

PROMOTING CANADIAN LAMB

By Jennifer Fleming, Executive Director

The CSF built its Market Development Strategy around one goal; to facilitate the increase of lamb consumption by 0.25 kg /person in the next five years. To achieve this, Canadian sheep producers are going to have to increase production by 60,000 more lambs per year.

The Canadian Sheep industry has received approximately \$775,000 to accomplish this goal and have 17 months to develop the infrastructure necessary to take advantage of this increased market demand.

Some would argue that increasing consumer demand for Canadian lamb is not going to be very difficult. A significant contributing factor to the increase in lamb consumption is the demographics of immigration. It is estimated that by 2017, one out of every five people in Canada will

be a member of a visible minority; which equates to between 7



and 9.3 million people. These new Canadians will be coming from cultures where lamb and mutton are important for food security and constitute 26% of the total meat output. This coupled with Canadian consumers, especially the baby boomers, turning to lamb as they seek out new dining experiences and there should be a marked increase in the demand for our product. Is the Canadian Sheep Industry up to the challenge?

CSF THINKS SO!!
Prior to the BSE prob-

lems, the Canadian Sheep industry had shown consistent growth in production. In fact Canada is one of only a few countries in the world that had been expanding sheep production. With the strengthening of market prices for lamb the industry should be able to return to the pre BSE trend of increasing production.

To ensure consumers choose Canadian lamb, the Market Development Strategy dedicates a portion of the funding to enhancing and supporting marketing strategies that currently exist, while simultaneously developing a Canadian lamb identity that will compliment and enhance marketing activities.

The rest of the strategy can be divided into three sections; supply, processing and, national and regional support.

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PROMOTING CANADIAN LAMB con't

SHEEP NLIS TO BE ROLLED OUT NEXT YEAR IN AUSTRALIA

The National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) for sheep will be rolled out across the country from next year, with details of the program released today.

All sheep born from the start of 2006 will have to be tagged and unlike the NLIS for cattle, the tags will be manually read instead of electronic.

Sheep going direct from property of birth to slaughter will not have to be tagged, a move which the Australian Meat Industry Council (AMIC) says will threaten traceability.

But Ian Feldtmann, chairman of the NLIS Sheep Management Committee, says the system can be changed if it does not work.

"AMIC and others have expressed concern on particular issues of the program and we're fully aware of their concern," he said.

"That is part, or the important part, of having this review in 2008. But we've had it quite clear that if there is any indication before 2008 that there is a need for review, we will certainly bring the review forward."

Source: www.abc.net.au/rural/content/2005/s1491098.htm

The supply portion of the strategy focuses on ensuring that the products supplied to the processor and retailer meet their demands and that there is an information loop back to the producer. The processing portions is dedicated to providing processors with insight into the consumer and customer needs to identify specific attributes of products as well as new opportunities to grow their business.

Mechanisms to support this would include identifying a product specification that meets the needs of the customer and consumers and linking it with a pricing mechanism that addresses the increased profitability both the processor and sheep producer. Lastly, due to the strength and diversity of the consumer needs across Canada, the promotional programs will rely heavily on identifying regional

partnerships with provincial sheep associations as well as producer, processor and retail/food service customers to ensure successful execution of the programs. The CSF is confident that the strategy incorporates a variety of elements that will provide the building blocks of a solid foundation to build programs which will strengthen the profitability of the Canadian sheep industry.

FROM THE CHAIR

By André Trépanier, CSF Chair

In mid-October I was invited as Chair of the CSF to attend a meeting of the American Sheep Industry executive Board. This invitation was a response to the recommendations of the Mexican Sheep Industry at the last American Sheep Industry Annual Convention to develop a North American Coalition for the Sheep Industry.

At the meeting, all three countries gave presentations on their respective industries,

which included information on flock sizes, animal health programs, and identification programs. We then our interest in a tri-nation sheep organization and how to go about developing it.

After rejecting the idea of a formal organization with by-laws it was proposed that an MOU would be developed by the American Sheep Industry based on one that they already have in place with New Zealand and Australia.

The CSF received a draft of the MOU a few days later and it will be discussed at the AGM November 24-25 in Ottawa.

In short, this MOU includes exchange of information on North American Markets, animal health and protection, breeding stock, research and development, animal identification and traceability. In addition, the North American Coalition would meet at least annually.

ON-FARM FOOD SAFETY UPDATE

By France Lanthier, National Coordinator OFFS

On July 19th the Canadian Sheep Federation (CSF) had the pleasure to announce that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) had awarded us a letter of Completion of Technical Review for our Food-Safe Farm Practices (FSFP) program. Having successfully passed Part I of Technical Review, we are now in a position to initiate Part II: Technical Review of Management System and Associated Documentation. The CFIA and CFA will be represented at our AGM and will hopefully continue to participate in our WG as observers.

The Management System must describe how the CSF will ensure the entire system's ongoing maintenance, evaluation and continual improvement. The Management System contains the following 4 sections:

1. General Management Component
2. Technical Component (which includes the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points-based documentation).
3. Conformance Component
4. Auditor-Training Component

The CSF has started to develop sections 1, 2, 4. Developing a conformance component will however require producer participation.

Producer Awareness Sessions

Producer uptake on the FSFP program has been slower than expected. Since June I have not received any requests for information or training sessions. I have however been able to attend

AGMs in Newfoundland, Ontario, and Quebec. From my communications with producers and provincial organizations it seems that producers have the following concerns: the information presented during training sessions is overwhelming, there is some redundancy in the record keeping forms, and there is a need for on-farm support for implementation. With these concerns in mind the following actions will be proposed at the OFFS WG at CSF AGM:

- The FSFP website or a hard copy of the information session should be mandatory as pre-training. This would make information sessions more interactive as producers would be prepared with questions
- Record keeping forms should be re-evaluated to minimize redundancy
- An implementation pilot project should be initiated to assess the real challenges and costs of implementing the FSFP program

Communication and Promotion

This activity has been the recipient of much of my attention for the past few months. The workshops presented last year were attended by approximately 350 of Canada's sheep producers. As previously mentioned uptake has been slower than expected. While full participation may not be a realistic expectation at this time, we must not let up on informing producers about the program and assuring that they are aware of funding opportunities. During the summer and early fall a new FSFP ad was developed. And in October a new FSFP brochure was distributed to provincial organizations. The major addition to our brochure is that it contains the address for the FSFP website. The ease of use and convenience of the online training is expected to increase producer participation.

ON-FARM FOOD SAFETY UPDATE con't

AUSTRALIA: NLIS CHIEF TIGHT-LIPPED ON US LICENSING DEAL

Australia is closer to signing a licensing deal with the United States to use our National Livestock Identification System (NLIS).

It is a lucrative market because about 26 million cattle are slaughtered there each year.

Rick Beasley, the head of NLIS at Meat and Livestock Australia, will not confirm how close Australia is to securing a deal.

"We had approaches from quite a number of countries recently to look at whether the core system here can be licensed, improved, modified, whatever, to suit their requirements," he said.

"Obviously their requirements are obviously going to be a lot different to ours.

"But the basics of traceability remain the same around the world.

"You want to know where the animal's born, where it's lived through its lifetime, what risk status it has and when it's ultimately slaughtered - the core system is the same around the world."

Source: ABC Rural

The COFFS WG will also be launching a website. This site will contain information documents circulated within the WG since its inception in 1997. The site is intended to educate the public on On-Farm Food Safety and to serve as a training tool for new On-Farm Food Safety Coordinators.

The CSF is now eligible to apply for Implementation Funds under the Canadian Food Safety and Quality Program's (CSFQ) *On-Farm Implementation Component*, which is managed by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC). Under the program, each producer can access up to \$850 worth of services as follows:

1. **Workshops (\$100):** Workshops focused on the implementation of food safety systems valued at \$50 per workshop. Producers are eligible to 100\$ for the purpose of workshops, therefore 2 workshops per producer.

Note: Producers will NOT be paid \$50 to attend a workshop. The CSF must provide the CSFQ with the number of participants then the funding is provided to the CSF to fund the workshop.

2. **On-Farm Support (\$750):** Producers may request on-farm technical support specific to adapting and implementing a food safety system on their farm. Technical support essentially means the request for a consultant or specialist to assist with implementation. Technical support is cost-shared; the CSFQ fund pays for 70% of the cost, up to a maximum of \$750. The producer or commodity organization will be responsible for the remaining 30%.

Specialized equipment: Producers may request funding for equipment that they will need in order to implement a food safety program on their farm. Financial support for specialized equipment is cost-shared, the CSFQ fund will pay for 50% of the purchase price, up to a maximum of \$750. The producer or the commodity organization will be responsible for the remaining 50%. To be reimbursed, producers may be required to submit original receipts for the amount received (Form AGR-1, *Statement of Farm Support Payments*), as it is a taxable benefit.

ANIMAL WELFARE AND TRADE – ON THE INTERNATIONAL RADAR?

By Monica Séguin, PhD Student in Applied Ethology - University of Saskatchewan

In Canada, over 650 million farmed animals are transported from their farm of origin to auction houses, slaughter plants, or sold to local, national or international clients. The transport of animals in Canada is regulated by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency who enforces the *Health of Animals Act*. This legislation governs the manner in which animals are transported within, into or out of Canada (i.e. maximum transport periods and minimum feed, water and rest times).

For example, sheep should be transported for no longer than 48 hours at a time and should be provided with a 5 hour period for rest, feed and water following long distance transport. For other countries, long distance sea transportation (days to weeks) of farmed animals may be necessary. Animals in both situations can be subject to multiple han-



dling, crowded environments, changes in climate, unforeseen problems (i.e., mechanical breakdowns, rejection by importing country) and other factors which cumulatively can lead to stress, distress, injuries and illness.

This is but one of the issues in a long list that the *World Organization for Animal Health* (OIE) -- the World Trade Organization's adviser on animal health matters -- is addressing as the designated international leader for animal welfare matters.

Creating welfare standards for food-producing animals is not an easy task. Animal protection is a complex, multi-faceted public policy issue which includes, but is not limited to ethnic/religious, economic, scientific, and political dimensions, all of which deserve equal consideration.

At the moment the major animal welfare concerns on the table include farm animal transport (both sea and land), slaughter and depopulation for disease control purposes.

It is the goal of the OIE to develop truly global standards for animal welfare and that these will be derived through global expert opinion and sound scientific evidence. A drawback though is that at this point in time the World Trade Organization (WTO), who aid in the development and agreement of legal ground-rules for international commerce between countries, will not discriminate on how a commodity is produced. In other words, a country does not have the legal right to ban the import of food-producing animals or their products due to differences in animal welfare laws or conditions. So, it remains to be seen whether international trade requirements will be put in place. However, the continued efforts of the OIE and the international community may result in changes occurring to trade relation to food-producing animals and their products between countries.

AUSTRALIA MARKETS THE DIFFERENCE

LIVESTOCK AGENTS WON'T SUPPORT PLANNED NLIS

Livestock agents say the proposed National Livestock Identification Scheme (NLIS) for sheep and goats is unworkable and unmanageable.

The scheme will be launched nationally in 10 weeks on January 1.

The Australian Livestock and Property Agents Association says individual states are doing their own thing and creating exemptions and colour coding without sensible consultation.

It also says abattoirs will escape the tagging regulations.

Association chief executive Andy Madigan says his organisation will not support the scheme for sheep and goats in its current form.

"At our recent AGM of the Australian Livestock and Property Agents down in Melbourne, a motion of no confidence was put forward and unanimously supported by all members present that we do not support the system in its current format," he said.

"Whilst there are exemptions and there's going to be mixed coloured tags, it doesn't carry the support of the agents and I might add nor the processors, nor the sale yard operators."

Processors find that differentiation is the key to red meat marketing. The key to the success of future Australian red meat marketing campaigns both in Australia and around the world will be to continue a strategy of differentiation. This strategy must involve maintaining Australia's clean, natural and safe image, improving supply chain efficiency and continually migrating product to high value positions in markets.

This was the message from Meat and Livestock Australia's managing director Mark Spurr in his address to the NSW Farm Writers forum in Sydney. Spurr said Australia's red meat industry is currently in good shape but warned against complacency in the face of challenges that lie ahead.

"We need to use our current strong position to nurture our significant competitive advantages of product integrity, safety and quality, while improving productivity and sustainability," Spurr commented. "However, there are significant challenges in the months and years ahead. The U.S. is set to return to key Asian markets and there is the looming challenge of competitor countries, like Brazil."

He pointed out: "The key to success, especially in overseas markets, is differentiating our product offerings from our competition. Along with industry, MLA has developed programs to enhance differentiation. Our primary differentiation strategy must be to nurture and develop our most significant competitive advantage, which is our clean, natural and safe image. It is this image that has helped the Australian red meat industry significantly boost sales domestically and in export markets."

Spurr said another key point of differentiation revolved around the need for the Australian red meat industry to continually improve supply chains.

"MLA is undertaking an exciting global initiative that aims to strengthen the relationships we have with retailers and better understand the expectations and needs of customers around the world," he said. "The emergence of global retailers provides exciting new opportunities for collaboration. We are looking to develop new innovative processes and move into developing closer relationships with the retail sectors in key export markets."

He added: "This new approach is all about process innovation and developing commercial key performance indicators and understanding the consumer all the way back down the supply chain."

Spurr said that the current industry strength was a great springboard for capturing future opportunities.

Source: www.meatnews.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=Article&artNum=10480

TWO MILLION DOLLAR RESEARCH INTO BARE-BUM SHEEP

Scientists will attempt to breed bare-bum sheep in a \$2-million research program that could provide an alternative to a painful animal husbandry practice. Australia's wool industry has been under pressure from an international animal rights campaign to phase out mulesing – where farmers cut skin folds from sheep's backsides to prevent the animals becoming fly blown. The research would determine the degree of flystrike resistance that could be bred into sheep in a five-year program focusing on test flocks in two states.



Research and development body Australian Wool Innovation (AWI), which was funding the project, said scientists aimed to select sheep which had naturally bare areas around the breech.

"You go out to a normal flock of unmulesed sheep and there'll be some variation in the breech, some will be more wrinkly than others, some will have a bigger naturally bare area," AWI wool production manager Ian Rogan said. "So this project will focus on beginning to select on that variation."

Part of the research will examine sheep at property in South Australia which have a possible genetic mutation that has left them bare of wool around their backsides. The wool-free bum trait had appeared in sheep on the Calcookara stud run by the Smith family on SA's Eyre Peninsula.

As well as appearing in about 200 ewes, the trait also had shown up in a few rams – the best of them named Kojak after the bald 1970s TV detective.

"Their rams will be one of the lines of sheep that we'll be testing in this project," Mr Rogan said. "On the one hand, using sheep like Kojak – which may or may not be a mutant – is one approach, but another approach is the slow, steady regular selection based on natural variation that's out there in the general population."

Researchers will monitor two flocks of 600 breeding ewes at Mount Barker in Western Australia's south west, and at Armidale in northern NSW. The research will be conducted by WA's agriculture department and the CSIRO.

Dr Andrew Swan, from the CSIRO's Livestock Industries, said each flock would comprise three mobs including one control mob and two selected for breech strike resistance. Half the lambs from each mob mulesed and the other half not mulesed.

"In addition to recording fly strike incidence and the impact on production traits, the project's five-year span should also enable us to record any seasonal variations in the incidence of breech strike," Dr Swan said.

The US-based People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) is continuing its worldwide campaign against Australian wool in a bid to end mulesing well before the industry's commitment of phasing it out by 2010. AWI, meanwhile, was pressing ahead with research into other forms of non-surgical mulesing. That included an enzyme injection that created a bare area in the breech which will be tested in field trials in NSW this month.

Mr Rogan said the industry remained determined to find viable alternatives to mulesing.

"Given that we're pushing forward on several different fronts, breeding being one of them, I think it demonstrates that we're serious about it and looking at all possible alternatives," he said.

Source: Robin Pash, AAP

COOL DELAYED AGAIN

Prompting the usual protests from the usual suspects, the Agriculture Appropriations Conference Report was finalized last week with a two-year delay for the controversial mandatory country-of-origin labeling law. The delay language simply changes the deadline for implementation from Sept. 30, 2006 to 2008.

The Conference Report was quickly approved by the House of Representatives with a vote of 318 to 62. The Senate is expected to debate the issue tomorrow.

The bill also includes a ban on horse slaughter, but with alterations that have caused consternation among supporters. Reports indicate that a change in a definition in the Federal Meat Inspection Act was made. Walt Smith, an aide to Rep. Henry Bonilla (R-TX-23), told the Associated Press that the provision was added to allow for federal inspection of other meat such as bison, deer and elk. He said he did not know whether the provision would undermine the horse slaughter ban.

Supporters of the horse slaughter ban said the added provision could prevent lawmakers from cutting money for horse meat inspections next year. Rep. John Sweeney (R-NY-20) also said the added provision could allow horses to be slaughtered along with cattle, goats, sheep and other livestock by using those meat inspectors.

Lawmakers also decided to change the National Standards on Organic Agricultural Production and Handling to override an appeals court decision that had stiffened the regulations. Consumer groups were displeased, but the Organic Trade Association said the decision would save organic business millions of dollars a year.

As well as these provisions, there is \$7 million for a specialty crops block grant program, \$200 million for the Market Access Program (MAP) and \$34.5 million for the Foreign Market Development (FMD) Program. FSIS is to receive an additional \$20 million over last year, but user fees were rejected.

WHERE SHEEP AND RELIGION MEET

By Chara Coulter, OSMMA

Muslims worldwide are celebrating the end of the holy month of Ramadan. Ramadan takes place in the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Islam uses a lunar calendar, that is, each month begins with the sighting of the new moon. The lunar calendar is about 11 days shorter than the solar calendar used elsewhere thus, Islamic holidays “move” each year. The month of Ramadan is the month in Islam’s lunar calendar when it is believed that the first verses of the Qur’an – Islam’s holy book – were revealed to the prophet Muhammad in the seventh century. Observant Muslims refrain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset during this period. This

year Ramadan began on October 4th.

Ramadan is a “month of blessing” marked by prayer, fasting and charity. Ramadan retains its focus of self-sacrifice and devotion to Allah (God). Muslims practice *sawm* - fasting - for the entire month. This means that they may eat or drink nothing, including water, while the sun shines. Families get up early for *suhoor*, a meal eaten before the sun rises, and; after the sun sets, the fast is broken with a meal known as *iftar*. Fasting serves many purposes: it reminds Muslims of the suffering of the poor, it is an opportunity to practice self-control and to cleanse the

body and mind. In addition, it allows Muslims to feel the peace that comes from spiritual devotion as well as kinship with fellow believers.

The festival of Eid al-Fitr brings an end to Ramadan and the fasting. In 2005 this began on November 3rd. It is one of the most important of Islamic holidays; it is celebrated with public prayers, feasts and exchange of gifts. Charity and good deeds also play a significant role in the close of Ramadan as Muslims are obligated to share their blessings by feeding the poor and making contributions to mosques. Lamb is commonly consumed by Muslims during their major holidays, as they are told

in the Quran not to eat pork or pork products, meat of the animals who died before being slaughtered or the carnivorous animals (as they eat dead animals). Lamb market pricing and slaughter numbers typically reflect the increased demand during this holiday. Lambs can be either male (castrated or intact) or female and not older than one year of age. Preferred lambs are between 60-80 lbs live weight and not overly fat. Eid al-Fitr, Arabic for the “festival of breaking the fast”, is a marketing opportunity for those marketing lamb but more notably is a time for family gatherings and celebration for Muslims worldwide.

AUSTRALIA - MEAT INDUSTRY REJECTS WATERED DOWN ID SYSTEM

Processors, saleyard operators and livestock agents have met the Federal Agriculture Minister in Sydney to raise concerns about the National Livestock Identification System for sheep and goats.

They have told Peter McGauran there is no point implementing the scheme in its current form if it exempts sheep and lambs sold direct to abattoirs and does not enforce year-of-birth tags. A spokesman for the Australian Meat Industry Council, Scott Sharman, says Australia's export markets will see the exemptions as a watering down of safety compliance.

"Australia has always positioned itself as a world leader on food safety and product integrity and this scheme that we're proposing, we're not confident that it follows in that stead," he said.

"The Federal Minister understands the concerns of meat processors and the requirements of our export markets and hopefully he'll be talking to his state counterparts about this issue."

Source: www.abc.net.au/rural/content/2005/s1487683.htm

MOU FOR ENHANCED COOPERATION

AMERICAN MEAT INSTITUTE AND CANADIAN MEAT COUNCIL SIGN MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING TO ENHANCE COOPERATION.

Washington, DC/Ottawa, Ont.—Leaders of the American Meat Institute (AMI) and the Canadian Meat Council (CMC) today announced that the two groups have signed a memorandum of understanding to enhance cooperation and coordination between AMI and CMC.

AMI and CMC for years have shared the goal of creating a truly integrated North American meat industry that embraces cooperation and free trade for the good of the industry and consumers. This new memorandum notes "common issues" and "common interests" that can be satisfied through partnership.

Specifically, CMC members will now be invited to attend AMI Animal Welfare Committee and Worker Safety Committee meetings. Also during this period, AMI and CMC will promote each organization's educational events and extend discounted member rates to members of either group. Speakers from both organizations also will be integrated into programming. The two groups also will coordinate on web site development and public affairs strategies.

"This is a very promising development for the Canadian meat industry," said CMC Executive Director James Laws. "CMC and AMI working together can leverage resources for the best possible outcomes for the industry and consumers."

AMI President J. Patrick Boyle echoed Laws' sentiments. "For years, we have operated for all practical purposes as an integrated, North American market. It's time that our trade associations work together in a more formal way to reflect that integration," he said. "I am very optimistic that this memorandum of understanding will yield major benefits for the industry on both sides of the border."

Source: AMI/CMC Joint News Release

MARYLAND REGISTERS PREMISES FOR NATIONAL ANIMAL ID SYSTEM

FREDERICK—Roughly a month after contacting more than 8,000 potential livestock producers, the state of Maryland has, according to this story, registered 400 premises as part of the National Animal Identification System. Maryland producers are encouraged to register their properties on a voluntary basis as part of the first phase of the NAIS program.

MARYLAND REGISTERS PREMISES FOR NATIONAL ANIMAL ID SYSTEM con't

Maryland Secretary of Agriculture Lewis Riley was quoted as saying, "That's obviously not very many yet. It's a necessary issue that we have to deal with. It certainly creates additional problems for the livestock (producers), we recognize that."

Developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, NAIS is designed to record the movements of any U.S. livestock animal in case of a disease outbreak or exposure.

Marilyn Bassford, NAIS grant coordinator for the Maryland Department of Agriculture, was cited as saying premises are identified as sites where livestock animals cross and include auctions, farmland, fairs and exhibits. By 2007, the registration of premises will be mandatory, and the MDA will begin to register individual and groups of livestock. The program is expected to be complete in 2009 with all animals registered and their movement between premises tracked by NAIS.

Source: Knight Ridder/Tribune Business News and Sarah Breitenbach, The Frederick News-Post, Md.

NORTHERN IRELAND - FARMERS READY FOR STRIKE

A war of words marked the opening of a nation-wide three-day farmers' strike in Northern Ireland, according to an article in the Belfast Telegraph newspaper. Ulster Farmers Union president Campbell Tweed accused David Handley, chairman of Farmers for Action - the pressure group organizing the campaign for better producer prices - of being opportunistic, the article said.

"I think he is being opportunistic and has made a business out of trying to divide other organizations," Tweed said. "All the U.K. unions believe fundamentally that withholding produce is not in anyone's interest. We also recognize that there is a lot of pain in the industry. We know there are many people struggling financially. But I must say we have found no significant support for this strike among our members." He added: "There is a lot of sympathy for the position farmers are in, but we don't feel there are many people prepared to support it."

As several livestock producers gathered outside a Dungannon meat processing plant, FFA coordinator in Northern Ireland William Taylor commented: "We are extremely disappointed at the leadership of the Ulster Farmers Union and that of other unions throughout the United Kingdom. We are not here to get involved in arguments with unions. Our campaign is to highlight the major price issues facing farmers."

He added: "We have no doubt that we have the support of the rank and file membership of those unions, but it is very disappointing that those at the top cannot lend their support. This strike is only the first one. If necessary we will have others and they will be extended for even four or five days."

A spokesman for the Federation of Meat Traders, which represents a number of family butchers in the province, said: "I think those involved in this strike are wasting their time. I have every sympathy for farmers but the way to go about these price problems is through negotiation and not confrontation. Family butchers are always around three weeks ahead of themselves with supplies so there will be no empty shelves in our shops."

A spokesperson for major supermarket chain Tesco said: "Our aim is to work with our suppliers to create sustainable relationships with farmers. We have a strong commitment to local suppliers in the province and currently purchase more than £300m worth of food and drink from them annually. We don't believe it is in anyone's best interests to deny shoppers access to U.K. supplies."

IRELAND— DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR SHEEP MEAT

The agriculture minister welcomes an important new study on the country's sheep sector.

A comprehensive study of the sheep industry in Ireland is to begin shortly with the view to drawing up a development plan for the sector. Ireland's Minister for Agriculture and Food, Mary Coughlan, said: "This is a very positive initiative on the part of the processing industry in partnership with Enterprise Ireland."

A steering committee is in the process of being established, which will monitor progress on the study and will be comprised of representatives of the relevant

key players including producers, processors, Teagasc, Bord Bia, Enterprise Ireland and the Department of Agriculture and Food. John Malone, former Secretary General of the Department of Agriculture and Food, will chair the group.

Coughlan said that it was necessary to analyze and evaluate all aspects of the sheep breeding, production (farming), processing and marketing elements of the industry and the inter-relationship that exists between them. She added that it was important to identify the changes that were needed in the various strategies to make them more effective in the future environment and



to draw together a cohesive development plan that will put the industry on a solid footing in the post decoupling era. All relevant interests will be consulted.

The minister said she was particularly pleased that the processing sector and producers, the main stakeholders in the industry, were central to this initiative. A key aspect would be benchmarking against best practice on the world stage including in such countries as Britain, France, and New Zealand. This is particularly vital in the increasingly competitive international market.

The terms of reference and the composition of the study group should ensure the delivery of a positive report with viable recommendations that can be implemented within a reasonable timeframe.

Coughlan said: "This is an industry-led and timely initiative and I look forward to an outcome which will be a serious contribution to policy formation for this important sector with consequential benefits for all concerned."

Source: www.meatnews.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=Article&artNum=10545

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