

By Jennifer Fleming, Executive Director

On May 18, 2005, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency released a Consultation Paper: *Revising the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's BSE Import Policy for Bovine Animals and Their Products*. The paper outlines the proposed updates to Canada's import policy in response to the evolution of scientific understanding of BSE and the refinement of international standards.

Canada's current BSE import policy, established in 1997, permits the importation of live ruminants and most products derived from them, only after the exporting country has been officially recognized by the CFIA to be BSE-free. The current policy covers live ruminant animals, including sheep, as well as embryos from sheep and goats.

The framework for the proposed policy is based on international BSE standards as developed by the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE). The draft policy provides Canada with the ability to assess the BSE-risk status of a country ensuring that the likelihood of importing the BSE-agent is negligible. (For more information see www.inspection.gc.ca/english/corpaffr/newcom/2005/20050518e.shtml).

Three categories of commodities have been proposed:

- Commodities that can be imported into or transit Canada without BSE-related restrictions;
- Commodities that can be imported into or transit Canada subject to certain BSE-related measures;
- Commodities prohibited from importation into Canada.

Countries interested in exporting to Canada will undergo a risk assessment on the BSE-risk status. According to the Standards Commissions, accurately estimating the prevalence of BSE infection (or lack thereof) can be difficult and as such, have indicated that is not necessary to differentiate risk levels for commodities on the basis of BSE incidence in a country. Therefore, three categories have been proposed:

- Category 1 – negligible BSE-risk;
- Category 2 – negligible BSE-risk with commodity-specific mitigation measures;
- Category 3 – undetermined BSE-risk

In short, the basis of the proposed policy is to ensure that safe trade can, and should, continue with appropriate safeguards in place.

Canada, the United States and Mexico announced their agreement to a harmonized import standard in March 2005. This agreement confirms their shared commitment to a science-based approach to the management of BSE and signals the intention of the three countries to bring their regulatory regimes into line with the OIE standards.

One of the biggest problems with the proposed policy is that it would only apply to those commodities "derived from **bovine animals**". The CFIA is, apparently, "...consulting separately but in parallel on proposed revisions to Canada's transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) import policy for sheep and goats".

This in and of itself may not be a problem, except that when you read consultation paper it refers specifically to TSE's. For example:

6.1.1 (a) "...the conclusion of the risk assessment indicates that the likelihood of the bovine animal population having been exposed to a TSE-agent within the last 7 years is negligible..."

6.1.1 (b) "...the likelihood of imported commodities being contaminated or infected with a TSE-agent has remained negligible..."

Since scrapie is a TSE, this policy suggests that it **could be** responsible for restricting the trade of bovines and their products.

Further on in the document, the issue of scrapie prevalence affecting bovine trade is mentioned again as it states that "Cross species transmission studies have demonstrated all of these TSEs are capable of infecting species other than their natural host. For instance, cattle are susceptible to experimental challenge with scrapie and CWD. Similarly sheep and goats are susceptible to BSE..."

In addition, a country's ability to export bovine products into Canada would be assessed based on policies and imported products relative to TSEs over at least the last 15 years. What this is suggesting is that trade in bovine commodities will be dependent on the scrapie status of a country for the past 15 years. The rationale used to include TSEs in the release assessment and the exposure assessment is that diseases such as scrapie and chronic wasting disease may be "...indistinguishable from BSE".

In essence then, the CFIA has been working to reestablish some level of trade for cattle, and have not only failed to include sheep in the discussions, but are suggesting that we **could be** responsible for the failure of the border to open if our eradication program is not complied with and enforced.

The CFIA will be accepting comments on the draft policy until July 22, 2005.

Where is the sheep research?

By Andre Trepanier, Chair

Recently the Canadian Sheep Federation (CSF) was provided a copy of the *External Peer Review Committee Report on Beef and Sheep Research*. The report outlines the Committee's recommendations in terms of research needs around food safety, animal health and environmental quality.

However, there was only one listed research project dedicated to sheep *3.4.7 Development of management systems for sheep production, including reproductive technologies and techniques to enhance lamb carcass and meat quality*. While the CSF is pleased to see that there is one project underway, we are very concerned that there is not more interest in sheep research.

Even more disturbing though was the committee's recommendation that "AAFC should examine sheep research in terms of its overall science priority and focus its resources in areas where there is a critical mass of expertise, and a clear consumer priority." Given the fact that sheep research has been slashed in recent years there is no critical mass, in terms of research, left. The CSF is very concerned that the statement regarding focusing on areas of critical mass might indicate the final demise of sheep research in Canada.

That being said, in recent years the Canadian sheep industry has been approaching critical mass as there has been impressive increases both in flock numbers and lamb consumption. In fact, lamb consumption has increased by 25% in recent years. While we currently supply approximately 50% of our domestic demand for lamb (which is increasing), there is tremendous potential for the industry to expand.

The industry, however, is facing challenges that are currently threatening its ability to expand to meet demand; challenges such as the inability to import breeding stock, to export live animals, limited access to federally inspected abattoirs and abattoir by-product disposal. In addition, there is increasing pressure from the market place and the government to respond to food safety, animal health and welfare and environmental issues.

Our ability to respond to a number of the challenges that the industry is facing will be severely hampered if we cannot continue to provide producers with innovative, practical and profitable solutions. We are concerned that limiting sheep research will inhibit the industry's ability to reach its full potential.

Research and development is vital for an industry that wants to provide producers with options that increase their ability to meet market demands, and of course, their profitability.

We cannot afford to underestimate the importance of sheep research as it relates to production, the environment, food safety and animal health and welfare.

On-Farm Food Safety Update

By France Lanthier, National On-Farm Food Safety Coordinator

As this is my first contribution to From the Flock, I would like to thank the CSF Board members for their warm welcome and words of encouragement.

On June 9th and 10th I attended my first Canadian On-Farm Food Safety Working Group (COFFS-WG) meeting in Ottawa. One of the topics of discussion was the development of a series of standards by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) dealing specifically with food safety. ISO 22000 is a document relating to food safety management that is designed to identify and control hazards at every level of food production. The document was developed based on the following key elements to ensure food safety:

- Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) principles
- Development and Implementation of Prerequisite Programs
- Development and Implementation of System Management Programs
- Interactive Communication between levels of Production

Thus far we have made the following steps with the Food-Safe Farm Practices Program:

- Development and Implementation of a Prerequisite Program based on HACCP principles
- Information delivery sessions ran through October to December 2004
- Since January 2005 a total of 21 producer workshops have been delivered in most provinces; averaging approximately 20 participants.
- In February and March 2005, 12 participants (PEI, NL, NB, QU, MB, SK, AB, and BC) attended "train the trainer" sessions

Currently we are developing a System Management Program and we hope to have a first draft of this document ready by the fall. The ISO 2200 document is expected to be available by mid-summer 2005. We are therefore doing well in our proactive approach to food safety in our industry. The ISO 22000 document is predicted to become the new international standard for food safety management and to streamline food safety standards worldwide.

ISO 22000 requires that an organization *demonstrate* (i.e. keeping records) the following through its food safety management system:

- The ability to control food safety hazards in order to consistently provide safe products that meet both the requirements agreed with the customer and those of applicable food safety regulations, and
- Aims to enhance customer satisfaction through the effective control of food safety hazards, including processes for updating the system.

(for above requirement and further information visit http://www.iso.org/iso/en/iso9000-14000/addresses/articles/pdf/tool_5-04.pdf)

One of the major areas of concern with this document and its potential impact is the suggested audit frequency of once per year. Although such a stringent auditing program may be appropriate at other levels of production, it would simply be too costly and frankly unnecessary at the farm level. The COFFS WG is considering formal participation to the discussions of Canadian stakeholders in order to address on-farm auditing issues.

Indeed the auditing process, the repercussions of failed audits, the value of passed audits, and primarily the cost of audits have been frequent topics of discussion across all food commodities. At this point, the auditing program has not been developed for our food commodity. It is an issue that we will hopefully be able to tackle shortly as it is of much importance to our producers.

Currently Producer Training Food-Safe Farm Practices Program workshops are free of charge, as are the program manuals, since there is funding available for this venture. As has been mentioned in the past while producers are already fulfilling the requirements outlined in the Food-Safe Farm Practices Program, the manual provides producers with a tool to clearly *demonstrate* this compliance. We have done well in predicting the trends in food safety; now let's move forward with continued producer awareness and training.

Australian lamb producers are “primed” for increased flock productivity

May 11, 2005

Meat News <http://www.meatnews.com>

Australian prime lamb producers are now fully-armed to increase the productivity per hectare – and profitability – of their sheep enterprises following this year's national series of MLA 'Prime Time for Prime Lamb' forums, according to Meat and Livestock Australia.

More than 1,700 sheep producers throughout Australia attended 15 MLA “Prime Time for Prime Lamb” forums held across five states during March and April, which marked unprecedented producer demand to conduct a second forum in Wagga Wagga last week.

MLA said that 89 percent of these participants indicated that they would make changes to their farming practices as a direct result of attending these forums. MLA's “Prime Time for Prime Lamb” forums provided the latest practical advice and proven management to help producers increase profit by weaning more lambs, getting more from their pastures, and finishing their lambs to market specification sooner.

Dr. Rob Banks, MLA's on-farm research and development manager for southern Australia, said the level of interest in the MLA Prime Time forums demonstrated that lamb producers were keen to make the most from their farming businesses in 2005 and beyond.

“It is very encouraging to see so many producers attending MLA “Prime Time for Prime Lamb” forums, and heartening to know they're taking away and using the research presented at the forums,” Banks said. “Written feedback from 1,300 producers revealed an overall “value” rating of the forums of 8.6 out of 10, with 89 percent saying they will make changes to their farm management as a direct result of attending a forum.

He added: "This trend is consistent with feedback received from producers who have attended previous MLA Prime Time forums held over the past two years. In 2003, for example, 85 percent of producers identified management changes to make on their farms upon leaving MLA Prime Time forums – a year later 80 percent had made those changes."

Banks pointed out: "This is really important to MLA. We want to deliver useful information that can make a difference to producers, and we want to be sure that it's being delivered in a way that encourages and helps producers to make these changes."

Banks said changes indicated by producers at this year's MLA Prime Time forums included improved ewe nutrition prior to joining and lambing periods, more stringent ram selection (terminal and maternal sires) using Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBVs) and improved grazing management to increase stocking rates and/or sheep performance.

"Other important management changes include testing for drench resistance and monitoring of worms and parasites, as well as taking the steps to calculate their cost of lamb production," he said. Banks said another successful outcome of the forum series was the launch of the MLA Lamb Cost of Production Calculator, a simple management tool that helps lamb producers measure the financial health of their businesses.

The do-it-yourself MLA Lamb Cost of Production Calculator gives producers a standardized measure (in cents per kilogram) of the cost to produce each kilogram of lamb on their farm and provides a basis upon which they can identify and make changes to improve their bottom line.

MLA Prime Time forums are an initiative of MLA and the Sheepmeat Council of Australia, and are conducted with event partners Landmark and Elders Limited and the support of the Australian Sheep Industry CRC, Australian Wool Innovation and the Department of Primary Industries in each state.

Work to begin in mapping the genome of sheep

May 17, 2005

From: Reuters

RESEARCHERS in Australia, New Zealand, Britain and the United States would begin work to map the genome of sheep, which could improve meat and fibre production as well as animal health, the US Agriculture Department said today.

Utah State University was the lead institution in the International Sheep Genome Sequencing Consortium, said the USDA, which provided \$US1 million (\$1.32 million) to the project.

Three Australian groups are involved - the CSIRO (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation), Livestock Australia, and Australian Wool Innovation.

The USDA also supported an international scientific consortium to map the beef genome.

The USDA is participating in the project through its Agricultural Research Service.

"Mapping the sheep genome will lead to advances in food and fibre production and identification of important traits in animal health and disease resistance," said Joseph Jen, USDA undersecretary for research.

"International collaborations like these are vital for promoting worldwide use and understanding of important scientific information."

The other participants include Genesis Faraday in Great Britain and New Zealand's AgResearch.

Lamb keeps hitting records

Monday, 23 May 2005

Australian lamb exports in the first quarter of 2005 jumped 16pc, compared with those of the equivalent quarter in 2004.

They were worth \$177 million – the highest first quarter total on record.

The increased export values and volumes so far this year reflect the current unprecedented overseas demand for Australian lamb.

Also, disease-related trade restrictions on other meat suppliers have added to an already tight market for meat proteins.

The largest increase in the value of Australian lamb shipments for the first three months of the year came from the US, Australia's largest lamb export market.

Increased demand, reflecting nutritional shifts in this market, contributed to the value of shipments for the first quarter, jumping 20pc on 2004 levels, to a record \$81 million.

The value of Australian lamb shipments to Canada, the Middle East and China also increased.

In contrast, the value of Australian lamb shipments to the EU was down 37pc, with an increased proportion of mutton being used to fill the EU sheepmeat quota, owing to favourable returns for mutton in this market.

Value of lamb exports to Japan was down 1pc on that of last year's first quarter, to A\$10.5 million.

http://fw.farmonline.com.au/news_daily.asp?ag_id=26522&s=27516

New Zealand lamb numbers drop

Friday, 10 June 2005

New Zealand lamb exports totalled 18,600 tonnes in April, 36pc below last year.

Meat and Livestock Australia has reported lamb exports for the first four months of 2005 totalled 103,000t, 16pc below last year and the lowest level since 2000.

These falls are the result of lamb supplies remaining tight, which has resulted in decreased production and high prices.

The European Union was the largest market during April, receiving 9690t (sw), down 34pc on the same period last year, while shipments to the United Kingdom fell 38pc, to 4380t.

Shipments to the Middle East fell sharply in April, down 76pc on last year, to 649t, resulting in the January to April 2005 figures falling 24pc, to 7360t.

The US received 1140t during April, a 56pc decline from last year, with a total of 6460t shipped during the four months of the year, down 35pc.

World's researchers join forces on animal welfare research

Tuesday, 7 June 2005

A new era of animal welfare research started today, with standard welfare measurements the first goal.

The gathering of the world's leading animal welfare scientists in Sydney today looked at the

potential of developing standard measurements of animal welfare as its first order of business.

Meat & Livestock Australia general manager, livestock production innovation, Reuben Rose, says the forum marks the start of a new era of international collaboration in the area of animal welfare research.

"Different scientists and different organisations around the world measure animal stress in different ways," Dr Rose said.

"At the moment there are no global, uniform, objective measurements when it comes to measuring the stress of an animal - we want to look at how we can find improved ways of measuring things that tell us about an animal's welfare.

"For instance, existing measurements for pain in animals may involve blood tests for physiological changes, another measurement may be based on recording the sounds animals make, and another may be based on measuring the behaviour of the animal.

"These methods of measurement may all be effective in their own right, but you end up with three welfare assessments which cannot be directly compared with each other."

The forum will examine what needs to be done to develop a framework for the identification of scientifically-based animal welfare measures.

Animal welfare scientists from Canada, France, New Zealand and Scotland, joined scientists from CSIRO and representatives from the RSPCA, Australian Pork Limited, Dairy Australia, Australian Egg Corporation and Meat and Wool New Zealand.