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From the flock

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FOR THE CANADIAN SHEEP INDUSTRY

Are We Up For The Challenge?

By Jennifer MacTavish, CSF Executive Director

Usually the Chair and Executive Director's reports are the places where you can read about what the CSF has focused on over the past year. This year though, I'd like to focus on what you can expect from us this coming year. It is the hope of the CSF that issues addressed and activities undertaken will advance the industry so that it is well positioned for sustainable success.

Of course, our ongoing programs will continue to demand much attention: scrapie eradication, food safety and traceability. Securing funding and implementing a project to establish the prevalence of scrapie so that eradication targets can be set, will be a focus of the industry this year. The goal is to be able to work towards a date when Canada can be OIE certified scrapie free.

In terms of food safety, the industry is currently, based on industry feedback, completing changes to the On-Farm Food Safety manual and preparing it to be reviewed by the CFIA. Additionally the CSF will be working with member organizations to help ensure producer training courses are made available, as well as trainer and auditor training courses.

The CSF is also implementing an aggressive RFID pilot project, setting up farms in each province with RFID systems. The participating producers will be tasked with testing these systems against the traceability standards that have been set by the government. Additionally they will help us to determine what benefits RFID systems have for Canadian sheep producers. The results of this project will be a major determinant in whether or not the industry implements mandatory RFID.

Additionally, the producers on this project will need to be willing to share their costs of production, so that the industry is able to determine the real costs of implementing traceability systems. Part of the work being done on this file is determining what part of traceability the industry can afford, and what part really is a public good.

Cost of production is something that you will hear us speak about more and more often this year, as we work with the industry to determine what the true costs of programs such as the OFFS, traceability and scrapie eradication are.



Challenges continued

Part of this discussion will also be whether or not these are true costs to the industry, or investments into the industry to help ensure its long-term sustainability?

C. ovis will remain a focus for the Federation as the joint CSF, OMAFRA, University of Guelph and University of Saskatchewan research project continues. Farms of origin will continue to be contacted if lambs are condemned in processing plants. The purpose of making this contact is to educate producers on what they can do to minimize the risk of C. ovis infection.

Also, the CSF will be working on issues around predation, access to medications for small ruminants and issues that impact the industry's ability to increase production and meet consumer demand for consistent high quality products.

All of these activities are linked to the CSF's commitment to ensuring that the industry is in the best position possible to take advantage of markets that are available and increasing its market share. Scrapie eradication, food safety, traceability, C. ovis, predation, they are all linked to market access and meeting consumer demands – consistently supplying quality product. Are we up for the challenge?

Farmers cannot afford to be spectators

Source: www.agrinews-pubs.com

Agriculture is taking a lot of hits these days — from lawmakers who seem to be tuning us out to yellow journalists whose articles, films and books are rife with misinformation — to animal rights activists and confused environmentalists who believe America's farmers are polluting the planet because cows belch and we use crop inputs to protect our crops from insects and disease.

Friends, I've said it a million times and I'll continue to holler at the top of my lungs until I'm blue in the face: we cannot afford to be spectators. There is too much to lose! If we want the agriculture industry in this country to survive and thrive, we must get in the game.

What does that mean to you? Does it mean taking responsibility to be an active community member? Does it mean sacrifices that are given for successful relationships — both personally and in business? Is it good stewardship? What does it mean to you, the farmer — who continues to produce a record crop and feed the world year after year? Does it mean taking a proactive approach in educating the public about who we are and what we do? It most likely includes all of these things.

Unfortunately, consumers do not trust us as much as they did just a couple of years ago and we need to get in the game and work together, as a team, to educate those who consume the food we grow on our farms and ranches. We all know that the face of rural America is changing — larger farms, fewer farmers and more and more people moving to the country to enjoy the rural lifestyle who still want all of the amenities associated with living in an urban area.

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Farmers cannot afford to be spectators continued

Many of these people are moving to somebody's old farmstead, but they sure aren't farmers by the old definition. Many of them want to get their kids out of the city.

In some cases, simple conversations with your new neighbor will bridge the gap. In other instances, the situation calls for much more serious action. We should have the phone numbers of lawmakers representing us on speed dial. We should know their e-mail addresses and the names of their aides. We need to reach out to our neighbors, to the general public and to the media. We cannot just "go with the flow" if we truly want to keep our rural communities as well as our towns and cities alive and prosperous.

One of the latest attacks on the U.S. food production system is an article by Time magazine entitled "Getting Real about the High Price of Cheap Food." Many of you have probably seen or heard about it by now. The article was rife with blatant lies like: our food is "increasingly bad for us, even dangerous."

Bryan Walsh, who wrote the article, spent hours interviewing people involved in production agriculture but only used one quote (which he managed to get wrong.)

I was happy to see the outpouring of support from so many individuals and organizations in the agricultural community who sent letters to the editor of the magazine for its blatant disregard for the truth and poor editorial judgment in printing the piece.

Bob Stallman, president of the American Farm Bureau Federation, summed it up effectively when he said, "Time's contemporary reporters would do well to take a comprehensive lesson in objectivity and good journalism from their predecessors."

Stallman said Walsh launches a "vicious attack on modern farmers and the processes they use to care for the land, their animals, their neighbors and communities." Stallman calls it a "full-blown opinion piece disguised as news."

In his letter to the editors of Time magazine, the AFBF chief wrote that as farmers, "we will stand tall knowing that Americans today have once again fallen in love with American food, and due in part to the healthy food we produce, they are living longer than ever before."

How is the average consumer — who trusts the journalist to give him relevant information — to know what is news and what is not news?

In my book, Bryan Walsh is no journalist. If we don't get in the game and tell those who consume the food we produce the truth, how will they know?

For too many years, we did not fight back when our industry was verbally assaulted, assuming that right will always triumph.

We can no longer afford to remain silent.

Get in the game!



Message From the Chair

By Dwane Morvik, Chair CSF

Over the course of the last few years there has been much discussion in the industry about our need to increase production to meet the growing demand for lamb. Those who have been in the industry long enough have heard this message time and time again – “We don’t even fill 50 per cent of our demand”, “we need to increase production” “we need to improve consistency”.

The truth is, only 59 per cent of the lamb consumed in Canada is imported. Earlier in this report there was information on Canada’s shrinking ewe flock size which undoubtedly negatively impacts our ability to expand our market share. What the information didn’t show though, was that sheep flocks are shrinking internationally; New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States all have smaller flocks. So while overall the consumption of lamb is trending upwards, the question is; given that flock sizes are decreasing internationally – who is going to fill the Canadian demand for lamb? And why can’t it be us?

Over the past year two areas that were identified as limiting production were access to medications for small ruminants and predation. The CSF has been working with the Canadian Animal Health Institute and the Veterinary Drug Directorate (VDD) to try and increase the industry’s access to medications. The VDD has indicated that they have made it a priority to do what they can to approve Minor Use Minor Species drugs, including reviewing research that has been conducted on a drug in another country and, depending on the quality of data, determining if they can use it to assist the drug’s approval in Canada.

We pay a greater cost for sheep specific drugs than many other countries, and this needs to change. We can do this by encouraging drug manufacturers to make submissions for approvals in Canada.

At a time when the Canadian sheep industry has a tremendous amount of room for growth, predation remains as a major detriment to increasing production and, in some cases has been attributed to producers getting out of production entirely. As a way of addressing this issue, the CSF has secured funding to host a Predation Symposium at this year’s Annual General Meeting. The goal of this meeting is to discuss what tools are currently available to producers, what tools should be available, the expansion of the list of predators covered by provincial Acts, and to identify potential research specific to predation.

Of course predation and access to medications are only two of the many production issues that limit a producer’s ability to expand. Other areas that need to be addressed included the continued support of research, improvements in genetics and management efficiencies, as well as flock health. The CSF has made a commitment to focus on relevant issues to enable the sustainable success of the Canadian sheep industry, but we cannot do it without you. Beef and pork are envious of economic situation the sheep industry currently enjoys. Let’s keep it that way. Your commitment to the sheep industry shows by the fact that you are reading this article. Stay tuned, stay in touch and together we’ll grow this industry together.



National Identification and Traceability

By Sean McKenzie – National ID and Traceability Coordinator

At a recent sheep producer meetings in Ontario the topic of federal and provincial traceability funding was discussed and there was some uncertainty as to the various dates that have been announced regarding traceability and mandatory RFID as well as what group is responsible for which initiative.

Last month the Federal government announced that traceability will be made mandatory for the four priority species by 2011. Those species are beef, sheep, swine and poultry. This announcement was made as much to motivate the government bodies to implement regulatory and legislative changes as it was to motivate the industry's to implement full-scale traceability. The full extent of what this will entail or how it will be rolled out is not 100% determined at this point however industry representative groups, provincial and federal governments have been and will continue to collaborate to finalize a set of standards that will take into account producer capabilities and limitations, while still satisfying the requirements for traceable product.

The second topic was the Canadian Sheep Federation which has set a target date for January 2012 for Radio Frequency Identification to become mandatory for the sheep industry in Canada. The caveat though, is that the industry needs to be able to complete its RFID pilot project if it is to meet either of these deadlines. Without support from the government, the industry will not be able to meet these deadlines. The RFID project will analyse the impact that RFID technology will have on sheep production at the producer level. This analysis will be done through on farm, real time and functional use of RFID technology and put an actual dollar value of the costs, and the benefit of using RFID to manage sheep production.

If the sheep industry is able to complete this work the results will show conclusively whether the move to RFID is in the best interests of the Canadian sheep industry or if we should be considering alternatives to satisfy the needs of our customers.

One question that is often heard is; "why is government forcing us to do this?" One of the reasons is because customers are demanding it. And when we say customer, we don't just mean the ones in the grocery store. For those of you that sell into salesbarns, the salesbarn is your customer. If you sell into a feedlot, the feedlot operator is your customer. Governments have the responsibility to answer to consumer concerns and often the perception is that there is more credibility to a government endorsed and enforced program than one that is solely industry policed or regulated.

Much of the messaging that you may here from CSF, your provincial organisations, or provincial government specialists may be about how traceability can help the industry. What the benefits might be to your farm and your operation and how it is being brought in "to benefit the industry". Many may feel that this message is misleading and that traceability is in actuality intended to speed up processing and make the job of inspection and enforcement easier and faster and not for the benefit of the producer.

To a point this is true; it is not being done just for the benefit of the producer. There are many benefits to various parts of the chain including those mentioned above.

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ID and Traceability continued

Some producers are concerned that the processors, retailers, government “...get all these benefits down the line and I won’t get a penny more for my animal if I have RFID or not!” Determining how true this statement is part of why the sheep industry is wanting to engage in the RFID pilot project. What we do know is that if we can’t answer to the demands of our customers they will find a product that does.

So while the CSF, CNGF and other industry representative groups like the Canadian Pork Council, Dairy Farmers of Canada or the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency work to represent the needs and interests of the industry (i.e. Producers) at the government table, we are also working to find potential options to benefit the producer. It is our job to look for ways to help the industry develop and producers to adapt to the changes and that is why our messages to you are often about improving efficiencies on farm, or obtaining carcass grading information or better record keeping improving breeding management.

One world, one health message brought home

The Ontario Veterinary College Animal Welfare Club’s 10 annual forum Saturday on “one world, one health” was amply demonstrated by speakers who emphasized the interweaving lives of people and farm animals.

University of Guelph pathobiology professor Dr. Pat Turner said it’s an old concept dating back 150 years that’s making a comeback.

Club spokesperson Kasia Sulima said Turner was referring to the growing recognition that veterinarians and human health counterparts need to work together to ensure the health of all living creatures, particularly in an era of

zoonoses, which are diseases that can jump the species barrier from humans to other animals and vice versa. She cited as an example West Nile virus, which spreads to humans from birds through infected mosquitoes.

“Now more than ever we see especially with zoonotic diseases and travel things can happen,” Sulima said. “It can spread all over the world.”

The link between people and animals was brought into sharp focus Saturday by the UofG population medicine chair and founder of the Kenya-based “Children of Bukati” charitable organization, which supports 700 orphans there.

Dr. Cate Dewey has for several years undertaken research, workshops and public education in poverty-stricken western Kenya on the spread of disease between subsistence farmers and their pigs. Because of poor farm practises and hygiene, coupled with abject poverty, there’s a constant cycle of transmission. People eating undercooked, infected pork get tapeworms that lead to epilepsy. The tapeworms shed eggs in human stools that are consumed by free-roving pigs, leading to cysts in pig muscle that infect people consuming this pork, continuing the cycle.

Her work on improving the livelihoods of pig farmers includes educating them on better farm practises, parasite control and production methods, as well as innovative feeding to supplement the pig diet of corn and plant roots. That includes feeding them bruised fruit, rumen content, fish byproducts, grist mill debris and blood from slaughtered cows, something they hadn’t fed their pigs before but are good nutritional supplements, Dewey told the audience.

“We are empowering these farmers through knowledge — and they are thirsty for this,” Dewey said.



Scrapie Canada Update

By Courtney Denard, National Scrapie Coordinator

Recently the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) met with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to discuss scrapie eradication. The primary message of this meeting was that the USDA is currently on track and resourced for achieving a status of scrapie-free by the World Organization of Animal Health (OIE) by the year 2017.

To accomplish scrapie eradication, the USDA has invested a significant amount of money to date. Approximately \$120 million has been spent between the years 2001 and 2009. This year alone, the USDA dedicated about \$17.3 million towards their scrapie programs, which includes a voluntary flock certification program, a nationwide surveillance program and an identification program for sheep and goats participating in scrapie eradication programs. Their hard work seems to be paying off. Scrapie peaked in the USA in 2005 and since this time it has been decreasing annually.

In light of all of their efforts, the USDA intends to progressively reduce their tolerance to external risk. In fact, the USDA believes that it is important at this time to start adopting a more Australia/ New Zealand like attitude toward the risk of disease introduction. This means restrictions surrounding which animals are allowed into the country will become more and more stringent.

2017 is the target date the USDA has set for detecting and eradicating the last cases of scrapie. After seven consecutive years of no scrapie cases, a country can apply for scrapie-free status from the OIE as long as the said country is following all OIE guidelines.

When a country is scrapie-free, the trade regulations associated with that country will change. Only countries that are also scrapie-free will have full access to their market. Since the

USA is one of Canada's biggest trading partners, this is something that our industry needs to keep in mind as we continue to develop and implement scrapie programs.

At the aforementioned meeting, the USDA also questioned Canada on its scrapie eradication plans. They wanted to know just how serious Canada was about eradicating the disease and what our true goal is when it comes to scrapie.

The USDA stated that they will only continue to keep the American and Canadian industries harmonized if Canada's objective is total eradication and we fully commit to working towards this. Following on the same line, if total eradication is Canada's goal, the USDA expects the CFIA and the Canadian industry to adopt a similar, escalating intolerance to external risks (ie: increasing restrictions on which animals are allowed into the country).

As Canada moves forward in its scrapie-eradication plans there is a lot to consider. Many decisions are going to have to be made in regards to what type of trading relationship we want to build with the States. It must be remembered that the US is a major market for Canadian producers to obtain new genetics for both the sheep and goat industries so we will want access to their market. Also, when the USA does become scrapie-free, they'll be a stronger competitor in other markets throughout the world. This means Canada will be at a disadvantage if we do not hold the same scrapie-free status.

Another thought to bear in mind is that when it comes to disease eradication, the Canadian industry cannot afford to make decisions in isolation. The plans and programs we implement to eradicate TSEs will have an impact on all ruminant industries in Canada, not just sheep and goats.



New sheep breeding tool to help replace mulesing

Source: theland.farmonline.com.au

A New sheep program, Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBVs) for breech wrinkle, will allow farmers to identify, select and breed from sheep that have improved natural resistance to flystrike. It will be launched later today by Sheep Genetics.

This is a major achievement that will greatly help the industry in its efforts to breed sheep that can be managed safely without mulesing, according to a statement from Australian Wool Innovation (AWI).

The ASBV for Early Breech Wrinkle gives Merino sheep producers the potential to fast-track their progress to reduce breech wrinkle in their flocks. As breech wrinkle is strongly associated with flystrike, selecting rams with low Early Breech Wrinkle ASBVs will contribute to progeny with enhanced natural resistance to breech flystrike. This is the result of five years of intensive investment in research and breeding initiatives across the country.

It is indicative of the enormous and ongoing commitment of the industry to address this complex health and welfare problem and a further illustration of Australian sheep producers' investment in enhancing flystrike prevention alternatives.

The research was funded by Australian Wool Innovation and Meat and Livestock Australia, together with Australian Merino Sire Evaluation Association and the Sheep CRC. Sheep with favourable Early Breech Wrinkle ASBVs have demonstrated less susceptibility to flystrike.

However, research has also shown the relationship between breech wrinkle and fleece weight must be carefully managed, so as to prevent associated negative production effects. This can be achieved through fleece weight and staple length ASBVs, with environmental effects also an important factor.

"AWI research has shown that animals with a breech wrinkle score of two or less have significantly reduced incidence of flystrike," Sheep Genetics manager Sam Gill said.

"It is still sheep breeders who make the choice to develop sheep suitable for their own environment and production system. It is also important that ram breeders use wrinkle ASBVs to select rams as there are some significant effects of sex, birth type, dam and age that could bias selection if not handled effectively," Sam added.

The accuracy of early breech wrinkle ASBVs has been validated with up to 10 years of research data (more than 15,000 records) that has found a strong association between breech and body wrinkle. Research has also shown highly wrinkled lambs tend to remain so throughout their lives. Sheep Genetics aims to produce one single breeding value for wrinkle that uses information from both early and later life measurement. Breech and body wrinkle scores have been collated from various industry sources such as the Sheep CRC Information Nucleus Flocks, Merino Sire Evaluation sites, MERINOSELECT members and AWI breech flocks.

The development of these recent breeding values for more than 300 industry sires follows the Visual Sheep Scores Guide published by AWI and MLA earlier this year. Interested parties are invited to an interactive online seminar or webinar to launch the ASBV for early breech wrinkle from 12:30-1:30 pm EST, Tuesday September 15.

AWI CEO Brenda McGahan will launch the ASBV followed by a presentation by Sam Gill, manager of Sheep Genetics on the technical details of the ASBV and how to interpret the breeding value.



Review of the Bluetongue Insurance Program

The Canadian Sheep Federation is currently reviewing its Bluetongue Insurance Program. We are encouraging those in the sheep industry to let us know what they think.

You can participate in the survey by visiting the CSF website or by clicking on the link - http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=IENRIOJ2AHugZVTkKXcIA_3d_3d

Alternatively, you can answer the following questions and send your responses by email to jennifer@cansheep.ca or fax 1-866-909-5360

1. Are you aware that Bluetongue insurance is available to Canadian Sheep Producers?
2. If you weren't aware of the Bluetongue Insurance program, would you be interested in learning more?
3. Where did you hear about the Bluetongue Insurance program?
 - i. Provincial newsletter
 - ii. Magazine article
 - iii. Magazine advertisements
 - iv. From the Flock
 - v. Points of View
 - vi. Producer meeting
 - vii. Other
4. Did you buy Bluetongue Insurance? If no – is there anything we can do to make it more attractive?
5. Is production insurance something that interests you? If so, what additional risks are you concerned about?
6. Do you have any additional questions and/or comments?

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