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From the flock

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FOR THE CANADIAN SHEEP INDUSTRY

CSF Business Plan

By Jennifer MacTavish, CSF Executive Director

Last month in Toronto, Ontario, at the Canadian Sheep Federation's Annual General Meeting, the Board of Directors signed off on the Federation's 2009-2014 Business Plan. This marks the third year of the Federation's Business plan, which was been developed in consultation with the Board of Directors, staff (provincial and national), industry stakeholders and after a review of the strategic and operational accomplishments for 2008-09.

The business plan is divided into two sections. The first section is dedicated to strategy and contains strategic elements (i.e., mission, core competency and values) and Key Result Areas for the future of the Canadian sheep industry and the CSF. The second part of the plan is dedicated to operations and contains objectives, goals and performance indicators that the CSF needs to undertake if it wishes to take its place as a successful Canadian agricultural industry, including necessary timeframes.

The Business Plan contains six Key Result Areas: Industry Development, Communications, Information Management, Education and Training, Organizational Management and Governance.

Each of these areas contains anywhere from 5 to 11 goals which are the focus of the CSF activities for the coming 12 months.

These Key Result Areas and their goals can be divided into four categories that summarize what it is the CSF is doing for Canadian sheep producers and why the organization is important to you.

First and foremost, the CSF is your national voice. A national voice is important because what isn't heard from is forgotten. So if the Canadian sheep producers do not have representation at the national level, going to meetings, meeting with government bureaucrats and officials, there would be limited to no ability to influence the decision makers. As such, funding and policies that are created would affect sheep producers and be established without any specific consideration for the industry.

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Business Plan continued

The CSF then, ensures that issues concerning you and the industry get the attention and consideration they need at the federal government level. Saving you time, energy and the expense of finding and deploying specific expertise to that role, which is critical to the viability of the industry. This ongoing government relations role also establishes the awareness and appreciation for the national industry that builds credibility and enables access to funding opportunities that would not exist otherwise.

Secondly the CSF is undertaking activities that are geared towards protecting and expanding the Canadian sheep flock. Our focus on health related issues, specifically scrapie eradication, Bluetongue insurance, and biosecurity focus on ensuring that the Canadian sheep producers have the tools they need to deal with animal health issues when they arise.

This is especially important given the current climate when it comes to animal health. The Canadian Animal Health Surveillance Network reports 8 emerging and re-emerging agricultural diseases since 2003. This may not seem like a lot, however, there weren't any reported from 1997 to May 2003. The question is not whether or not the Canadian sheep industry will be faced with a major disease, but when.

The CSF is also implementing activities which are geared to help maximize producer profits. To this end, a Cost of Production template was designed for implementation on the CSF website, additionally the Federation is working on pre-gate factors that may impact sheep producers' ability to access markets.

These include On-Farm Food Safety, and Traceability. And while these programs may become important in terms of market access, the CSF does recognize that they must be available to producers in a way that is not cost prohibitive.

While this is not meant to serve as an exhaustive list of the CSF activities, it is meant to provide you with a glimpse of what it is we are working on. And also, to encourage you to be in touch and let us know what's on your mind. We cannot adequately do our job of representing producers if we do not hear from you.

National Identification - Cost Sharing

By Sean McKenzie – National ID and Traceability Coordinator

As has been discussed here in From the Flock many times before there is a desire from the federal government and national industry groups to develop a National Agriculture and Food Traceability System (NAFTS). The Industry/ Government Advisory Council (IGAC) was tasked by the federal and provincial Ministers of Agriculture to put together a set of standards and policies that would end up being the framework for this system. Much deliberation and debate has followed and through the establishment of working groups to address specific components and issues the IGAC groups is making progress.

The Cost Sharing working group was tasked to outline and address the various issues around the question of 'who will pay' for the maintenance and day to day operation of such a system. Most producers believe that if the government wants this, then the government should pay. The benefits of having a traceability system in place for emergency preparedness, response and recovery are seen to be for the "public" good and therefore should be borne primarily by the government.

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National Identification continued

On the other hand, it has been argued that the benefits of having livestock and food traceability are also a value to the producer who can use it to show due diligence in the event that a food safety or animal health emergency should occur on or near to their farm, and thereby potentially be protected from loss of consumer confidence, market access or in extreme cases de-population.

To look deeper into this Public vs. Private good question the Cost Sharing working group contracted J.E. Hobbs, W.A. Kerr and from the Department of Bio-Resource Policy, Business & Economics, at the University of Saskatchewan and M.T. Yeung from the Estey Centre for Law and Economics in International Trade to draft a report on what makes a 'good' either public or private and how the proposed National Traceability initiative fits into this model.

Their final report makes demonstrates that this matter is far from a black and white. Traceability information can be divided into both categories of public and private goods, as well as further sub-divided into 'Toll' and 'Club' goods. These sub-categorisations describe how a particular good is made available (freely, or with restrictions) and to whom it is available (all or specific restricted access ie: a club). Each of which becomes important concepts as we discuss the how's and who's of access to information, and the distribution of costs.

The costs of traceability to producers have been well documented. Purchasing of ear tags, record keeping for trace-back investigations, producer time invested to apply, record and report these numbers continue to be presented as their investment in the system. What is to be determined next will be the investment of the general public who looks for the information to support claims of nutritional value, production methods, or other qualifying attributes.

With a better understanding now of how the various components of traceability and a full traceability system can be categorised and broken down the IGAC group is taking another step forward towards the development of a National Traceability System for Livestock and Poultry. The completion of this study provides the IGAC group with a better understanding of how the costs for traceability implementation can be fairly and equally distributed amongst all the stakeholders.

Food Safety – A Farmer's Responsibility?

By Barbara Caswell

When we talk about the food supply chain, we are talking about everyone from the producer, through the feedlots and auction markets, through the slaughter, processing and distribution facilities, right to the retailer. I'm currently updating my skills through a HACCP course and, in my opinion, one of the most important lessons I have learned is that, in terms food safety, the food supply chain is exactly that – a chain! And a chain is only as strong as the weakest link! It's time we show consumers just how much we do to offer them a safe, high quality product as part of that chain.

I was recently invited to talk at the Saskatchewan Annual General Meeting on food safety, and it really gave me the opportunity to express to local producers what the CSF's on-farm food safety program is. There is much caution and hesitation towards on-farm food safety, with producers concerned about another program and another cost, but for what?

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Food Safety continued

Let us take a few steps back. The question of, 'what is on-farm food safety' cannot be answered without considering what food safety is. After all, it is impossible to implement a program if you don't have a clear understanding of what it is you are trying to accomplish. While many organizations have provided their definition of food safety, in terms of being a consumer, it comes down to being able to eat food without being harmed. Using this definition, it seems almost easy to say I market live animals to a processor or feedlot, not a lamb chop – food safety is not my concern. But remember my analogy of the chain, and a food safety system is only as strong as the weakest link. That is why CSF has taken the time to put together their on-farm food safety program, Food-Safe Farm Practices.

When asking a producer if they use medications and are aware of medication withdrawal times, the reply is always yes. All producers deal with these issues in their day-to-day operations. These are some examples of the food safety hazards which producers have the ability to and are controlling on their individual operations. However, while the number of food illnesses reported and the number of food contamination cases is said to be declining, the media has grasped hold of the concept and we have actually seen an increase in the number of cases in the news. This has made the consumer wary of the products they purchase and they have begun to demand a safer food supply. Government has responded with a number of initiatives, including recognizing on-farm food safety programs and providing a great deal of funding for the on-farm food safety initiative.

While implementation of the Food-Safe Farm Practices Program does not guarantee a safe product, it certainly helps, and it shows consumers that the sheep industry is taking due diligence in terms of food safety.

While everyone is aware of the need to follow medication withdrawal times, the Food-Safe Farm Practices program provides producers with the necessary records and steps to be able to show the public what they are doing, and increase the level of confidence in our product. And medication residues are only one hazard managed by the program.

I have heard a number of individuals say, while they believe food safety to be important, there is a real need to grow the industry and that is where the focus is. The potential is there and we need to capitalize on it. However, I have also heard many discussions about why growing the industry seems to be such a difficult task. Food safety programming is a way for us to better our industry and to promote our industry, both domestically and abroad. If we want others to invest in our industry, we need to have confidence enough to invest in the industry ourselves. Food safety is a worthwhile investment – it provides consumer confidence, helps maintain markets and decreases our liability in the event of a food safety issue. While the government has not made on-farm food safety mandatory yet, let's take the first step into investing into our industry! For more information, contact the CSF office.



Scrapie Canada Update

By Courtney Denard, National Scrapie Coordinator

With the New Year quickly approaching, it is a good time to take a look back at the year that was. Below is an overview of Scrapie Canada's activities in 2009. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) confirmed six cases of scrapie in 2009. Four of the cases were atypical scrapie with one case originating in Saskatchewan, one in Alberta and two in Ontario. Two of the six cases were classical scrapie, both originating in Quebec.

To follow this issue throughout the year, log onto the CFIA's website at: <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/anim/heasan/disemala/scrtre/situation.shtml>

A major theme in 2009 was scrapie eradication. During the summer, the CFIA met with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to discuss this matter. 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 year 2017. To accomplish scrapie eradication, the USDA has invested approximately \$120 million between the years 2001 and 2009.

At the same meeting, the USDA 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 also stated that they will only continue to keep the American and Canadian industries harmonized if Canada's objective is also total eradication and we fully commit to working towards this. This means Canada will be required to adopt a similar, escalating intolerance to external risks (ie: increasing restrictions on which animals are allowed into the country).

This put Canada into a position to seriously consider its next steps in terms of scrapie. In light of this, Scrapie Canada submitted an application to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's AgriFlexibility Fund to support a nationwide scrapie prevalence study. The U.S. completed a similar study in 2002. At the time of press, Scrapie Canada's application was still under review; therefore, more information on this project will be released in early 2010.

Switching notes, the National Genotyping Survey came to a close on March 31, 2009. Overall, the three year research project was very successful and provided new genetic information on Canadian purebred sheep genetics. In total, about 9,300 Canadian purebred sheep were genotype tested through this project.

This new data will play a positive role in the Canadian sheep industry by adding to the industry's knowledge of scrapie; increasing the number of sheep in Canada that have been genotype tested; and providing the industry with valuable information to set up scrapie reducing breeding programs. All of these are important steps forward in moving towards a scrapie-free industry, as well as keeping Canada in line with scrapie initiatives that are occurring in the international agricultural community.

A summary of the project's final report can be viewed at <http://www.scrapiecanada.ca/genotyping-NatSurvey.html> or it can be forwarded by contacting Scrapie Canada.

The Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program- Pilot Project was also completed at the end of March 2009. The results of this project provided the industry with new information on the cost of implementing a national scrapie certification program.

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Project results showed that it would cost approximately \$211,000 per year to fully run a national scrapie certification program. On the producer end of things, results found that on average it costs \$250 per year in veterinarian fees to be enrolled on the program. The average time spent on the program was about 14 hours per producer per year.

A summary of the pilot project's final report can be viewed at <http://www.scrapiecanada.ca/UpdateAugust2009.html> or it can be forwarded by contacting Scrapie Canada.

Although the pilot project aspect of the Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program finished in March, the actual program itself did not stop. The program is still currently running and is open to any sheep or goat producer in Canada who wishes to enroll. At the end of 2009, the program has 60 enrolled producers and 13 temporarily enrolled producers. 53 of these are sheep producers and 20 are goat producers.

Scrapie Canada would like to congratulate the following producers who have achieved a Certified status on the program:

- Bill and Lynne Duffield, Codan Suffolks, Ontario
- Ray and Ann Marie Hauck, Ram H Breeders, Alberta
- Malcolm and Shirley Rose, Manitoba
- PharmAthene Canada Incorporated, Quebec

Foot and mouth scare prompts \$12m build

Cabinet approves fresh development over an upgrade to AsureQuality's AgriBase

A 2005 Waiheke Island foot and mouth disease scare has prompted the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry to develop a new \$12 million computer-based system to hold detailed farm information.

Ground-up development of the system, called Farmsonline, will cost an estimated \$3 million, with a further \$9 million in operational costs over the next five years. The decision to build the system was approved by Cabinet last month after considering an alternative upgrade to existing systems such as AsureQuality's AgriBase.

Analysis showed that enhancing AgriBase would be more expensive and no faster than building a new application," says a brief on the MAF website. "In addition, there were no unique business benefits with this option that could not be achieved through a contestable procurement process."

The decision was made in consultation with AsureQuality "and they understand our reasons", says Clifton King, systems design manager for the project. It is now envisaged that AsureQuality, a government-owned company that provides food safety and biosecurity services to the primary sector, will link to Farmsonline and use the data there to continue to provide its farm information services.

A spokeswoman says AsureQuality is "comfortable with MAF's decision" but declined any further comment.

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The aim of the Farmsonline system is to speed up and improve MAF Biosecurity's ability to locate properties, identify the stock and crops held on them and manage response programmes for an emergency or disease outbreak, such as the 2005 Waiheke scare. "It will improve emergency responses and reduce losses to farmers and the New Zealand economy," says MAF.

Much of the information to be included in the Farmsonline database is already available, but has been scattered over a number of silos. Some, however, will need to be newly gathered and some will be in the hands of the farm businesses themselves or other private organisations, raising again the delicate question of government repackaging of private data.

MAF doesn't anticipate having to pay for any of the data sourced from outside, says King. "Our business model is to exchange data with other parties at the cost of transfer. A bigger issue will be mutual assurance of appropriate data privacy and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) will be developed for this," he says. Farmers will be able to update information on their properties through a web interface and certain events, such as change in ownership of a property, will be reported by other agencies to MAF Biosecurity and will trigger a request for an update.

Farmers will not be compelled to supply information for the Farmsonline database, MAF says. Any future compliance requirement will need new law and will be preceded by consultation, MAF says. However farmers may be required in future to supply certain data for other schemes, such as a contemplated National Animal Identification and Tracing (NAIT) Scheme, which, if it is approved, will link with Farmsonline.

Farmsonline will include a website through which any member of the public will be able to browse information on farms. The tender specification for the system draws a firm line around "restricted" data items, such as personal information on the

owner or manager of the farm and exact details of the land area used for various animals and crops.

This will not be publicly available. However, some possibly sensitive data such as the presence of a crop on the property is currently on the unrestricted side of the boundary in the data model.

Although the priority is to centralise information on rural properties, limited data will also be held on the country's 1.7 million urban properties, since they may also be affected by a biosecurity emergency. This will be collected from territorial local authorities, King says.

Farmsonline is scheduled to be in operation by March 2011. MAF plans to run the system on the hardware it already has, provided by Unisys and Revera.

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