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From the flock

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FOR THE CANADIAN SHEEP INDUSTRY

CSF Chairman and Vice Chairman spend day in Ottawa

The Canadian sheep industry recently sent a letter to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lisa Raitt, and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Gerry Ritz, requesting that the Ministers collaborate on the design and development of a national strategy on predation. The new national strategy would provide a clear and consistent framework for dealing with predation issues across Canada, while providing sheep farmers with effective, practical tools to protect their flocks and livelihood. The full briefing on predation that was provided to the Ministers can be viewed on the CSF website (<http://www.cansheep.ca/cms/en/Issues/Predation/Predation.aspx>)

Both Mr. Gairdner and Mr. Pike were receptive to the idea of organizing a meeting with provincial Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture staff along with sheep producers to discuss what tools are available for managing predation in an effort to get a handle on the depth of the problem. A key outcome of the meeting would be the development of a national strategy for dealing with predation. The CSF will be following up with the Minister's office over the next few weeks and will work to get a meeting with Minister Ritz within the next two months, to try and secure funding for the meeting.

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Towards a national strategy on predation

As a result of this letter, the CSF was asked to meet with Aaron Gairdner, Minister Ritz's Chief of Staff and his Policy Advisor Dustin Pike, on March 25th. At this meeting, Dwane Morvik (Chair) and Andrew Gordanier (Vice-Chair) were able to discuss the damaging effects that predation has on the industry's ability to expand its production and, in some cases, even retain shepherds.

**Bluetongue Insurance
Get Yours Now**

Policies for 2009 are only available until June. For more information in BT insurance please see www.cansheep.ca or call the CSF office at 1-888-684-7739.



Ottawa visit continued

Scrapie prevalence study

Fortunately, there was time in the meeting with Mr. Gairdner and Mr. Pike to also discuss other issues that are facing the sheep industry and impeding our ability to access foreign markets. The key message given to the Minister's Chief of Staff and Policy Advisor was that the sheep industry needs to secure funding to conduct a scrapie prevalence study so that a strategy and target date can be set to eradicate scrapie. The Minister's office seems open to discussing ways to help the industry regain access to the US and Mexican Markets. They have requested a copy of the business plan that has been developed for a scrapie prevalence program and this will also be on the agenda for our meeting with the Minister.

Traceability

Dwane and Andrew also took time to meet with the Agriculture and Agri-Food (AAFC) representatives and discussed with them the needs of the sheep industry, especially how they relate to the potential implementation of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology in the sector. Given that the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Agricultural Ministers have indicated that traceability is a priority area, there is little doubt that there will be support for the industry. What that support will look like, however, is still unknown since Growing Forward and other support programs have not yet been announced.

Access to new drugs

After discussions with AAFC representatives and Veterinary Drug Directorate (VDD) representatives, the industry has learned that it will become easier to get drugs approved for use in Canada. As of March 31 2009 the VDD has indicated their backlog of drug requests will be eliminated and they will be well poised to process new drug requests with greater efficiency. They also indicated they have made it a priority to do what they can to approve Minor Use Minor Species drugs.



(L to R) Dwane Morvik, Andrew Gordanier

As such, they are looking into possible fee reductions for companies who bring forward submissions. Additionally, they will review research that has been conducted on a drug in another country and, depending on the quality of data, can use it to assist the drug's approval in Canada. The CSF was also informed that the fastest way to get drugs approved for use in small ruminants would be to apply for label extensions for products that are already approved for use in Canada for cattle. In this instance, the company would only have to provide the VDD with information on the efficacy of the drug for the target animal (sheep). What the industry has to do now is encourage drug manufacturers to make submissions for approvals in Canada.



A New Approach to Food Safety

By Lorraine Hall, National Coordinator On-Farm Food Safety

“If HACCP does not begin to adopt and adapt risk assessment and risk management concepts and technologies, it will become obsolete.” This statement began the presentation of Dr. Robert Buchanan at a food safety conference I attended recently. The purpose of the conference was to develop a better understanding of a new approach to food safety that is being discussed around the world. The new approach uses an “integrated chain management” for food safety, where risk management testing uses the science of microbiology to arrive at an acceptable level of public health.

In the 1950's, varying microbiological criteria became a barrier to international food trade. With this as a driver, the Codex Alimentarius Commission was created in 1963 by the FAO and WHO to develop food standards, guidelines and related codes of practice. The Commission adopted HACCP and its principles; however, most of the criteria were focused on food quality and controlling fecal contamination; risks to public health were not fully considered when the criteria were established.

In the 1980's and 1990's, HACCP was adopted on a global scale, and today remains the gold standard for food safety. At this time, there was a general pause for about ten years in the establishment of new microbiological criteria. Today, testing against microbiological criteria is an important part of most food safety risk management systems or HACCP plans. However, most of the criteria are based on guessing the impacts to public health, and what methods work best. In the last several years, there has been renewed interest in advancing microbiological criteria, along with an increase of expertise in this area.

The result is the emergence of risk based metrics for relating microbiological criteria to public health outcomes. In a risk based approach to food safety, the stringency to a food control system is related to its intended public health outcome.

Other characteristics of a risk based approach include the ability to validate that the system is achieving the intended level of control, as well as verify that the system is continuing to function as intended.

HACCP has evolved little over the past 40 years, and there is a need to relate food safety programs to public health outcomes. Currently, HACCP programs focus on potential food safety hazards, not risks. Dr. Buchanan explained risk vs. hazard in the following way: when crossing the street, your risk of getting hit by a car is high if the car is 100 m away, going 120 km/h. Your risk of getting hit by the car is very low if the car is 5 blocks away, going 50 km/h. The hazard in both scenarios is getting hit by a car when crossing the street; but the hazard itself does not deal with risk in a quantitative manner. Such is the case with many food safety programs.

Another challenge of HACCP systems is that it does not transparently establish what an acceptable level of risk is. The focus is on eliminating the hazard and not on managing the risks to an appropriate level. Additionally, in many HACCP programs, there is confusion over the steps of monitoring, verifying, and validating, and there is a limited ability to deal with emerging hazards.

In HACCP systems, there is a lack of feedback loops to use information on performance and effectiveness of the system. The use of risk assessment and risk management tools have the potential to improve the hazard analysis process, establishment of critical, or safe, limits, and to evaluate any process deviations.

Dr. Buchanan stated that there is a great potential to improve HACCP by making it more sophisticated, resulting in enhanced software run systems connected directly to feedback loops. HACCP would also be a more dynamic management tool with measurable results.

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Food Safety continued

Before we throw up our hands and give up on our HACCP programs, it is important to keep in mind that these changes, should they come, will be years away. As I mentioned earlier, HACCP is the gold standard worldwide in food safety systems, and this is not going to change overnight. The HACCP based Food Safe Farm Practices (FSFP) program for sheep and lamb is technically sound and has been recognized as such by the CFIA. Developing risk based approach to HACCP systems will require a conceptual change in thinking at many levels. Investments in science, risk analysis, communications, public policy, and education would be needed. Information would be needed on consumer practices and behaviour as well as the relationship between hazard levels and consumers risks. All this is not going to happen at a great rate, and if it is to happen, it will take government endorsement in the form of money and resources. For now, the CSF FSFP program is sound, and our HACCP programs, although they must evolve, are not going to change drastically in a short time. If the FSFP program follows the risk management techniques, the program will in all likelihood, become simpler.

For more information please visit:
www.dairyinfo.gc.ca

Another Farm Registered on the Food Safe Farm Practices Program

The CSF is pleased to announce that as of February 17, 2009, Parker Stock Farm achieved registered status on the CSF Food Safe Farm Practices program. Parker Stock Farm is owned and operated by Glenn and Kathy Parker just south of Three Hills, Alberta. The farm has a flock of 56 ewes and 2 rams, as well as approximately 50 lambs.

The FSFP audit lasted approximately 3.5 hours and examined several areas of good production practices covered by the FSFP program: animal health products; buying, selling and shipping animals; general farm management; feed, water and bedding; and worker training. The records pertaining to these practices were also reviewed.

Congratulations Glenn and Kathy!



Scrapie Canada: Important Changes to the Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program

By Courtney Denard, National Scrapie Coordinator

Since 2004, the Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program (SFCP) has been funded by Agriculture Canada's Advancing Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food Program (ACAAF). After five productive years, on March 31, 2009, the ACAA program officially came to an end. This means Ag Canada will no longer be funding the SFCP. In light of this, changes surrounding administrative fees, processing applications and obex (brain) testing fees have occurred. These changes are outlined in more detail below.

Changes to Administrative Fees and Processing Applications:

As of April 1, 2009 an annual enrollment fee of \$50/ hour plus GST will be charged to each participating producer. This fee will cover the time spent on processing producer files. Producers applying to the program for the first time will be required to include a payment of \$50 plus GST with their initial package. Producers submitting their annual application of advancement will also be required to include a payment of \$50 plus GST with their advancement package. Cheques should be made out to the Canadian Sheep Federation and files will not be processed if payment is not included. If your file takes longer than one hour to process, you will be invoiced \$50/ hour plus GST for each additional hour spent on your file, an amount that is broken down by 30 minute segments.

The number one goal is to ensure that the program remains available to producers, something the industry is striving to achieve. However, given the fact that federal funding is no longer available; a user-pay system needs to be implemented in order for the program to continue. A rate of \$50/ hour plus GST is considered reasonably priced for this type of service and is on par with other programs in the agriculture industry.

Producers are still permitted to submit their inventories in a paper format; however, to reduce the amount of time spent on processing your file, and therefore reduce your processing fee, submitting your inventory in Microsoft Excel is highly encouraged (A paper copy of your inventory must still be submitted with your annual Application of Advancement package. Each page of the paper copy inventory must be initialed by the accredited veterinarian). In order to serve producers better and ensure an efficient turn around time, processing applications will now be handled in the following manner.

Each file will be reviewed on a first come, first served basis. If information or supporting documentation is missing, producers will: (a) Be contacted and asked to submit the missing information/ documents or; (b) Will have their file returned back to them.

This decision is dependent upon how much information or documentation is missing from the file. If your file is returned, you will be required to add the missing information/ documents and return the file back to Scrapie Canada. Once Scrapie Canada receives your updated file, it will again be processed on a first come, first served basis.

Changes to Obex (brain) Testing Fees: As part of the SFCP, producers are required to submit a brain sample from all animals over 12 months of age that die on the farm. If no animal dies on the farm within a one year period, producers are required to submit a cull for testing (the cull must be at least 24 months of age). Please note, as of April 1, 2009 funding for brain tests is no longer available through the SFCP.

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Scrapie Canada continued

Funding for brain testing is still available through the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's (CFIA) National Scrapie Surveillance Program. If you have an animal over 12 months of age die on the farm, or cull that needs to be tested, please contact the CFIA at 1-800-442-2342. The CFIA must be contacted prior to sending the sample to the laboratory.

If you do not send your brain sample in through the CFIA, you will be charged by the laboratory completing the testing. Most laboratories charge approximately \$50 per sample (depending on the laboratory), plus additional fees if entire heads are submitted. For more information on laboratory fees, please contact the laboratory you choose to work with.

Finally, the CFIA and the Scrapie Committee will continue to review the SFCP each year in June. Program participants will be given an opportunity to put forward changes they would like to see made to the program before the annual review is made. Comments must be made in writing (e-mail is accepted) and sent to the National Scrapie Project Coordinator by May 15. If you have any suggestions you would like to offer concerning the program, please contact the National Scrapie Project Coordinator. A copy of the updated program standards can be found on the Scrapie Canada Website at <http://www.scrapiecanada.ca/VSFPrules-regs.html>.

If you have any questions relating to the above information, please contact Scrapie Canada at 1-866-534-1302 or by e-mail at admin@scrapiecanada.ca.

Bluetongue Insurance Now Available for 2009

Coverage Protects Canadian Sheep Producers Against Disease

Bluetongue Insurance for 2009 is now available to all Canadian sheep producers. The voluntary program provides affordable insurance coverage for mortality, business interruption and consequential losses due to Bluetongue – an insect-borne viral disease of sheep and other livestock. Producers have until June 30, 2009 to apply for the annual coverage, which supplements funding available through current government agricultural assistance programs.

Bluetongue is not only a threat to European sheep producers – two recent incidences in the United States give Canadian producers good reason to be on guard. An outbreak in Montana in early August last year affected deer, antelope and sheep. It was severe enough that 16 counties, most of them in eastern Montana, were placed under quarantine. Producers in those counties couldn't ship their lambs to market from about September 1st through to early October. Bluetongue also killed 250 sheep in Wyoming's Big Horn Basin.

Launching the insurance program is an innovative step by the Canadian Sheep Federation (CSF) to protect sheep farmers in the event of an outbreak of Bluetongue disease. Available for the first time in 2008, the impetus for development of Bluetongue Insurance was provided by import policy changes introduced by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency coupled with the spread of Bluetongue disease in the United Kingdom and in several Northern European countries.

This commercial insurance program is endorsed by the CSF and financially assisted through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Private Sector Risk Management Partnerships Program.



National Identification and Traceability

By Sean McKenzie, National ID and Traceability Coordinator

The CSF often gets responses to articles in From the Flock on RFID technology, and for the most part these are from producers expressing their disagreement with the points presented, or concerned at the seemingly ever increasing costs and expenses put on producers. The CSF is always interested in receiving as much input as we can so that we can do the best job possible representing the Canadian sheep industry. Thank you for all your comments and input – keep it coming.

For those of you who disagree with or are afraid of the costs that the move to RFID identification may have, (many of you have stated that the returns don't justify the expense) I recently came across this article, or more accurately it was sent to me, that was entitled "Tag costs can outweigh benefits, research shows" by Neil Wallace in the online edition of the Otago Daily Times (NZ). It seemed to provide both sides of the story and so I believed it to be a good fit for a From the Flock article. As I read through though it I couldn't help but notice that the findings don't completely support the claim of the article that electronic ID or RFID is more expensive than the money it returns. **If you'd like to read the article yourself, you can find it on the internet at: www.odt.co.nz/news/farming/48492/tag-costs-can-outweigh-benefits-research-shows**

To summarize the article discusses research that was done in New Zealand on the Traquair cattle/sheep station near Otram on the south island. While this particular study is dealing with somewhat larger animal numbers than the average sheep farmer here in Canada has to consider, the message and outcomes can be easily be translated to our industry here. They are running 41,750 stock units (split approximately half and half sheep to cattle) on 6000 hectares (~14 800 acres).

The research suggests that on a purely economic basis, electronic identification tags in sheep and cattle can cost more than the return; however this doesn't seem to be wholly supported in the rest of the article.

Off the top the article points out that the study "took no account of the wider issue of securing market access through animal tracking". This, in a country like New Zealand that depends heavily on export markets seems like a serious omission. A perfect example of this can be viewed online. McDonalds Japan recently produced an entire 90 second (15 is the norm for Japan TV) commercial for their hamburgers in Australia, the entire message being based on the National Animal Identification Strategy and traceability.

Here is the address for the article and video:
<http://qcl.farmonline.com.au/news/state/livestock/news/mcdonalds-japan-sells-with-aus-nlis/1481702.aspx>

The research looks at the use of RFID versus conventional ID tags in both cattle and sheep and within these groups they are separated based on end market (breeding stock vs. market animals). This was to compare and understand the potential uses of the electronic tag against the end value of the animal. The result of the research suggests that the use of electronic ID did show a benefit when used in cattle for market, but not so in ewes and breeding cattle. So what are these numbers? (All prices are in New Zealand dollars).

The tagging of a portion of their ewe flock (3000 animals) was done at a cost of \$1.90/unit. This provided the opportunity to use performance information in the selection of poor performing animals. This allowed for the removal of animals that were losing weight or in poor condition, or who were repeatedly rearing single lambs and overall resulted in an increase in the value and productivity of the flock. The use of this information was calculated at \$1.83 per stock unit, the return from the information.

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ID and Traceability continued

With a quick bit of math this would suggest that the cost of the tags was actually 7 cents more than the value they returned which would support the claim of EID of being more costly than it returns. However, what it doesn't calculate is that by removing these poor production animals and decreasing the flock size the costs of their inputs would be reduced; reduced input costs, coupled with the fact that the remaining stock are more efficient and producing more lambs/ewe the costs that remain are than spread out over more animals. So for a tag price that works out to 7 cents per tag the producer was able to increase the quality of the flock, eliminate the animals that weren't earning their keep and reduce the input costs overall.

These types of studies are important steps to take when considering the use of new technology, there isn't any point in moving ahead with programs that are only going to hinder the development of the industry. However, it is also helpful to look beyond the initial expense of a tag and see that there may be ways to improve the bottom line over the long run by spending a little more at the start. Isn't there an old saying that goes 'you have to spend money to make money'?

An article out of the US quoted by a representative in the USDA that last year they took 199 days to trace cattle involved in a tuberculosis outbreak due to lack of a complete and efficient system for locating animals. If this had been a Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak a delay of 10 days is too long, 200 would devastate all species across the entire country and quite possibly North America.

Vaccination the likely source of the Bluetongue serotypes 6 and 11 Outbreaks In Belgium, Germany and The Netherlands

Source: ProMed

At the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health of 4 Mar 2009, the Netherlands and Germany presented the results of their surveillance and other investigations into bluetongue virus type 6 (BTV6). In October and November 2008, the Netherlands and Germany reported laboratory findings of BTV6 circulation in cattle located in neighbouring parts of their territories with very little, if any, clinical signs of bluetongue disease. The detection was a result of routine bluetongue surveillance.

Information on the genetic sequence from the virus isolates indicates a high similarity with the BTV6 South African modified live vaccine. This virus may have circulated to a limited extent in the local midge vector population. No bluetongue clinical disease has been observed in the field or under experimental conditions. The results of these investigations suggest that no virulent BTV6 virus strain has circulated in the Netherlands or Germany, while the positive findings are most likely to be ascribed to the use of a modified live vaccine.

Belgium reported a similar situation with respect to circulation of bluetongue virus type 11 (BTV11). Information on the genetic sequence available indicates a high similarity with the reference strain that was used to produce the South African modified live vaccine for BTV-11. No virus has been isolated, and no clinical signs of bluetongue disease have been observed.



West Hawk Lake Zoning

Source: Canadian Animal Health Coalition

The Canadian Zoning Committee (CZC) is proud to announce that the West Hawk Lake (WHL) Zoning Initiative, under the management of the Canadian Animal Health Coalition (CAHC) is in its final stages of development. Thanks to the collaboration and support of all levels of government and the Canadian livestock industry, since September 2005, to develop national, fully functional Zoning capabilities on site:

- a national, multi-species zoning module housed within the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency (CCIA) database containing information about livestock movement across the MB-ON site
- a facility at WHL capable of 24/7 operations
- a process with increasing participation of senders, drivers and receivers in the creation of a an animal movement manifest

Additionally the CZC has promoted the uptake of zoning requirements through a Technology Assistance Program. Twenty three facilities have benefited, receiving assistance to purchase RFID readers, panels and/or computer systems. A variety of operation and facility types including feedlots, auctions and feed/water/rest stations were assisted. Discussions were held with facilities throughout the nation including AB, SK, MN, ON and QUE. Participating facilities/demonstration sites are encouraged to operationalize zoning procedures and to share their knowledge and experiences with producers and industry.

On a trial test basis, WHL operations ran 24/7 between November 24, 2008 and February 14, 2009 with the support of Manitoba Transportation Infrastructure.

As the Advancing Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food Program (ACAAF) funding for the WHL Zoning Initiative concludes Growing Forward unfolds, regular operations will continue at the site to maintain the momentum and enhance participation of the project.

Operators and drivers passing through the site will be able to deposit their permits and load information in the box provided. However, we do not anticipate a decrease in participation or movement across the site; WHL staff will continue to contact senders and receivers and encourage permit creation and recipients of Technology Assistance will become more comfortable with the routine. Reports will be processed in accordance with our work plan and within the allotted time frame.

In preparation of full implementation 24/7, CZC will request changes to federal regulation in support of zoning requirements and we will continue to promote WHL Zoning throughout the Canadian livestock industry. To date, the WHL Zoning project has benefited from strong government and industry support as contributions of \$2.36 million have been received. Industry continues to show support as the creation of permits increases. The collaborative partnership entered into by industry and government has made WHL an effective reality. We look forward to the next steps which will continue to increase participation levels and awareness.

Thank you for your support.



Agriculture ministers call for output boost

Source: Associated Press

Agriculture ministers from industrialized nations called Monday for increased agriculture production as a way to combat world hunger.

Ministers from Group of Eight countries, gathering in Cison di Valmarino, a small town near Venice, approved a final document to be presented to world leaders at a July G-8 summit in Sardinia. Italy holds the rotating G-8 presidency.

"It is necessary to focus on all the shared strategies to put in place to reduce poverty and increase world production," the document said, adding that further studies are needed to coordinate approaches on managing food stocks.

The ministers also called for an increase in public and private investment in agriculture, rural development and environmental protection. They acknowledged that "the world is still very far from reaching" the United Nations' goal of reducing the number of hungry people by half by the year 2015. High food prices have plunged an additional 40 million people into hunger last year, pushing the overall number of needy to almost 1 billion, according to the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization. The G-8 are: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, Britain and the U.S.

85% good enough for Product of Canada, say farmers

Source: www.cbc.ca

Farmers are adding their voice to complaints that new rules for Product of Canada labelling set the bar too high.

Until the end of last year, something could be labelled Product of Canada if most of the cost of the product was incurred in Canada. That meant a can of mandarin oranges grown in China could be labelled Product of Canada if it was packaged here. The new rules, implemented Jan. 1, require 98 per cent of the food be grown in Canada to earn the Product of Canada label. "Very low number of processors will use this new denomination. And the program is voluntary, so they will probably choose not to use that," Laurent Pellerin, president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, told CBC News Friday.

The trouble is most processed food contains sugar, spices or other foods that are difficult to source in Canada. Earlier this month, a P.E.I.-based salad producer, Johnston's, complained it had to stop using the labels even though 95 per cent of the product was grown on the Island.

Opposition parties in Ottawa are supporting the processor, but Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz came out in support of the new rules. The new rules came following complaints from consumers. Pellerin said Ottawa should have gone with the 85 per cent Canadian food content recommendation from the parliamentary committee that looked into the issue.

"We have to maintain the pressure on that, and partner a committee with government, processors, farmers, to follow up the application of this new regulation," he said, "and, if necessary, to make some adjustment, to make sure [of] the final objective, that is to make the thing clearer for consumers." Once the rules are finalized, he said, the federal government should inform consumers with a marketing campaign.



Global Animal I.D., traceability update at O.I.E. conference

Source: meatpoultry.com

BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA — Progress being made to implement global animal identification and product traceability was addressed by The World Organization for Animal Health (O.I.E.) and its members at the O.I.E. International Conference on Animal Identification and Traceability.

"Discrepancies between national identification of live animals and traceability systems of animal products make it difficult to trace products of animal origin throughout the food chain at the world level; developing countries risk losing out on market access because of trade barriers that sometimes are put in place as a result of these discrepancies," said Dr. Bernard Vallat, O.I.E. Director General. "The best way to prevent this is for all countries to progressively implement international standards, such as those of the O.I.E. and Codex."

During the conference, participants confirmed the need to strengthen the bridge between identification and traceability of live animals and of products of animal origin. "We should aim at establishing traceability throughout the whole food chain from primary production down to consumers," said Dr. Kazuaki Miyagishima, Secretary for the Codex Alimentarius Commission. "The public health goal can be achieved by seamlessly applying the standards and principles established by the O.I.E. — at the farm level — and by the Codex Alimentarius Commission — at the food-processing and distribution level."

Identification and traceability systems recommended and used by the public and the private sector, however, can be based on very different requirements, which complicates the conditions of trade in live animals and products of animal origin.

"We encourage the stakeholders to comply with the official standards of the O.I.E. and Codex Alimentarius Commission and not to establish unilateral standards that conflict with the official standards and jeopardize the importation of animal products from developing countries," Dr. Vallat said. "On the basis of O.I.E.'s ongoing work in reinforcing Veterinary Services' capacities, using the O.I.E. Tool for the Evaluation of Performance of Veterinary Services (O.I.E. P.V.S. Tool), which has the requirements of the O.I.E. Terrestrial Code as its legal base, the experts defined the development of good governance, applied research, capacity building, education and communication in animal identification and traceability as priorities for developing countries."



EU tells farmers to tag every sheep in Britain

Source: www.telegraph.co.uk

Farmers will have to spend £65 million tagging every single sheep in Britain under new EU rules.

From January 1 next year Britain's 30 million sheep will be required to wear a hi-tech tag which can monitor their movements.

European commissioners claim the electronic ID (EID) tags will help contain an outbreak of disease such as the foot and mouth epidemic in 2001.

Farmers will have to burden 92 per cent of the cost themselves at a cost of £5,000 for an electronic tag reader and up to £1.50 per tag. They have criticised the proposals as "crazy" and "unnecessary" and say the extra costs could force them out of business.

John Hore, a farmer from Pilning, near Bristol, said: "We are prepared to fight this to the bitter end." "The strength of feeling is such that it is quite possible we will see farmers taking to the streets. We are just not being listened to. And we need our government firmly behind us.

"We have 30 million sheep in this country - probably more than the rest of Europe put together." "They want each one of those sheep to be individually identified. And farmers are saying 'No, it's just not possible'. This could do to the sheep industry what TB is doing to the cattle industry."

John Mercer, chief livestock adviser to the National Farmers' Union, said: "It's a crazy rule. It's not wanted. It's not needed. And it could, potentially, devastate the sheep industry. We really need political pressure now."

Farmers also claim the technology is flawed and will be dogged with technical faults in field conditions, particularly on hill farms where flocks are several thousands strong.

The regulation to tag every sheep in Europe at a cost of £109million was adopted by the EU in 2003. The original start date was January 1 2008 but this was delayed by two years after objections from farmers.

In Britain, farmers will be expected to carry out 92 per cent of the expected £65 million costs, markets and collection centres five per cent and abattoirs three per cent.

Farmers are still lobbying for the scheme to be made voluntary before the scheme is introduced. The UK is home to Europe's largest flock and, in a report compiled by the Joint Research Centre - which advises the government on technical issues - they have warned farmers here will be hardest hit.

Farmers Union of Wales' hill farming committee chairman Derek Morgan said: "I dread to think what the full costs to the EU sheep industry will be. "This report simply adds to the already overwhelming evidence that shows that costs of EID are completely disproportionate, while the benefits are negligible, and could actually be negative in the case of a disease outbreak. "We are committed to fighting this ridiculous legislation to the bitter end and this is yet more evidence which totally undermines the basis on which the Council of Ministers has made their decisions.

"However, the industry must also brace itself and start planning on the assumption that it will come in next year, because the majority of member states are hell-bent on ignoring the evidence."



Climate change fears for deadly virus outbreaks in livestock

Source: www.eurekalert.org

Global warming could have chilling consequences for European livestock, warned Professor Peter Mertens from the Institute for Animal Health, at this week's meeting of the Society for General Microbiology in Harrogate.

Since 1998, rising temperatures have led to outbreaks of Bluetongue (BT) across most of Europe, which have killed over 2 million ruminants. The outbreak caused by BT virus serotype 8, which started in the Netherlands and Belgium during 2006, has since spread to most European countries, including the UK in August and September 2007. This outbreak, the first ever recorded in northern Europe, was not an isolated event. There are also fears that related viruses, such as African horse sickness virus, which can have a fatality rate of more than 95% and shares the same insect vectors as BT, could also be introduced.

BT is spread by the biting midge, which has recently colonised the northern Mediterranean coast, leading to outbreaks in affected regions. However, BT outbreaks have also been spread by other novel vector species of midge which are abundant across the whole of central and northern Europe. In experiments, a single bite from a fully infected midge can transmit the virus and as midges are blown across Europe "like aerial plankton" it is almost impossible to prevent them getting to the United Kingdom.

Warmer weather increases the rate of infection and virus replication in the midge itself, and increases their activity in more northern areas. Indeed, the 2006 outbreak started in the Netherlands when temperatures were six degrees higher than previously recorded. Mild winters may also play a significant part in the problem, as the midges that are not killed by the cold (in the absence of frosts) may survive in sufficient numbers to maintain a reservoir of the disease. It is clear that BT can also be transmitted directly between cattle, providing an overwintering mechanism for the virus to survive from one midge season to the next.

"We have seen outbreaks caused by twelve strains, from nine distinct serotypes of BT virus, which have arrived in Europe via at least four different routes since 1998", said Professor Mertens, "This indicates that there has been a fundamental shift in BT epidemiology, linked to climate change.

In 2008 the UK vaccinated over 10 million sheep and cows against BTV-8 and was the only country in Europe to successfully suppress the disease outbreak. However different BT virus types have subsequently arrived in northern Europe which represent further threats to the UK for 2009 and beyond."

"These events demonstrate that the whole region is now at risk from further incursions of BT virus, as well as other insect transmitted viruses, many of which can also affect humans. Although the vaccines against BT virus currently available for use in northern Europe are relatively crude, as they are made from inactivated virus grown in tissue culture cells, it is clear that they can work against BT. However, more advanced vaccines, made from the protein-subunits of the virus, along with diagnostic tests that can distinguish vaccinated from infected animals, are urgently needed. Vaccines are also needed for other related viruses, including African horse sickness virus, and potentially both Epizootic haemorrhagic disease virus and Equine encephalosis virus."

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