

My Place is the Highlands
Cliff Thayer, Splendorview Farm, Cummington
By Mary McClintock

Cliff Thayer of Cummington's Splendorview Farm jokes that he started out with two sheep in 1955, and now he has "too many." It probably feels like too many on cold February nights when he's helping some of his 100 brood ewes deliver the year's batch of lambs. Cold nights aside, Cliff must enjoy his work as he has devoted much of his life to raising sheep on his 160-acre farm, and to promoting sheep husbandry throughout the state. Cliff's children are now the fourth generation farming the family's land, following in the footsteps of their great-grandfather. Before him, Cliff's father, Stanlee Thayer, had dairy cattle until bulk tanks and pasteurizing became the norm. Stanlee used to bottle his raw milk and peddle it throughout the area. Cliff thinks his father was ahead of his time and would fit in well with the recent upsurge in popularity of raw milk.

Cliff and his family – wife Lorie, son Kyle, and daughters Alison, Shawn, and Kim – raise championship sheep and primarily sell them as purebred breeding stock. Raising three different breeds – Southdowns, Suffolks, and Dorsets – helped keep peace in the family when three of Cliff's children all were showing sheep competitively.

Along with raising a family and sheep, Cliff is active in the Hillside Agricultural Society and the state sheep and wool community. He was one of the originators of the Massachusetts Sheep and Woolcraft Fair which started 30-some years ago with a potluck supper in Worcester. Since then, the springtime, first-of-the-season fair is held at the Cummington Fairgrounds and has grown to include over 50 vendors, sheep dog trials, and many non-sheep fiber animals such as alpacas and angora rabbits. Even though it has expanded, the fair always includes a Saturday night potluck supper. Just as different breeds of sheep helped keep the peace in his family, Cliff thinks it is important to have a time for everyone to "break bread together" at the beginning of the fair season before rivalries build.

Splendorview Farm currently includes about 50 acres in hayfields and pasture with the rest in forest. They cut firewood and timber from the woods and rent out some of the land for maple sugaring. Because Cliff wants his children and grandchildren to be able to continue farming on the land he received from his father, he has placed all but 2.5 acres of the land in an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR). He kept that parcel out of APR in case one of his children wants to build a house. The rest of the 160 acres will continue to be open for farming, permanently protected from development. Cliff's glad there won't be a development on his land and is especially pleased that his land is part of a large protected area that stretches from Plainfield to Worthington. The splendor of the view from Cliff's farm will continue for generations to come.