

In this issue:



▶ Sheep RFID Systems Pilot Project ..... 1-4

▶ From the Chair ..... 5-7



▶ On-Farm Food Safety Program ..... 8-9

▶ Scrapie Canada ..... 10-11



▶ Food Safety - Listeria Outbreak ..... 12

▶ Agriculture Ministers Meeting ..... 13



# From the flock

FEBRUARY 2009 • VOLUME 6 • ISSUE 2

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FOR THE CANADIAN SHEEP INDUSTRY

## Sheep Industry to Test RFID Systems

February 2009 – Guelph, ON – A traceability research project gets underway this summer that will test complete RFID (radio frequency identification) systems on sheep farms across the country. To keep in step with key trends in national and global markets the Canadian Sheep Federation is considering a target date of January 1, 2012 for mandatory RFID.

Canadian sheep producers, provincial and national sheep organizations are discussing how to best capture the benefits to sheep producers from electronic flock management systems. The use of RFID technology in Quebec, on Ontario farms and in the Lakeland Carcass Sire Project showed promise with time and labour savings and with improved accuracy and efficiency in record keeping. Farm co-operators are seeing even greater management potential with the systems being tested in the Alberta Lamb Traceability Pilot project. Those results will be available this coming year with a final report to be released March 31, 2010.

“We are looking to provide more resources and tools for the Canadian sheep producer. Improving access to technology may improve the speed at which animals can be processed and reduce losses due to human error but it has not been tested or documented in Canadian agriculture or specifically on farm” says CSF chair Dwane Morvik, “By studying the impact of installing fully electronic systems for animal identification and record keeping at the farm level, producers participating will be able to critique and use the systems to gain first-hand experience so that they might provide educated opinions to the board and other producers. The study should also determine how the industry may return greater financial incentives from buyers and management benefits for the lamb producer.”

RFID goes far beyond the ear tag; electronic systems are used in virtually every industry for database management or electronic inventory control. Electronic livestock production systems are newer, but have the potential to benefit the entire supply chain from producer to consumer. The Canadian sheep industry will play a part in the technological revolution of food production.



## Backgrounder to CSF Mandatory RFID News Release

- The Canadian Sheep Federation (CSF) represents all Canadian sheep producers in setting national policy for the sheep industry. It works closely and cooperatively with all levels of government and industry related organizations, both domestic and foreign, to further the viability, expansion and prosperity of the Canadian sheep industry. The Canadian Sheep Federation (CSF) has a strong mandate to support and further the viability, expansion and prosperity of the Canadian sheep industry.
- Administered by the Canadian Sheep Federation (CSF), the Canadian Sheep Identification Program (CSIP) was launched on January 1, 2004. The program was designed to address producer concerns about sheep health and meet consumer expectations for quality assurance and food safety. In addition, the program was designed to be affordable, simple, practical and reliable.
- The CSF is committed to ensuring that the CSIP evolves with the changing needs of producers and the industry. One aspect of animal management is the development of genetic resource database and record keeping in the sheep industry to allow producers to improve the genetics of their flock through selective breeding. Carcass grading reports are also a valuable tool that should be developed and this trial will be able to connect these details to the producer.
- Documented information as to which ID and management system is best suited to satisfying sheep producers needs, the industry as a whole – present and future, and/or which will meet the needs of our customers for traceability, animal health and food safety has not been explored. This project will examine one potential option which is the use of radio frequency identification (RFID) systems. These systems, which incorporate RFID tags, readers and computer software, collect and combine animal identification information with other recorded attributes. These systems are being presented by some as the best available option however direct industry specific research is needed to determine this for certain.
- “We are looking to provide more resources and tools for the Canadian sheep producer. Improving access to technology may improve the speed at which animals can be processed and reduce losses due to human error but it has not been tested or documented in Canadian agriculture or specifically on farm” says CSF chair Dwane Morvik, “By studying the impact of installing fully electronic systems for animal identification and record keeping at the farm level, producers participating will be able to critique and use the systems to gain first-hand experience so that they might provide educated opinions to the board and other producers. The study should also determine how the industry may return greater financial incentives from buyers and management benefits for the lamb producer.”

[Continued on next page](#)



## Backgrounder continued

- In 2005 a questionnaire was circulated to Canadian sheep producers asking for comments on the CSIP system. At that time while there was support for the program there were many comments that noted problems or potential problems with the program.
  - *The program will probably not be good enough to meet requirements in five years*
  - *It takes too long to trace an animal*
  - *Dissatisfaction with the current tags (hard to read, infected ears)*
  - *No assurance that the animal identification stays with the carcass*
  - *Believe that all provinces should have the same identification system*
  - *The program is too labour intensive too the larger flocks*
- When asked what they wanted to get out of national identification system, the top responses from the industry were:
  - For tags to contribute to sheep management decisions; as long as an RFID system is relatively inexpensive and user friendly (e.g., genetic improvement) - *This is the whole premise for the CSF project - to investigate and determine feasibility*
  - Traceability for “gate to plate” marketing - *This will be part of the whole system analysis that the project looks at*
  - Minimum paper work to meet export obligations - *Electronic record-keeping means less “paper-work” and more automatic/automated transfer is possible*
  - Government support and promotion of the program - *Application to Growing Forward will be made to support this program*
- Experience has been gained over the past six (6) years from observation and participation in the ovine program at Agri-Traçabilité Québec, QC which employs RFID tags exclusively.
- Alberta agriculture provided funding and expertise to establish the Lakeland Carcass Sire Project and the Lamb Traceability Project (LTP). The Lakeland project was to identify the terminal sire breeds that produce the highest value lambs for the premium lamb market, including farm direct markets and the index-pricing grid at Sunterra Meats, Innisfail. The LTP arose in an attempt to develop an animal identification and tracking system for the lamb supply chain. Its goals are:
  - *To identify and track lambs from birth to processor*
  - *To demonstrate benefits of linking producer and processor (carcass feedback)*
  - *To improve supply chain management (focus on a target market and its criteria for lamb)*
  - *To use new technology on-farm to determine if it is practical and if there is management benefits to balance the costs (in dollars, training, time).*



## Backgrounder continued

- The Alberta LTP and LCSP projects produced excellent results which are being analysed and will be reported on shortly. These projects demonstrated that the use of RFID systems including tags, readers and software, can facilitate faster and more detailed flock management than traditional tagging methods under certain conditions.
- Radio Frequency Identification goes far beyond the visual ear tag. It refers to an entire system which includes an identifier (tag), RFID reader and computer software. The combination of these items allows the user to quickly identify and record the tag information, in the case of animal tags – an identification number. This can then be associated through the computer software to other animal attributes (genetics/ breeding info, carcass grading, lambing performance etc.).
- Current identifiers and program provide the absolute basics for animal identification; tracking is difficult and involves significant manual labour to capture animals and read tag numbers, which in the event of an animal disease is too time consuming. Producers attempting to use these as management tags require excessive handling of the animals causing stress to both the animal and the producer, feedback from the auction, slaughter/grading facility is not possible. Use of RFID technology allows for rapid and timely response to animal disease emergencies with little manual labour or opportunity for error recording.

This also allows for rapid processing of animals on farm reducing handling stresses to animals and producer; electronic tags can be read at auctions, slaughter and processing facilities to create records of sale and carcass grading information which can then be provided back to producers for flock management and/or as proof of sale data.

- The Canadian sheep industry has great potential for growth and expansion. As Canada's population continues to grow the influences of immigration, diversification and an increased awareness of the consumer are all working to increase the demand for lamb as a protein source. This increase has, in fact, far out grown the production of Canadian lamb to the point where our producers are supplying only 50% of the domestic market for lamb. This leaves the remainder to be supplied from our overseas competitors (New Zealand, Australia). Improving on Canadian production methods and increasing efficiencies could allow for increases in available Canadian lamb for capturing domestic market. Use of RFID systems can reportedly do these things, but we were require direct experience to justify these claims



## From the Chair

By Dwayne Morvik, Chair CSF

This was my first year attending the American Sheep Industry's (ASI) Convention on behalf of the Canadian Sheep Federation (CSF). Attending the Convention not only gave me the opportunity to meet with our American counterparts, but also provided me with the ability to sit in on a number of the presentations being given and, truth be told, I could just as easily been sitting in on a Canadian sheep producers meeting.

Like the Canadian industry, the sheep industry in the United States is being challenged with declining infrastructure, ongoing predation issues, lack of approved drugs for use in sheep and a shortage of small animal veterinarians. The sheep numbers overall continue to decline – albeit at a slower pace, in the western range states, and are actually increasing in the mid west and eastern farm flocks. They are also facing labour losses, issues with grazing permits and the appreciation of the US dollar.

The critical mass in the United States industry is also decreasing at a time when demand for lamb in that country continues to increase. Like Canada then, the US is filling their demand for lamb using imported products, which fills approximately 50 per cent of the market for both countries. Part of the increase in demand for US product can be attributed to an Eat More USA Lamb program which demonstrated that there is a \$45 return in sales for every \$1 spent on USA lamb promotions. This compares with beef and chicken that return only \$4-5 in sales from their promotions.

Despite these challenges, there are some real areas of opportunities that were identified for the industry including the application of genomics and the use of ID systems as the foundation for overall flock health programs.

Other opportunities include value chain production, increasing productivity to meet increasing demand, the use of sheep in vegetation management and breed improvements.

All of this information was presented by Gary Williams from Texas A&M and can be found in the publication "Changes in the Sheep Industry in the United States – Making the Transition from Tradition". The study not only looked at the current status of the US industry, regulations and trade issues, land stewardship, major accomplishments and the structure of the industry. It can be viewed in its entirety at [http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record\\_id=12245](http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=12245)

**Continued on next page**



**Glen Fisher – the new ASI President replacing Burdell Johnson**



## ASI Convention continued



The New Executive – (Left to Right) – Tom Coyler (Mass), Will Getz (Georgia), Bob Benson (Indiana), Gary McGhee (Texas), Art Swannack (Washington)

### Research Papers

During the course of the convention there were a number of presentations given on research ranging in scope from production issues, to nutrition, to animal health. Dr. Rodney Kott from Montana State University gave a presentation on the Western Range Index system for sheep, which included calculations for weaning weight, yearling weight, maternal milk, fleece weight, fibre diameter and lamb crop in addition to having a profitability index. The study concluded that large sized ewes had reduced “stayability” in the flock and that the optimum mature size for ewes, to increase the number of lambs marketed, was 150 pounds and 250 pounds for rams. In other words big sheep don’t last.

A presentation was also given on the Nutritional Strategies for Increasing the Efficiency of Sheep Production. C. S. Schauer and J. S. Luther, from North Dakota indicated that producers may want to use dried distillers’ grains as a way to decrease feed costs. Care should, however, be taken in balancing rations using distillers grains as lambs can get urinary

calculi and there may be too much phosphorus and sulphur in this type of feed. One way to address this is to limit the ration to no more than 25% of the total fed ration.

Schauer and Luther also looked at gestation supplementation, the objective being to lengthen the feeding times between protein supplementation periods in fall lambing ewes to reduce costs. By feeding protein (soybean meal) on a weekly basis, instead of daily, fuel savings could be realized thereby decreasing the operating costs of feeding protein. It was suggested that this could be stretched to every 10 days without having a negative effect on livestock performance – both in terms of ewe performance and lamb birth weights.

Nutrition can also be used to increase fertility. Citing research that indicated that the amino acid arginine had been shown to increase reproductive performance in pigs, Rambouillet ewes were injected with arginine from the first day of mating to day 15 and showed a decrease in reproductive losses. These ewes also had an increase in productivity when measuring embryos and there were more live lambs born per ewe. This study showed great promise and negotiations are under way looking at the best delivery method for arginine whether it will be injected or ingested as a slow release bolus.

Dr. Robert Stobart from the University of Wyoming spoke of the evaluation of new techniques to enhance the use of artificial insemination (A.I.) on farm. While A.I. has not currently being routinely employed by the sheep industry, the ultimate goal is to enable a greater exchange of superior rams to develop a standard protocol for collecting, freezing and inseminating frozen-thawed ram semen. Further research though needs to be done on alternative methods of ewe estrous synchronization using frozen-thawed semen.



## ASI Convention continued

Bluetongue has been given an increased amount of attention lately as it makes its way through northern Europe and has been found in the United States. Given this, the presentation by Dr. Jack Lloyd, from the University of Wyoming on Repellents to protect sheep from *Culicoides sonorensis* was very interesting. In 2007, producers in northern Wyoming and southern Montana experienced an increase in Bluetongue in their sheep flocks. Given that the BT virus is transmitted by biting gnats, Dr Lloyd proposed two methods to eliminate feeding on sheep. The first was by use of an oil solution spray aimed at the underside of the sheep and applied as they proceeded through a raceway set up for the application.

The second approach was the use of an insecticide ear tag, originally approved for use on cattle called PYthon® the conclusions indicated that both products were both effective for reducing feeding rates of Bluetongue gnats for about five weeks following treatment. The PYthon® tags have state label status in both Wyoming and Montana and according to the Y-Tex Corp the oil solution as a spray should be available by next spring following the EPA process. The data from the studies have been sent to authorities in Europe as justification for a study to be done this coming season.

In terms of predation, funding was announced for a forum on research and an operation dealing with livestock guardian dog information. Although animal activist groups filed with EPA to eliminate the use of the M-44 device and the LPC (1080 collar), Wildlife Services may have continued use of these products but certain conditions may have to be met in order for these methods to continue to be used, for instance, they may be limited in use by private applicators.



Siddoway table – Awards lunch

Theobromine (derived from chocolate), mixed with caffeine and corn syrup is the latest product in the testing and registration stage as a new coyote control product. Studies in Idaho showed that it had a 70% efficacy when used in trial pens 100 acres in size. Approximately 100 data submissions to EPA are needed on various things like chemistry and product stability before approval is granted for use. The timeline on this new product is likely 4 - 5 years away but ranch trials could occur by spring lambing of 2010. It was noted that the death of the coyotes was not unpleasant.

Allison Beadle MS, RD, LD presented “Lean on Lamb”, which is available at [www.leanonlamb.com](http://www.leanonlamb.com). The presentation focused on nutrition and sustainability as the new view for holistic approach to eating. The Tri-Lamb group – Australia, New Zealand and the USA contributed \$495,000 for new nutritional analysis to be completed on lamb cuts from three countries (with average values to be used) and to hire a dietician and professional chef from New York to be a spokesperson for the group.



## New ELDU Policy for the Food Safe Farm Practices Program

By Lorraine Stevenson-Hall, National Coordinator On-Farm Food Safety

Recently, the CSF Board of Directors passed a policy for the Food Safe Farm Practices (FSFP) program that was recommended by the CSF On-Farm Food Safety Technical Committee. The Committee, which is made up of industry experts, including veterinarians and producers, made the recommendations after months of research and discussion. This policy specifically applies to producers who are on the Food Safe Farm Practices program and relates to extra-label drug use (ELDU) in sheep and lamb produced for meat or milk in Canada.

ELDU, also referred to as off-label use, is the use of a drug (prescription or over the counter) in a manner that is not indicated on the label or package insert, including modification of the withdrawal period for meat or milk.

In Canada, ELDU can be performed by veterinarians, vet technicians, and producers. Veterinarians need to be able to treat animals effectively, while ensuring that the public is being served by assuring that food products are safe to consume (i.e. no drug residues). When prescribing a drug for extra label use, veterinarians extrapolate from what they know about other species (indications, dose, route, withdrawal) or from literature or other experts. The inappropriate use of drugs in an extra-label fashion by a producer could pose some potential risks. Sub-therapeutic doses may result in ineffective treatment; inappropriate or overuse of drugs may occur; drug residues could end up in meat or milk, which constitutes a food safety hazard; and inappropriate drug use may result in the development of anti-microbial resistance over time. Another significant concern is that any person using or prescribing extra-label use of any drug is subject to regulatory action if product residues are found in human food.

Prior to the passing of this policy, the FSFP program stated: It is recommended that you consult your veterinarian before using any over-the-counter (OTC) animal health product in an extra-label manner. The word recommended in this statement implies that it is ok to use OTC animal health products in an ELDU manner without a vet script. Additionally, from an organizational standpoint the program was opening itself up to liability by suggesting that ELDU of OTC drugs is acceptable. This opens the door to a scenario where a producer would be in compliance with the FSFP program but could end up sending an animal with drug residues into the food chain. Clearly a policy was needed to help mitigate the potential hazards associated with ELDU, and to avoid potential liability for producers and the FSFP program itself.

The Committee reviewed the Veterinary Drug Directorate recommendations regarding ELDU, own use provisions, and prescription drugs. The new FSFP policy regarding ELDU is designed to ensure that producers adhering to the program requirements are taking the necessary steps to control the hazards outlined above. The policy deals with three areas of drug use: 1) Own Use provision, 2) Prescription drugs, and 3) OTC drugs.

1) The “Own Use” or “Personal Use” provision would allow the owner of an animal to import non-registered drugs and active pharmaceutical ingredients into Canada, with the proviso that they be used for the treatment of only the importers own animals. Since only drugs labeled with a Drug Identification Number (DIN) issued by Health Canada can be legally distributed and sold in Canada, the FSFP program will make no provisions or policies in its manual for “own use” or “personal use” importation of drugs.



## ELDU Policy continued

2) The second part of the policy deals with prescription drugs. The issue had been that many producers do not have a flock vet or access to a vet, making it difficult to obtain a prescription. Some products are less expensive to buy in the US or through means other than a vet clinic, resulting in the absence of a script. The new policy states that under the umbrella of the FSFP program, all prescription drugs used for treating sheep and lambs must be accompanied by a veterinary prescription.

3) Finally, the new policy deals with ELDU of OTC drugs. Health Canada recognizes ELDU as a tool in the practice of veterinary medicine for animals within a valid Veterinarian Client Patient Relationship, since it facilitates access by veterinary practitioners to certain drugs for the treatment of animals. Health Canada also takes the position that ELDU in food producing animals by persons other than licensed veterinarians is not recommended except when such use is conducted under the supervision of a veterinarian within the context of a valid Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship.

The provincial registrars of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Associations have made it clear they feel that veterinarians practicing ELDU in any species should have a vet client-patient relationship (VCPR) with the animal owners and that a time limited prescription should be written for any ELDU. The registrars feel that a SOP (standard operating procedure) for ELDU is not sufficient and the general consensus is that prescriptions could be written for about a one year period.

Given this information, the final part of the policy states that: Within the scope of the FSFP program, ELDU may only be employed when a producer has a prescription from a veterinarian within a VCPR.

The details of what constitutes a valid prescription and a VCPR would be set by the laws governing veterinarians in each province. The new policy may be hard to swallow and somewhat controversial for many producers.

The CSF does recognize that there is a problem with producers having access to small ruminant veterinarians, as well as there being few drugs approved for sheep in Canada. In light of these issues, the CSF is working with the Veterinary Drug Directorate to increase the number of drugs are approved for sheep in Canada. The VDD is developing an approval process for minor use-minor species and sheep and goats are the trial species. In addition the CSF is investigating the possibility of reciprocal agreements with other countries.

In a nutshell, the new policy states that "farmers who want to be on a nationally recognized food safety program should use drugs wisely and obey the law". This program is about protecting human health and producing a safe food product. This is an area where compromise can not occur. It may require a shift in the way some producers do business but that is not a reason to weaken the program. Food safety is becoming more of a concern for consumers and it is in our best interest to be proactive in preventing a issue, as opposed to trying to put the pieces back together once a problem has occurred.

*I would like to thank Dr. Paula Menzies for allowing me to use excerpts from her presentation titled: Are We Using Antimicrobials Prudently in Small Ruminants in Canada?*

*Thank you also to the CSF On-Farm Food Safety Committee for their hard work on developing this policy.*



# Scrapie Canada Update

By Courtney Denard, National Scrapie Coordinator

As many producers already know, due to the 2003 BSE crisis, trade access to the U.S. for all Canadian sheep and goats was stopped. After a long awaited period of time- and a lot of hard work on behalf of the industries- the Canadian border was opened for the importation of sheep and goats from the U.S. in April 2007, but with this came a restriction. Any Canadian producer wanting to import female sheep or goats (including embryos) from the U.S. must be a participant on the Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program (SFCP). The same restriction was applied to exporting American producers- they too had to be on the U.S. Scrapie Flock Certification Program. To date, the export of Canadian sheep and goats into the U.S. for the purposes of breeding stock is still not permitted. The current position of the U.S. is that in order for full trade to resume, Canada needs to develop and implement a National Scrapie Eradication Program similar to the U.S. model.

## So what is the U.S. doing in terms of scrapie eradication and how does it compare to Canada's model?

The U.S. has been working for many years on scrapie eradication, developing a well rounded package that is made up of numerous components. These components include a flock certification program; an eradication and compensation program for flocks/ herds that are tested positive for scrapie; a regulated inter-state sheep and goat ID program; and a national surveillance program;

Canada also has been focusing on scrapie eradication and has been doing so since the 1950s. Canadian programs include a flock certification program; an eradication and compensation program for flocks/ herds that

are tested positive for scrapie; a national genotyping program for purebred sheep; an identification and traceability program for sheep; as well as national and provincial surveillance in sheep and goats.

When it comes to the flock certification, Canada and the U.S. have comparable programs. Both programs require producers to work with a veterinarian completing annual inventories of all sheep and goats on the property. Producers on both programs must also track any incoming and outgoing animals and must complete brain testing on an annual basis.

Differences between the U.S. and Canadian program do exist. For example, it takes American producers seven years to reach the certified level on their program, whereas Canadian producers can be certified in five years. For all pathways in Canada's program, producers are required to complete a brain test on any animal over the age of one year that dies naturally on the farm. The U.S. only has one pathway that requires producers to brain test all mature deads and this is the export certified pathway.

Currently in Canada there are about 55 enrolled producers on the SFCP and in the U.S. there are 1,971. However, it should be noted that only 30 of these participants are on the export certified pathway, meaning only 30 U.S. producers are following the same regulations laid out in the Canadian program. The other 1,941 producers are enrolled on the U.S. Scrapie Flock Certification Program but they are following more lenient regulations.

**Continued on next page**



## Scrapie Canada continued

Canada and the U.S. are quite similar in terms of their scrapie eradication and compensation program. Both countries' infected flock clean up programs are risk based using genetics (genotyping) and compensation is offered for all animals ordered destroyed.

The two major areas where Canada and the U.S. differ in their scrapie initiatives are identification and surveillance- and it is here where Canada lags behind. In 2000, the U.S. developed and implemented an inter-state identification program for all sheep and goats in the country. To date, Canada only has a national ID system in place for sheep. Our country's lack of a national ID system for goats is seen as a major hold back.

Canada is not up to par with surveillance numbers either. Not only has the U.S. been completing scrapie surveillance for a longer period of time than us, they complete more of it; therefore their numbers are a lot higher than ours. As part of the National Scrapie Eradication Plan, the U.S. has three national surveillance components, which completes surveillance on-farm and at slaughter facilities. Surveillance was also made a priority in the U.S. with the 2002 Scrapie Ovine Slaughter Surveillance study where scrapie prevalence in the U.S. was determined.

Canada does complete surveillance on a national level but the numbers are not comparable to the U.S. In Canada, sheep and goats are tested for scrapie on-farm through the Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program and at slaughter facilities by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency; however, due to low producer uptake and lack of resources, Canada has just not been able to meet the U.S. surveillance numbers. And unlike the U.S; Canada has not completed a scrapie prevalence study, which is vital step in eradicating the disease.

In order to be on equal playing ground with the U.S; a national identification system needs to be established for goats in our country. Canada also needs to dedicate more time and resources to scrapie surveillance on a national level and more producers need to submit heads for scrapie testing.

For more information on Canada's scrapie programs, log onto [www.scrapiecanada.ca](http://www.scrapiecanada.ca) and [www.inspection.gc.ca/english/anima/heasan/disemala/scrtre/scrtree.shtml](http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/anima/heasan/disemala/scrtre/scrtree.shtml)

Information on scrapie programs in the U.S. can be found at [www.aphis.usda.gov/animal\\_health/animal\\_diseases/scrapie/](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/animal_diseases/scrapie/)



# Comprehensive food safety systems not product testing key to guarding against Listeria

Source: [www.farmscape.com](http://www.farmscape.com)

A Winnipeg based food safety expert suggests comprehensive food safety systems is the best line of defense against the bacterial contamination of processed food products.

A Health Canada-Canadian Food Inspection Agency working group, formed in response to last summer's national listeriosis outbreak, is recommending several regulatory changes including increased end product testing by CFIA.

Dr. Rick Holley, with the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences, says U.S. initiatives to increase end product testing are a less than positive approach to food safety and he is concerned Canada may follow that direction.

**"You can't test safety into end products. You can't inspect safety into products. You have to build it in."**

The food safety systems that the food processing plants use, which are approved by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, should be adequate to address the issues associated with listeria monocytogenes in the final products and prevent the organism from ever getting in there in the first place.

We just can't test enough product to give us a good statistically valid idea of whether or not the organisms are likely to be causing a problem in the products and so what we must do is take a pro-active approach and use the safety systems that we all know about and make sure that they're working properly and then monitor.

Testing has a role to play in terms of validating the operation of the food safety system and, then finally, end product testing is again used as a validation step but a validation step only and it shouldn't be used as a demonstration or interpreted as meaning that since one sample is negative that all of the samples are negative or that for that matter one sample is positive and all of the samples are therefore positive.

**It just doesn't work that way.**

Dr. Holley believes the emphasis should not be placed on end product testing, but rather the further development of comprehensive food safety systems that are used and monitored appropriately.



## Agriculture Ministers Focus on Economy and Uphold Commitment to a Competitive and Profitable Sector

Federal, provincial and territorial Ministers of Agriculture met in Ottawa today to discuss issues which are critical to a competitive, innovative and profitable agricultural sector.

Ministers discussed the current economic situation, both within Canada and globally, and underscored the need to continue to work with the industry in these difficult times. Ministers discussed, in particular, the ongoing economic difficulties facing the livestock sector including the responsiveness of existing and future programs to meet both long and short-term challenges. Governments will continue to collaborate to ensure programming is responsive to the needs of the Canadian agriculture and agri-food sector.

Ministers noted that Canada has one of the safest food systems in the world. Governments committed to ongoing collaboration to strengthen food safety, so that consumers and trading partners can continue to have confidence in Canadian food products. Ministers concurred that Canada's food safety and traceability systems are linked and are a key part of improving the competitiveness and profitability for the sector.

Concerted government effort will continue on implementing a national agriculture and food traceability system for emergency management and market access purposes, building on existing initiatives, and with priority on livestock and poultry. Ministers directed their officials to return in July with an action plan on food safety and a progress report on traceability.

Ministers also discussed recent advances on market access issues, including the establishment of the Market Access Secretariat. They recognized the need to focus on new opportunities in pursuit of commercially-

significant market access. Ministers are determined in their focus to increase Canadian agricultural and agri-food exports and to level the international playing field for Canadian producers. Ministers agreed to continue to work with industry to assess and address the impacts of U.S. country-of-origin labeling requirements.

Ministers stressed the importance of a successful conclusion to the Doha Round of trade negotiations at the World Trade Organization which benefits Canada's entire agricultural sector, including supply-managed and export-oriented industries.

Ministers noted the progress made in the development of Growing Forward programs. They reiterated their commitment to complete bilateral agreements and get new programs up and running in all provinces and territories by April 1, 2009. New Growing Forward programs will be more flexible and responsive to local needs and support a strong, competitive and innovative sector that contributes to society's priorities and proactively manages risk.

Ministers noted the importance of making progress on the review of the existing demand-driven suite of business risk management (BRM) programs. The review is important to ensure that BRM programming is responsive to Canadian farmers in helping them to manage risks.

[Ministers of Agriculture will meet next at their annual conference to be held July 9-10, 2009, in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario.](#)



## Role of climate change in disease spread

Source: Animal Net

Ever since scientists first proposed that our planet might be experiencing widespread climate change, concerns have been raised about its implications for the spread of arboviruses – viruses carried by arthropods such as mosquitoes, midges and ticks. However, while alterations in temperature and rainfall are important factors in making new territory hospitable to an invading arbovirus, many other forces also play significant parts in new patterns of viral emergence. That's the message of a paper by University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston pathology professor Stephen Higgs and Oxford University professor Ernest A. Gould.

The relative importance of climate change in the spread of four viruses have captured headlines in the past 10 years: West Nile virus, Chikungunya virus, Rift Valley fever virus and Bluetongue virus. Of the four viruses under review, Higgs said, climate change could probably only be given the lion's share of the credit for the spread of Bluetongue virus. The midge-borne virus can cause fatal disease in sheep, goats and cattle and until about 10 years ago was limited to Africa. Then a warmer climate in Europe made it possible for the cold-sensitive *Culex imicola* midge species responsible for carrying the virus to move north.

Today, borne by other midge species, Bluetongue has spread to 12 European countries. "There are some confounding factors here, in that infected but asymptomatic livestock are being moved around, and midges can be spread great distances quickly by the wind," Higgs said. "But it seems clear that Bluetongue's dispersal has been driven by the northward expansion of *Culex imicola*, and that climate change may have contributed to that.

## Alberta Lamb Producers

The Alberta Sheep & Wool Commission is now Alberta Lamb Producers. Why change the name? The primary reason is to support our industry in implementing the new vision. While wool, breeding stock, genetics, and other by-products are very valuable aspects of the industry, lamb is the primary product and the focus for growth.

**Our Commitment:** Alberta Lamb Producers together with industry stakeholders will foster a renewed enthusiasm, pride and energy to nurture the growth and prosperity of the sheep industry in Alberta and in Canada. Wherever the industry is showcased it will continue to focus on the primary industry product—young, tender, delicious Alberta lamb. **ALP Vision:** "A flock in every field and lamb on every plate"

The absheep domain name and e-mail addresses will continue for now but look out for a new domain name coming soon. It will take a while to make the changeover complete, so watch for more news.

## Contact Us



30 Malcolm Road  
Guelph, Ontario  
N1K 1B1

**Tel:** (519) 824-4120  
**Toll Free:** 1-888-684-7739  
**Fax:** 1-866-909-5360

**Email**  
jennifer@cansheep.ca

**Website**  
www.cansheep.ca