

*By Jennifer Fleming, Executive Director*

For months now, Canadian sheep producers have been hearing about the Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program and the National Genotyping Program. Both programs, which are being administered by the Canadian Sheep Breeders' Association (CSBA), the Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency (OSMA) and the Canadian Sheep Federation (CSF), will be launched this spring.

### **Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program**

This pilot program will provide 60 sheep producers the opportunity to choose between three different approaches to managing the risk of scrapie on their individual premises. Ten goat producers will also have to opportunity to access a single pathway. Pathway 1 requires the producer to operate a virtually closed ewe flock; Pathway 2 involves genotype screening along with third eyelid biopsy and; Pathway 3 is the development of a genetically resistant flock using either RR rams or QR and RR ewes and rams. Upon acceptance into the program, all flocks participating in the VFSCP are required to submit all on-farm deads greater than 12 months of age for scrapie testing (heads, obex and lymph nodes are acceptable for testing) by provincial / private laboratories. Once a flock has reached the certified level, it will need to continue to meet the program requirements to remain Certified.

Flock inventories are the absolute cornerstone of the program. Every animal will have to be identified and all sheep entering and leaving the flock will have to be recorded. This includes animals being born, dying, purchased, sold or loaned out, (lambs, ewes, rams, embryos and semen) with all inventory records being reconciled yearly by the producer.

OSMA will be the administrator of the program right across Canada and will be responsible for the application process and statistics. A private veterinarian accredited by CFIA will be responsible for overseeing the farm operations in terms of inventories, blood sampling and conducting the first level audit, while OSMA will be responsible for the second level audit and making all producer advancement decisions.

*Producers will be responsible for paying for their accredited veterinarian. Producers will also be financially responsible for any genotype testing at private laboratory required prior to application and entry into the program.*

Provincial sheep organizations and the Canadian National Goat Federation will be responsible for selecting producers for participation on the project. The project is open to any sized flock, and to both purebred and commercial operations with the general criteria including:

- History of participation on flock health programs where available
- System in place for maintaining extensive flock records
- Willingness to abide by the program requirements (including restrictions relating to new stock) for the duration of the project

Producers participating in the program will agree to the following conditions for the duration of the project:

- All adult sheep and goats on the premise will be identified using two forms of identification.
- An annual inventory supervised by a CFIA accredited veterinarian.
- Throughout the year, producers will track animals leaving (deaths, sales) and entering the flock/herd (births, purchases) to balance against the annual inventory.
- Generate an annual report that details the previous flock inventory with the newest annual inventory and documents that every animal entering and leaving the flock met the program requirements (for the selected pathway). The accredited veterinarian must verify and submit this annual report to OSMA.
- Follow the rules specific to the selected pathway, including restrictions relating to the introduction of new stock.
- Be responsible for the collection of heads or specific brain tissue (obex) from all mature sheep and goats dying on farm. If collecting only brain tissue, producers may receive training from the accredited veterinarian or have samples collected directly by the accredited veterinarian.
- Be responsible for storage and shipping of heads / samples to a CFIA approved laboratory approximately three times per year. Producers living in close proximity to an approved lab may deliver the heads / samples in person.
- Document all costs and labour involved in implementing the program. This information will be submitted to OSMA annually.

### **National Genotyping Project**

The goal of this project is to collect genotype samples from 36,000 purebred sheep from across Canada over a 12-14 month period. Sheep producers who are selected to participate will be contacted to arrange sampling from selected purebred sheep. Sampling will take place throughout the year.

Individual sheep's genotype results will be reported back to the producer and will be entered into a database linked to the purebred sheep registration maintained by CLRC and Canadian Sheep Breeders Association (CSBA). An associated software program is currently under development by Nova Scotia Agricultural College (NSAC) to help producers predict genotype results or indicate the need for testing of offspring from a breeding of a ewe and ram of known genotype entered in the database.

Letters inviting purebred sheep producers to participate in the program will be sent out by the end of May. If they choose to participate they will have to:

- Schedule a visit by their veterinarian or their veterinary technician to collect blood samples from all the sheep they wish to have genotyped. They will be reimbursed 70% of the cost of this visit (up to \$6 per sample).
- Muster sheep for blood collection. Provide accurate animal identification to go with sample.
- Ship blood samples to specified laboratory. They will be reimbursed 50% of the cost of shipping these samples.

### **What will they get?**

- Genotype (3 codons) report on as many purebred sheep as they wish to genotype (either sex) at a cost of \$10 per sheep (plus GST).
- Information regarding how they may use this genetic information to decrease the risk of scrapie affecting their flock.
- Genetic information will be entered into a national database and access to a computer program that will enable them to predict genotypes of offspring.

Producers participating in the National Genotyping program, will also be provided with assistance in relation to decisions associated with breeding programs based on their test results.

The combination of these projects will form a foundation for a National Scrapie program that will help us re-enter international markets in the future. With the addition of active surveillance for scrapie our program will be similar to programs in the US. The progress that we have made in establishing these programs is the result of continued cooperation and efforts by both provincial and national sheep organizations.

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### **On-Farm Food Safety Update**

*By Ryan Van Loon, National On-Farm Food Safety Coordinator*

**T**his is my last article for From the Flock as I am moving on from my position as of May 1<sup>st</sup>. I have applied to and been accepted into teachers college and will begin in May.

I want to thank the OFFS Technical Working Group, the provincial associations, and the producers for your support through this initial implementation phase of the Food Safe Farm Practices Program.

I have had a unique opportunity to visit a lot of Canadian towns and countryside over this year and have greatly expanded my appreciation of this diverse country—both the people and the countryside—even in February!

Provincial support has been tremendous all the way this year, especially considering this program is not an easy sell in these tough economic times. I would also like to take this opportunity to commend Jennifer on her continued diligence and hard work at the helm of the CSF. Jenn provided guidance and support to me throughout the year on various aspects of the food safety program to help ensure that the program will be successful.

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## **Greenhouse gases and sheep production**

*By Monica Seguin*

**R**educing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions should be an important concern for all producers. In the farming sector, approximately 40% of greenhouse gases (GHG) originate from livestock, half of which is methane produced as a byproduct from ruminant digestion (enteric production). Micro-organisms in the rumen, called methanogens, aid in the breakdown of feedstuffs high in cellulose. Modifying livestock rations or the gut microflora has the potential to reduce the enteric production of GHGs.

Researchers across the world, studying in areas of animal and plant genetics, are investigating ways to reduce the production of GHGs. The amount of methane that is produced can vary dramatically depending on the quality of an animal's diet. Feeding livestock balanced and higher digestible diets is one of the most practical methods to potentially reducing GHGs, or more specifically methane.

Scientists from New Zealand have found that the physical make-up of plants may play an important role in the amount of GHG produced by animals. Livestock that eat plants high in condensed tannins (yellow-brown compounds found in plants) produce up to 16% less methane emissions. Researchers hope to introduce the tannin component into pasture species, thereby reducing methane production from enteric fermentation. While, researchers in Australia have taken a different approach and have developed a vaccine, for sheep, which in a preliminary study reduced GHG emissions by 20%.

Although much of the research is still in preliminary stages, there are practical applications that producers can implement from providing feeding livestock balanced and higher digestibility diets to reduce fermentative gases, to using ionophores to promote rumen efficiency. Ultimately, producers need to take an integrated approach to effectively reduce GHG production, as changes in livestock feeding has implications for other farming areas such as cropping practices, soil management and nutrient management.

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## **Canadian Sheep Identification Program**

**T**his past month a number of concerned producers phoned the Canadian Sheep Federation after browsing the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency (CCIA) website. Apparently information on the website was indicating that all sheep and lambs would have be tagged with RFID tags by September 2006. This is **not** the case.

The CSF has not made any movement towards mandatory RFID use at this time.

When reviewing the CCIA website for sheep-related information, please ensure that you are on the sheep page <http://www.canadaid.com/Producer/sheep.shtml>

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## **USDA unveils draft national animal ID system**

On Thursday May 5, Agricultural Secretary Mike Johanns, released a draft of the USDA's National Animal Identification System (NAIS), which will be mandatory by January 2008.

A draft of the NAIS can be found at [www.usda.gov/nais](http://www.usda.gov/nais). Highlights of the program include:

- By April 2006, 25% of all premises should be registered
  - A national identification number (AIN) would be operation by July 2005
  - In October 2007, the infrastructure should be established to collect data at high-volume slaughterhouses and the government will start collecting animal movement data at key concentration points (e.g., markets, feedlots)
  - January 2008, all premises must be registered with enforcement and animal identification of each animal
  - July 2008, the program should be collecting a high percentage of animal termination records at slaughterhouses as well as records of all defined movements of animals
  - The cost of the program will be subsidized partially by the USDA and the states with \$85 million already spent or earmarked for the first two years of implementation
  - The exact costs to producers, processors and retailers has not yet been determined.
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### **Voluntary COOL bill introduced in House**

A bill calling for voluntary country-of-origin labeling, to replace a mandatory program set to go into effect in September 2006, was introduced to the House. The bill received immediate support from the National Meat Association and the National Pork Producers Council, who stated that mandatory legislation would have cost the industry enormous amounts of money without significant benefit.

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### **Australian Lamb exports jump**

The Australian daily news is reporting that lamb exports jumped to record levels in March, and for the first quarter of 2005. The US continued to be the largest single export market for Australian lamb, importing 10,400 tonnes (shipped weight) of the 32,100 tonnes exported in the first three months of 2005. China was their second largest export market, importing 3,400 tonnes and the EU and Japan rounded up the top four.

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### **Irish Sheep Farmers protest lamb prices**

Sheep farmers in Ireland protesting over lamb prices have reached an agreement with the Irish Country Meats Group. The protests have closed meat-processing plants across Ireland and the agreement has resulted in the Group reopening its plants in Camolin, County Wexford and Navan, County Meath.

Irish Farmers' Association president John Dillon said the strong stance taken by sheep farmers in defense of their livelihoods over the last week had put down a marker that there was only so much they could take. Dillon said he appreciated the sensible approach adopted by the management of Irish Country Meats that had brought about agreement.

IFA National Sheep Committee chairman Laurence Fallon said sheep farmers have removed their protest at both the ICM factories and the company has agreed with local suppliers to pay a base price of Euro 4.75 per kg (\$7.58 CDN) plus 6c per kg bonus for U grades into next week. In addition he said the agreement also covers hoggets at the same price level, which applied prior to the protest.

National Sheep Committee Chairman Laurence Fallon said he understood sheep farmers had reached agreement with Kildare Chilling which resulted in the company reopening its plant in Kildare for cattle and sheep.

Fallon said the company had agreed with local suppliers to pay a base price of Euro 4.75 per kg plus 5.6c per kg bonus for U and E grades and the same price for hoggets which applied prior to the protest. However, a number of livestock markets cancelled their sheep sales this week in solidarity with the sheep farmer protests, which are continuing outside other processing plants across the country. The farmer protests are into their second week now, resulting in no sheep or lambs being processed in any plant since last Wednesday. Even though the protest began last Monday, the plants had enough supplies to carry them through to Wednesday. In the meanwhile the Minister for Agriculture Mary Coughlan urged those in the dispute to quickly and effectively resolve their differences and return to supplying premium markets.

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Category: Legislation and Regulation, Marketing, Processor News

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## **Sheep farming promotion in central Chile**

Chile's Deputy Agriculture Minister Arturo Barrera announced that the central zone of the country will begin exporting lamb and mutton for the first time ever later this year. Among the markets targeted are Mexico, Israel, United States, European Union and Arab countries.

The announcement was made during the inauguration of Ovine Reproductive Centre in La Estrella, VI Region which should help 500 sheep farmers improve animal husbandry techniques and genetics.

Mr. Barrera said the target was 12 million US dollars in lamb exports by 2010. However those farmers interested in the export project must register under a strict sanitary and traceability monitoring system and the same applies to abattoirs

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## **Cost-Share Program Helps Sheep Owners Control Scrapie**

*Denise Derrer, Public Information Director, Indiana State Board of Animal Health*

Controlling the spread of scrapie is now a little easier for Indiana sheep producers under a new program launched this week by the Indiana State Board of Animal Health (BOAH). The program shares the costs of genetic testing of sheep for susceptibility for the disease.

Under the program, sheep owners will be reimbursed for testing fees and some veterinary expenses for up to five animals within a flock. While that doesn't sound like a lot of animals, BOAH Scrapie Director Cheryl Miller, DVM, explains that the test results can be far-reaching. "We're encouraging, but not requiring, flock owners to test their rams for scrapie susceptibility. Because a ram will sire many more off-spring than any individual ewe, the genetic makeup of that male will have a broader impact on a flock--or multiple flocks, if he's leased or loaned to other flocks," explained Dr. Miller.

What's more, by providing expense reimbursement for five animals per flock, the available U.S. Department of Agriculture dollars that are underwriting this program can be extended to a greater number of farms.

According to Dr. Miller, Indiana's program differs somewhat from those in other states, because producers who do not have five rams can still participate by testing ewes. "Many Hoosier flocks do not have a resident ram," she said, "but we still want to provide an opportunity for those owners to participate."

The blood test, known as codon 171 testing, identifies genetic markers that make an animal susceptible to scrapie and may be passed on to lambs. Owners who know the genetic makeup of their breeding stock can make better management decisions to eliminate the susceptibility trait from their flocks. By selecting scrapie-resistant bloodlines, shepherds can add value to their flocks.

Producers who want to participate must call BOAH for pre-approval. A licensed and accredited veterinarian must collect blood samples for tests to be completed at any of nine USDA-approved laboratories. After testing is complete and results are received, the flock owner must submit a payment request to BOAH, along with copies of paid receipts and test results, for reimbursement.

Producers may receive up to \$15 per animal to pay for the costs of testing. (Most of approved laboratories charge less than that.) The program will also pay veterinary charges up to \$25 for the first animal and \$5 for each additional, up to five sheep. The program is for testing of sheep only; codon testing is not reliable in goats. All participating flocks must be enrolled in Indiana's flock identification program. (Producers may enroll when calling to receive codon-testing approval.)