton Richmond Federation of Agriculture, also previously holding a position on that Board.

As their children have grown and become more independent, Sarah has taken on full time teaching (SFTX 2003, MEd 2021). Her husband has recently retired allowing for a shift in roles and responsibilities at home and on the farm.

Sarah & Paul have four grown sons, Alex (27), Liam (25), Stewart (22) and Cameron (18). They have all played an integral role in the farm over the years and it pleases Sarah to no end when they bring their friends home "to see the farm".

Sarah maintains a strong interest in agriculture, particularly sheep and the future of our industry.