

## Navajo Sheep & Wool

The Castleland RC&D Council is sponsoring a sheep and wool project in the 4-corners region of the Navajo Nation. This past June, they sponsored a tour for other RC&D Councils to learn more about this and other projects, including that



construction of rain water collection structures. The tour started out near a Kayenta shopping center with the transfer of two registered Churro rams to a local Navajo sheep breeder and community leader. The rams were donated by Sam Cunningham, chair of the RC&D Council, to Benjamin Lee Clark. The accompanying photo shows Cunningham explaining to Clark breed characteristics as shown in the close-up photo of one of the rams. The Navajo-Churro breed has largely been lost from the reservation and Cunningham and others have been working for the past 20 years to help reintroduce the valuable wool qualities back into the traditional products business that helps support many Navajo families. She noted that a Churro rug is easily worth twice as much as a traditional Navajo rug in the local markets.

The sheep and wool project was jump-started with a mini-grant from NRCS that provided commercial wool carders and spinning wheels, along with production and marketing training for families interested in improving their traditional product marketing opportunities. A major goal of the project is to not only help Navajo families (and especially their children) sustain their traditional products culture, but also to make sheep and wool an economic mainstay in the community.