



# FROM THE *flock*

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**State of the Sheep Industry**

Over the course of the past year, **the Canadian sheep flock has shown some signs of rebuilding** with the total number of ewes and replacement lambs on farms increasing. January 2012 Statistics Canada numbers indicate that Canada's ewe flock grew by 0.6% to 524,500 head, up from 521,600 head in January 2011. Most provinces in Canada saw increases in their ewe flock size with the exception of Newfoundland and Labrador (17% decrease), and Quebec (0.3% decrease). In keeping with the increase in ewe flock size there was also a rise in the number of replacement lambs. As of January 2012, there were 82,900 replacement lambs reported on Canadian Farms, 4.1% higher than 79,600 head, reported in January 2011. Replacement lamb numbers rose in all provinces with the exception of Quebec, which posted a decrease of 2.6%.

Canadian slaughter fell again in 2011 to 699 thousand head, down 2.12 per cent from the 714 thousand head slaughtered in 2010. Although slaughter numbers were down across the country, Western Canada saw the biggest drop at 2.6 percent, with Eastern Canadian slaughter numbers only dropping by 1.9 per cent. The decrease in the Eastern slaughter numbers was cushioned by a 1.1 per cent increase in the number of animals slaughtered in Nova Scotia; the only province to see slaughter increase. Despite a 1.8 per cent decrease in the number of lambs slaughtered, Ontario remains the hot bed for slaughter in Ontario representing 45 per cent of the total number of animals slaughtered (Source: Statistics Canada). It is not surprising to see the number of animals slaughtered decrease as producers are seeming to be holding back animals to expand their flocks.

In 2011 18.3 million kg of lamb were imported into the Canadian market, a decrease of 3.3 per cent over 2010 when 18.9 million kg of lamb was imported. Despite the decrease in quantity being imported, the value of the lamb increased 36 per cent from \$114 million to \$155 million. (Source: Statistics Canada).

Given the reduction in the number of lambs slaughtered in Canada in 2011, it is not surprising that the amount of lamb and sheep meat exported from Canada also decreased. The quantity of meat exported decreased by 42% to 279,966 kg worth \$816,262.

**Live Animal Trade**

Imports	The vast majority of live animal imported in 2011 were animals going direct to slaughter or into a feedlot. All 19,536 animals imported into Canada were from the United States; 177 of which were purebred animals. This is a decrease of 42% over the number of animals imported from the United States in 2010.
Exports	The United States remains the largest market for live feeder or slaughter in 2011. In total 9,045 animals worth \$1.1 million were exported in 2011; 9,008 of which went to the United States. This is an increase of 515 per cent over 2010 when only 1469 animals were exported worth \$254,748.

**RECOGNITION**

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*Opinions expressed in this document are those of the Canadian Sheep Federation and not necessarily those of AAFC.*



## New and Emerging Disease Reported in Europe

Scientists in Europe have reported the discovery of a new virus, informally named the "Schmallenberg virus", with diagnosed cases confirmed in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Britain, France and most recently in Italy. First detected in dairy cattle in August of 2011, this orthobunyavirus has now been detected in over 590 cattle, sheep and goats throughout northern Europe (as of February 9th, 2012). Orthobunyaviruses are a diverse genus of viruses found world-wide that are transmitted mainly by gnats and primarily affect ruminants, although some North American species of the virus can affect humans.

The Schmallenberg virus causes fever, diarrhoea and lost production in live animals and mummified foetuses, stillbirths and birth defects of offspring of infected females. The Schmallenberg virus is thought to be transmitted by insects, primarily by midges (*Culicoides* spp.). To date no animal to animal transmission has been demonstrated except transplacental transmission from a viremic dam to the foetus (European Commission, 2012). Symptoms in live animals have been observed mainly during the lengthy active midge season (April – November) and subside within a few days with a very short viral period of only 1-6 days. Foetal infection at this phase plays a much more severe role in this disease. If a pregnant female is infected during a vulnerable phase of pregnancy, thought to be 28-36 days gestation in sheep and 75-110 days in cattle (FLI, 2012), the virus could infect the fetus causing serious damage. Observed birth defects to date include severe arthrogryposes (tendon shortening of the ankle), torticollis (contraction of the muscles of the cervical spine) and hydrocephalus (accumulation of water on the brain). Due to the delay between infection of pregnant females and birth of affected offspring, scientists and producers are bracing for many more positive cases as the lambing, kidding and calving seasons unfold.

A risk assessment conducted by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control in Stockholm in December 2011 suggests that it is "unlikely that this virus will cause disease in humans, but it cannot be excluded at this stage" ([http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications/Publications/Forms/ECDC\\_DispForm.aspx?ID=795](http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications/Publications/Forms/ECDC_DispForm.aspx?ID=795)). The risk assessment went on to suggest that the health of vets and producers in close contact with infected animals be closely monitored.

Scientists are scrambling to understand more about the Schmallenberg virus. It remains unclear whether this exotic virus has only recently been introduced to the region or if it has been present for some time in small ruminants and has only recently been diagnosed. If the disease has been newly introduced, animal health officials are anticipating a rapid spread of the disease and a large number of malformed lambs, calves and kids are expected.

The Friedrich-Loeffler-Institut (FLI) has developed a method for detecting the virus, RT-PCR testing, that is currently available to veterinary and research institutes in Europe. Producers and veterinarians are encouraged to report suspected cases to local veterinary authorities citing the need to contain and control the disease as it poses considerable risk to the industry. No vaccines are currently available for the disease.

The Schmallenberg virus, and the related Simbu serogroup Orthobunyaviruses, is not included in the list of diseases subjected to international notification or standards on trade established by the OIE and current knowledge of the disease suggests that it does not need to be addressed differently than its genus of viruses. However, affected EU members have notified the OIE of outbreaks of the disease under the notification procedure for emerging diseases (European Commission, 2012). The EU is not currently imposing trade restrictions in relation to the Schmallenberg virus.

With respect to international trade, the OIE recommends following bluetongue protocol for the trade of semen and live non-pregnant animals and Akabane virus protocol for the trade of embryos. The OIE suggests that more data is urgently needed to make recommendations for the safe trade of live pregnant animals, and further research necessary to establish the potential existence of viraemic healthy newborns and any risk associated with their trade (OIE, 2012).

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency has created a web page dedicated to the Schmallenberg virus, aimed at keeping Canadian producers and industry members updated on the status of the disease. For more information about what the Schmallenberg virus means to Canada, visit: <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/animals/terrestrial-animals/diseases/schmallenberg-virus/schmallenberg-virus/eng/1328804118103/1328804210822>.

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## REFERENCES

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## Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification - Myth Busters

The Scrapie Canada office frequently receives inquiries and requests for clarification regarding the Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program. This month's article serves to dispel some of the misconceptions regarding the VSFCP and clarify some of the frequently asked questions.

### PROGRAM COSTS

The annual fee for VSFCP participation is \$50 plus GST or HST. Additional fees may be levied where processing of annual applications exceed 2 hours but keep in mind that filing an annual inventory report electronically will help minimize processing time. The application processing time for participants with flocks or herds of 150 breeding animals or less seldom surpasses 2 hours.

Enrolled producers will incur additional costs associated with VSFCP participation. Annual inventory reports need to be conducted by an accredited veterinarian, an activity for which

the producer will be invoiced directly by the attending veterinarian. In addition, all on-farm deads 12 months or older need to be tested by a CFIA-approved lab. The cost of scrapie testing is paid by Scrapie Canada directly to the lab and the producer will not be invoiced for the test. The Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program offers reimbursement to producers to help offset some of these additional costs:

- \$100 per year towards the cost of the annual veterinarian inventory visit.
- Scrapie brain testing (at designated laboratories) will be paid for by the program.
- \$110 towards the cost of hiring a veterinarian to come to the farm to remove a brain sample meant for scrapie brain testing.
- \$20 per shipment to send scrapie brain samples to designated laboratories.

In order to capitalize on these available reimbursements, enrolled producers need only submit copies of the invoices to Scrapie Canada as they are incurred.

## PURCHASING FEMALES

The VSFCP has 3 participation pathways for producers to enrol in. Pathway 1 follows a system of limited acquisitions and disease surveillance to control the risk of developing scrapie. As such, producers enrolled in Pathway 1 are limited to purchasing females from other producers enrolled in the program at an equivalent or higher status level. Purchasing females from a non-enrolled flock/herd or a flock/herd of a lower status will result in a loss of status within the program.

Producers enrolled in Pathway 2 of the program are likewise limited to purchasing females from enrolled producers of equivalent or higher program status without incurring a status penalty in the program. Pathway 3 enrolled producers may purchase females from both enrolled and non-enrolled flocks provided the females have been genotyped as 171QR or 171RR. Females of the genotype 171QQ are not permitted in Pathway 3 enrolled flocks.

Enrolled producers must submit purchase receipts for all purchased females and program status of purchased females if enrolled in Pathway 1 or 2, or genotype results for purchase females if enrolled in Pathway 3.

## PURCHASING MALES

Producers enrolled in Pathway 1 or 2 of the VSFCP can purchase males or semen from ANY flock or herd and ARE NOT restricted to buying from enrolled flocks/herds. Program status for Pathway 1 enrolled producers will not be affected by the purchase of males.

Producers enrolled in Pathway 3 (Whole –Flock option) of the VSFCP may only use 171QR or 171RR males either homegrown or purchased, while producers enrolled in Pathway 3 (Rams-Only option) may only purchase and/or use 171RR rams.

Regardless of the source of purchase males, purchase receipts for all males need to be submitted with the next annual inventory report.

## DEADSTOCK TESTING

All VSFCP enrolled producers must submit obex samples for scrapie testing from all animals 12 months or older that have died or been killed on farm, male and female. If there are no on-farm deaths of animals 12 months or older, producers must select an animal 24 months or older to be destroyed for testing. The sample may come from either a male or female, and are not limited to only females.

Disease surveillance is a vital part of disease control and annual sample submission is an essential part of the VSFCP.

## LAMBS AND KIDS ON ANNUAL INVENTORY REPORTS

VSFCP producers need to submit an annual inventory report listing all small ruminants on farm aged 12 months or older at the time of the inventory AND all animals purchased, sold or dead since the last inventory report. Animals under the age of 12 months that have been sold or that have died since the last inventory report must ALSO be included on the inventory report even if they did not appear on last year's inventory. The total number of animals on-farm under the age of 12 months at inventory time should also be reported, but animals need not be individually identified or listed at this time.

## SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Producers submitting an annual application for advancement within the VSFCP must provide supporting documents to accompany the annual inventory report. Supporting documents include all purchase receipts, sales and sale barn receipts, slaughterhouse receipts and scrapie test results (for on-farm deaths 12 months or older). The supporting documentation is required to verify the movement of all animals in and out of the flock/herd, and the program does not need to verify dollar amounts. Producers may block out monetary amounts, provided contact information is still legible.

Supporting documents for annual inventories may be reviewed by the accredited veterinarian conducting the inventory, but it is ultimately the responsibility of the producer to submit supporting documents with the annual report.

We encourage all enrolled producers and producers interested in enrolling in the Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program to contact the Scrapie Canada office with any questions about program rules and requirements. We are always pleased to help.

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