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# From the flock

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FOR THE CANADIAN SHEEP INDUSTRY

## 2008-2013 Business Plan

By Jennifer Fleming, CSF Executive Director

This week in Moncton, New Brunswick, at the Canadian Sheep Federation's Annual General Meeting, the Board of Directors will sign off on the Federation's 2008-2013 Business Plan. This marks the second year of the Federation's Business plan, which was developed in consultation with the Board of Directors, staff (provincial and national), and industry stakeholders. The plan is reviewed annually, and we've made necessary updates based on the strategic and operational accomplishments for 2007-2008.

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) as well as 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: Communications; Business Development;

Financial Management; Information Management;

Education and Training and Governance. Each of these areas contains anywhere from five 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.

### Your national voice

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

The CSF then ensures that issues concerning you and the industry get the attention and consideration they need at the federal government level.



## Business Plans continued

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.

### Protecting the Canadian sheep flock

Secondly, the CSF is undertaking activities that are geared towards protecting the Canadian sheep flock. Our focus on health-related issues, specifically scrapie eradication, Bluetongue insurance and biosecurity, focus on ensuring that 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 eight 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.

### Maximizing producer profits

The CSF is also implementing activities that are geared to help maximize producer profits. To this end, a Cost of Production template is being designed for implementation on the CSF website. Additionally, the CSF 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 recognizes they must be available to producers in a way that is not cost prohibitive.

### Growing and securing the market

In May 2008, the CSF held a Value Chain Roundtable session in Ottawa, and a second one is being held on October 29th in Moncton. These meetings address not only a way to work on maximizing profits for Canadian producers, but also a way of trying to grow and secure the market – which is the fourth category of activities.

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.

If you haven't done so already, now is the perfect time for you to speak up. We're heading into the planning cycle for the 2009-2014 Business Plan and we want your views to help shape our future focus and activities. Feel free to contact me directly at 1-800-684-7739.

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# An Interview With Shawn Perry

By Lorraine Hall, National Coordinator OFFS

Recently, I had the privilege to interview one of our registered producers, Shawn Perry, who farms in Newfoundland. Shawn's sheep operation was registered on the Food Safe Farm Practices (FSFP) program about one year ago, in November 2007. Following are the questions I asked Shawn and his answers about his experience with the audit process for the FSFP program.

## **Can you describe your operation for me?**

The farm is now in its fourth generation for the family. We raise Newfoundland Heritage Sheep, which is a rare breed that is distinct to Newfoundland. The genetics for this breed have only been out a few years. We have 65 breeding ewes and 3 breeding rams.

## **What made you decide to become registered on the FSFP program?**

If getting registered meant doing something better or improving my operation in some way, I figured it was worth it. I knew that it would probably teach me something I didn't already know, or help me improve on something that I was already doing.

## **How did you prepare for the FSFP audit?**

I didn't do much over and above what I was already doing. We were doing all of the basics of the record keeping, like tracking the movement of animals on and off the farm. One thing that I needed to change was keeping the medication in the same area as where the sheep were, that was something I didn't realize that needed to be changed.

## **How long did the audit take?**

The actual on-farm part when the auditor was here took about three or four hours. I was corresponding with the auditor for about a six month period before the audit, to prepare and see what I should be doing before the final audit.

## **What main areas of your operation did the auditor look at?**

A lot of it was around making the carcass safe for human consumption. For example, meeting withdrawal times for animal health products, making sure there were no broken needles in the sheep, tracking any suspected broken needles, that kind of thing.

## **Are there any areas where you felt that the audit was too tough or too lenient?**

No, I thought the audit was pretty straight forward, they were either yes or no answers. There were some aspects of the program that weren't relevant to my operation, like the medicated feeds and water section. I use town water that is already chlorinated, so we saved some time there.

## **Of what value has it been to be registered on the FSFP program?**

People look at my farm in a whole new light; more people are focusing on it than before. It's been a marketing tool. Since we have a unique breed our lambs have always sold easily, but this has been an additional bonus. The only disadvantage for me was the time that it took to go through the registration process, besides that it's been very beneficial.

## **What advice would you give to producers who are considering registration on the program?**

Do exactly what you're already doing now, go through the audit process and then you will find out that what you're doing right you could maybe do better, and anything that you're not doing can be changed. I wasn't doing everything exactly right, but just approached the whole thing as a learning process. The majority of producers, probably about 70%, are already doing most of what's required, there are some small producers in this province who don't track/tag their lambs, but it's generally not much in addition to what you're already doing.



# Scrapie Canada Annual Report

By Courtney Denard, Scrapie Project Coordinator

Approximately 8,600 purebred sheep from across Canada have been genotype tested through the National Genotyping Survey- an initiative developed by government and industry and administered by Scrapie Canada. Launched in June 2005, the survey is open to all Canadian purebred producers with registered sheep. Although the program was slated to run for one year, extension requests have made it possible for the survey to continue for three and a half years.

The last extension request permitted the program to run until December 16, 2008 - the final day producers can complete genotype testing through the survey. After December 16, a rebate will no longer be offered to Canadian producers interested in genotyping their purebred sheep. Any producer who is interested in genotyping their flock- or even just one of their animals- should do before the December 16th deadline.

If there are any producers still uncertain about what the National Genotyping Survey has to offer, or why it is important, the following information may apply. The National Genotyping Survey has been important for both producers and the industry for many different reasons.

For producers, the financial reimbursement offered by the program has made genotype testing purebred sheep more affordable. The normal cost to genotype test one sheep is about \$30 (depending on the lab). Producers testing through the program only pay \$10 per head. Secondly, money is also reimbursed to the producer for the cost of the vet visit (to draw the samples) and shipping the samples to the lab. Through the program, producers receive \$6.00/ head (up to 70%) for the vet visit as well as half of the shipping fees.

Genotyping also benefits producers by providing valuable genetic information. All samples tested through the program are entered into the national database, where producers can go online and view their individual test results at <http://genenovas.ca>. Using their test results, producers can establish breeding programs back on the farm, which can eventually breed for scrapie resistance. Through the survey, producers also gain access to the GeneNovaS Market Place- an online listing of genotyped animals for sale.

When it comes to the Canadian sheep industry, the National Genotyping Survey has been valuable as well. Unique to Canada, the program has gathered a knowledge base for increasing resistance of Canadian flocks to scrapie. And because the Canadian project includes ewe testing, it is one of the most advanced in the world.

By genotyping, Canadian producers can pro-actively work towards increasing the resistance of the national flock to scrapie. Extensive testing makes it possible to decrease the negative impacts of this disease, including: financial loss to producers; high-cost government programs; and animal welfare concerns for producers forced to de-populate their flocks/ herds.

Genotyping the national flock also allows Canada to be at par with countries throughout the world that also have genotyping programs in place. For example, as part of their scrapie eradication plans, both the US and Europe have developed and implemented well-established genotyping programs.

For more information on Canada's National Genotyping Survey, please call Scrapie Canada at 1-866-534-1302 before December 16, 2008.



## A Breakfast Meeting with Dr. Charles Milne

By Sean McKenzie, National Coordinator - Animal Identification and Traceability

Dr. Charles Milne is the chief veterinary officer for Scotland and was recently here in Canada to speak on emergency response and the experiences that they have faced in Scotland and the UK over the past several years, with Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD), Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), and Avian Influenza (AI). I was unfortunately unable to attend the 1.5 day emergency planning seminar in Winnipeg however I did get to meet and hear Dr. Milne speak in Ottawa the following day.

The meeting was very interesting and provided some insight into what can happen in the event of a serious animal health emergency. It also showed that here in Canada and North America in general, despite the new regulations and requirements being placed on producers, we have been particularly lucky so far as we have not had to face the types of nation wide emergencies experienced in other areas of the globe. The potential however is there and if we are to prevent the catastrophic sort of result that they experienced in the UK and Scotland we need to consider these as serious possibilities and prepare ourselves accordingly.

To use BSE as an example; in Great Britain there were 2008 reported cases of BSE in one year (2003). This truly puts our 14 cases over the past 5 years into perspective. While the Scottish beef cattle herd is considerably smaller than ours here in Canada at approximately 472 000 breeding animals vs. our 14 million, their sheep flock is approximately 3 times ours with ~2.9 million (2007). Their sheep industry also differs from ours in that they have a very stratified population. Dr. Milne explained this as follows: they have the highland ewes, which are hearty breeds, not particularly good quality carcasses or wool, but do well in harsh conditions, as are found in the highlands and these ewes are bred to better quality rams. The ram lambs from this

pairing are sold for low grade meat, the ewe lambs are moved and raised on the “hills” where conditions are somewhat more favourable and generally are of better quality but not as tough as their parents. These hill ewes then are bred again to higher quality rams and lambs are then sold to market (rams) and the ewe lambs are sent to be raised on the lowlands, the most favourable areas for raising animals. These ewes then in turn produce lambs which are all sent to market for the highest grade meat. This stratification provides for efficient use of varieties of terrain and conditions it brings with it its own issues, not the least of which being that with your sheep flock constantly being moved (flowing) down hill, and with them the likelihood of transporting diseases and infecting new areas with disease increases substantially.

Other issues that were contributing to the problem included a significant overstocking of land area. Government support payments to producers were often set on a per head basis; more livestock meant more support when/if it was provided. This program has been modified in the recent past so as to encourage more sustainable and less hazardous, in an animal health sense agricultural practises and as a result the sheep population has dropped from approximately 4 million to 3 million.

Moving onto the topic of animal health Dr. Milne reviewed their experience with Brucellosis in 2003. The case initiated with animals, cattle specifically, that were imported from Ireland. Surveillance has since been improved to the point where they have been able to reveal Brucellosis virus is pregnant cows. These are then able to be culled before spreading disease on.

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## Dr. Charles Milne continued

Learning from this event and to prevent import of other infectious diseases, namely Tuberculosis (TB), they have adopted a policy of testing all animals prior to import and then again 60-90 days after arrival. This allows for the dormant period of many infectious diseases and if found the animals can be destroyed before they are exposed to or allowed to come in contact with the resident population.

### ID and Traceability

For the national beef herd all producers holding animals are required by law to register in order to obtain a herd number. All animals must be double tagged with herd identification number and animal identification number. Within 30 days of birth all calves must be registered and given an identification number; if the animal is not registered it will not be slaughtered for human consumption. Once the animal is registered it receives a passport which then stays with that animal for its entire life. Any movement of that animal, both the origin and destination, must be recorded on farm and reported to a central database within 3 days. Finally the passport must travel with the animal at all times from registration through to slaughter.

The national sheep and hog industries are slightly different in that there is no individual identification for animals; however a flock number is also issued through a national registry. Each sheep is tagged with the flock number and all movements on and off farm are recorded. For now Scotland uses a batch or group lot numbering system both on farm and in the sheep movement database, but there is a plan in place to have all animals individually tagged by 2010. This is in compliance with EU rulings and is being heavily debated in many areas of the EU, including Scotland.

There is also a compulsory Bluetongue vaccination program that applies to all sheep. To provide some sense of scale, the average market for sheep in Scotland is 25 000 head per day. Speaking next about measures that been put in place to lessen the threat of spreading animal disease Dr. Milne reviewed the “20-Day Rule” (2001) which has since been modified to a “13-Day Rule”. This ruling applies to beef, sheep and hogs being imported into the country and it states that if an animal is imported to a farm, no other animal from that same premises can leave the herd/flock for a period of 13 days except to travel directly to slaughter or to move within the same operation. This is to allow for 2 cycles of the incubation period for virulent diseases such as Foot and Mouth to pass and if no clinical signs begin to show the animal is assumed to be free of these diseases.

This naturally led to a discussion on the creation of the Scottish Premises registry. The extent to which this has gone in Scotland is simply amazing. Every single field in the entire country has been mapped with GPS coordinates and given a number to link it to a database. This is then used to assign the field to a producer and all the livestock that are kept on that piece of land. Given the significance of this I feel its worth repeating - I mean every field in the country can be placed on a map with exact GPS coordinates, and the data linked to that field will include the name of the farmer, what livestock are currently on that field, how many animals and of what types. Obviously this same system would never be feasible here in Canada due if nothing else to the sheer scale of the country, but you still have to be impressed by the achievement.

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## Dr. Charles Milne continued

Moving on we then heard about the agreements that have been for carcass disposal in the event of an outbreak. There are 4 levels of disposal options that the government is planning to follow if needed, they are;

1. Render and incinerate
2. Bury – mass burial site
3. Burial – on farm
4. Pire – burning as was the case with recent large scale disposal of cattle from FMD outbreak\*\*

\*\* Dr. Milne made a special point that this would be only as an absolute worst case scenario and only as a distant last resort, due to the incredible negative impact to the industry this visual image had on the general public.

The government has also contracted vaccination teams that can be mobilized in very short order. The teams are made up of one vet plus four or five individuals who can assist in vaccination of the animals in the area surrounding an outbreak of disease. There are 100 vets in total and the training for the teams is repeated on a yearly basis. The vaccination protocol is applied in much the same way as we fight forest fires here. Animals on the perimeter of the infected zone are treated to prevent outward spread and essentially contain the disease; this is in comparison to attacking the specific points at which the disease appears, and avoiding 'chasing' the disease as it spreads. He reviewed the recent outbreak of FMD in sheep and went through the graphics showing the spread of the disease, tracing it all back to a single animal on one farm. The result was dramatic, showing that between the 15th of February when the infected animal arrived and the 19th when the diagnosis was made, the disease had moved from a single farm to cover the entire southern half (or more) of the country.

This was a stark reminder that in this case by the time you realize the disease is present it is too late to start making a plan.

Finally they have also organised and regularly test the trucks that will be used to move animals or condemned carcasses. These trucks must meet specific requirements not the least of which being that they must be water tight.

The 2004 Animal Health Strategy was predicated on the European recognition that a simple government bailout plan could lead to poor management practices. What they have instead been moving towards is the creation of a "war chest" fund that would be available for future funding needs. This fund would be collected through a levy on a per head basis from producers across the EU. In the interim they are working to eradicate BVD, TB and potentially Johne's disease from the national herd. The fund would be used for compensation for animals or economic losses suffered by producers following an animal health emergency. Contributions would come from both government and industry. All in all it was a very interesting meeting and I am grateful to the Canadian Animal Health Coalition for organising the event and the Dairy Farmers of Canada for hosting the breakfast meeting. Also thanks go to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Canadian Cattlemen's Association and Alberta Pork for their funding of Dr. Milne's visit. I found it to be very informative and interesting to hear what is being done in other parts of the world when it comes to traceability and emergency response and think that there is a great deal that we could be learning from other countries in preparation so that hopefully we never have to face the same tragic circumstances here.



## Growing threat from bluetongue

By Joe Watson, Source: <http://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/Article.aspx/908531?UserKey=>

### Call for new safeguards as different strain of virus is discovered in Netherlands

Europe has been put on a new bluetongue alert after scientists yesterday confirmed an outbreak of a different strain of the virus in the Netherlands.

Serotype six (BTV6) has not been seen in Europe before and has previously been confined to Africa, central America and the Middle East. Farmers and authorities across Europe are currently trying to control the eight and one strains (BTV8 and BTV1) of a virus that is spread by midges and which can kill the cattle, sheep, goats and deer infected with it.

The Dutch agricultural ministry has imposed a 31-mile protection zone around the four farms where the virus was discovered in the east of the country.

The zone will significantly limit livestock movements and replaces the temporary livestock export ban that the Netherlands put in place last week when the then mystery illness was found.

The discovery now greatly complicates Europe-wide moves to eradicate bluetongue as each different strain needs its own vaccine.

A mass vaccination has already started against BTV8 across the EU. Scotland begins its compulsory vaccination of livestock next Monday. BTV1 has since summer spread north from Spain to cover a large part of France. BTV8 has now spread over the bulk of the continent from east to west and north to south. It was the virus strain discovered in England last year.

The threat of two new bluetongue strains entering the UK yesterday prompted NFU Scotland to call on government and industry to bolster defences to prevent the virus being imported.

Vice-president Nigel Miller renewed calls for Scottish farmers to be prepared for the vaccination of their animals from next week. He added: "While that campaign will protect our livestock from one particular strain of the disease, we cannot emphasise enough that the vaccine will not be effective against BTV1 or the new danger of BTV6. We must do everything within our powers to ensure that the threat from bluetongue does not escalate further."

Mr Miller said the union wanted the Scottish Government to examine all the options available to it to prevent the importation of animals from high-risk areas in mainland Europe into Scotland. "Current safeguards that animals from Europe are free from disease are not working, the system is breaking down and the threat from bluetongue is growing not receding. All animals imported from Europe continue to be tested for all strains of bluetongue but the threat is such that further action should be considered," he said.

The Scottish Government last night urged farmers to be on their guard and to avoid sourcing stock from high-risk areas – a plea shared by the NFU who criticised those who continued to import livestock through hiding behind existing rules. Scottish Rural Affairs Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead was last night due to discuss the potential implications for the UK with Environment Secretary Hilary Benn.

Europe's standing committee on food chain and animal health will discuss the situation in the Netherlands at its meeting later today. Mr Lochhead said he was looking for the UK to demand robust action. NFU England added: "Clearly this is very worrying and detailed investigations are under way to try and find out how this serotype arrived in the Netherlands."