



From the *flock*

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FOR THE CANADIAN SHEEP INDUSTRY

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West Hawk Lake Project

By Sean McKenzie – National Coordinator, Animal Identification and Traceability

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada recently announced that they are investing in the West Hawk Lake Zoning initiative. This investment will allow the Canadian Animal Health Coalition to establish disease control zones within Canada. The ability to create control zones within the country is critical to the mitigation of foreign animal disease within Canada.

West Hawk Lake itself is located on the border between Manitoba and Ontario and is essentially the only passage point for commercial vehicles, road and rail, between the two provinces and obviously between eastern and western Canada. This in itself makes it an ideal location for the establishment of a control point for animal disease management but the geographic location also provides a convenient location for effectively dividing the country into east and west if the need were to arise.

Zoning is employed by countries to contain or attempt to contain a disease so as to limit the impact to surrounding operations and allow the unaffected areas and producers to continue with business as usual, while the affected area is decontaminated. By establishing the West Hawk Lake (WHL) check point in Manitoba the project will facilitate the creation of east and west zones within Canada. The concept being, that if an animal disease outbreak occurs in Alberta the checkpoint at WHL will close and producers in Ontario and east will be able to continue to operate, buy and sell livestock as usual. The same is true if an animal health emergency were to occur in Quebec or the Maritimes those from Manitoba West would continue to move, buy and sell animals as if there were no emergency.

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West Hawk Lake continued

The practice of zoning is facilitated, recognised and accepted domestically and internationally only if it can be shown that no animals susceptible to the disease in question have moved across the checkpoint at WHL. This requires a national traceability system, including animal identification, premises registration and animal movement tracking be established and in place.

At present several initiatives have been established or are in the works along with the development of the WHL Zoning project to facilitate this. The Canadian Sheep Identification Program (CSIP), which mandates the individual tagging of all sheep prior to their departure from the farm of origin is one, tagging of all bovine animals also before leaving the farm of origin is another. The National Goat Federation has also proposed and is developing what will become a mandatory national ID program, all of which address the animal identification pillar for traceability.

Currently premise registration has been left to the provincial government to establish, each of which are at varying stages of development. The exact movement of animals as well is under development in collaboration between industry groups and governments, however for this initial development and testing of the WHL initiative it is sufficient to know what animals (by ID number) have moved either east or west across the Ontario/Manitoba border. Tracking of this information will allow investigators to rapidly assess whether or not a potentially infected animal has moved across the border and respond accordingly. Without a functioning zoning system as is being developed at WHL if a disease outbreak were to occur, Canada as a whole would be considered the 'zone' thus impacting producers coast to coast. Once established a zoning program can significantly limit this impact and potentially cut the costs of a disease in half.

The objectives of the 2009-2013 WHL project include:

- 24/7 - 365 days/yr operation including client support and call centre;
- enhancing producer participation;
- validation of data collection and integrity and assessing the ease of the system
- defining the WHL role in a National Agriculture and Food Traceability System and
- investigate an expanded WHL scope to include other agri-food commodities

The data that is collected and stored at the WHL checkpoint includes information about the departure and destination points of each load of animals. This information will only be accessed in the event of an emergency. The overall goal of the WHL project is to collect and access information required for the immediate response to a foreign animal disease. If successful it will significantly enhance disease containment capacity in Canada mitigate the associated risks.

Funding for this initiative has been provided by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada through the Canadian Integrated Food Safety Initiative under Growing Forward.



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Q-fever

By Jennifer Fleming – Executive Director CSF

Q-fever is an infectious disease that spreads from animals to humans. It is caused the microbe *Coxiella burnetii*, which is shed in the birth fluids, milk and manure of infected animals and can survive for months, perhaps even years, in dust or soil, because it is resistant to heat, drying and disinfectants. All animals – mammals, birds and even insects – can be infected with this bacteria. While *C. burnetii* does not usually cause clinical disease in animals, it has been linked to late-term abortions in goats and sheep. Humans can acquire the infection by inhaling infectious aerosols and contaminated dusts generated by animals or animal products. It causes flu-like symptoms in humans, sometimes leading to pneumonia and occasionally hospitalization.

Q-fever has been reported around the world, including Canada. Most recently, however, the Netherlands have been dealing with an outbreak. In 2009 there were 2,293 cases of Q-fever reported in humans with 6 deaths. Between January 1 and March 18, 2010, there were 247 confirmed cases with 6 deaths. This is in comparison to 5-20 cases being reported annually between 2000 and 2006. Due to the fact that the disease is difficult to diagnose and detect in animals, it is the human outbreak of Q-fever that usually alerts officials to the presence of the disease.

In an effort to control what officials in the Netherlands called "...an unprecedented outbreak", they made the controversial decision to cull over 50,000 pregnant dairy goats, from 55 of the country's 400 farms. Most of the affected farms were in the southern part of the country and the slaughter accounted for more than half their total livestock. This decision was made after epidemiological studies pinpointed goats as the source of the disease in an area that was densely populated with humans and dairy farms.

While Canada has never seen a human outbreak of this magnitude, there have been clusters of human cases related to abortion and normal kidding / lambing in small ruminants as well as abortion and stillbirth in cats. Serological studies in humans in Quebec have shown a relationship of having Q-fever and working with sheep. It is common to find evidence of *Coxiella* in aborted materials from sheep and goats in Ontario. So we know that the infection is around – and occurs in our sheep and goat populations.

However, a study that examines the infection status of the sheep / goat farm and the health of the humans that care for them, has not yet been done – but is being planned. In the meantime, we do know of measures that can reduce risk of Q-fever in people working with sheep or goats:

- Destroy placentas and foetuses of aborted animals by burying in the ground or burning.
- Have confined birthing areas not open to the wind and that can be cleaned and disinfected.
- Wear protective clothing when assisting lambing / kidding. This includes disposable plastic sleeves (e.g. rectal sleeves), dedicated coveralls and footwear.
- If abortion is occurring, wear an N95 mask. This is to prevent inhalation of the organism.
- If abortion is occurring, make sure that you submit foetuses and placentas through your vet to the regional animal diagnostic laboratory in order to get an accurate diagnosis.
- Wash hands in disinfectant soap and leave the protective clothing in the barn.
- Pregnant women should not assist with lambing / kidding – even if no abortion is occurring in the flock.
- Compost manure for a minimum of 5 months and then spread only on still days.
- Do not allow dogs or cats on the farm to have access to placentas



Q-fever continued

In Europe a vaccine (Coxevax, CEVA Santé Animale) is available to prevent infection of sheep, goats and cattle. Vaccinating all breeding females will decrease abortion and – in those animals not already infected – decrease shedding of the microbe. Vaccinating all breeding females on an annual basis will – over time – reduce shedding of the microbe into the environment through birth fluids, milk and manure, thus helping to protect humans as well as animals. At this point, the vaccine is only available by a biological import permit through the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. It is hoped that within a few years, the vaccine is licensed in North America making it easier and less expensive to obtain.

A study of Q-fever and its impact on animal and human health is planned for Ontario sheep flocks and goat dairies over the next year. The study is being conducted by researchers at the University of Guelph and is funded by the Ontario Animal Health Strategic Fund. Researchers will randomly select sheep flocks and goat herds across Ontario and visit them once. At that visit they will administer a questionnaire to the farm-workers than take care of the animals and draw a blood sample to determine if that worker has been infected with Q-fever. They will also draw blood from a sample of the breeding females and administer a questionnaire regarding the health of the flock / herd. By examining the health of the animals and the health of the humans that care for them, researchers will identify management practices that either influence the risk of Q-fever.

16th Annual Great Lakes Dairy Sheep Symposium

Nov. 11-13, 2010

The 16th Annual Great Lakes Dairy Sheep Symposium will be held during the three full days of Nov. 11-13, 2010 at the Ramada Convention Center in downtown Eau Claire, Wisconsin. The symposium will include presentations by dairy sheep producers, sheep milk processors, university scientists, and industry service personnel on Nov. 11 and 12 followed by a bus tour on Saturday, Nov. 13 of a dairy sheep farm, a sheep milk farmstead cheese operation, and the Spooner Agricultural Research Station. The Spooner Station, operated by the University of Wisconsin-Madison, has the only dairy sheep research farm in North America. The final program and registration information will be available on the Dairy Sheep Association of North America's web site (www.dsana.org) by the end of July.

Eau Claire is conveniently located on Interstate 94 in northwestern Wisconsin approximately 100 miles east of Minneapolis. Shuttle service to and from the Minneapolis airport to the Ramada Convention Center can be reserved through Chippewa Valley Airport Service (1-877-811-4211, www.chippewavalleyairport.com) at a cost of \$33 each way. Several direct flights into Eau Claire's Chippewa Valley Regional Airport from Chicago O'Hare are available on United Airlines at reasonable costs each day, and while less convenient, it is possible to fly from Minneapolis to Eau Claire with one stop.

For additional information, contact Claire Mikolayunas (mikolayunas@wisc.edu, 1-608-332-2889).



Approval and Usage of Drugs in Canada

By Barb Caswell, Interim National Coordinator, On-Farm Food Safety

One of the biggest food safety concerns for food animal producers is the risk of animal health product residues at unsafe levels in meat or milk. As a major concern, we have spent a great deal of time ensuring there are good production practices in the Food-Safe Farm Practices Program that can significantly reduce the risk of this hazard occurring.

Some producers have expressed concern that these practices are difficult to achieve for those that do not have a veterinarian accessible to them on a regular basis or for smaller operations. After meeting with the Veterinary Drug Directorate in April, I thought I would take some time to discuss how drugs are approved in Canada for use in livestock, what the Canadian Sheep Federation has been doing behind the scenes in terms of drugs approved in Canada to make things easier for Canadian producers, and next month I will take some time to provide some pointers on how to read a drug label when using animal health products on your farm.

You may (or may not) know that all drugs for use in animals must be approved by the Veterinary Drug Directorate, more commonly referred to as the VDD. The VDD is a branch of Health Canada and is responsible for evaluating and monitoring the safety, quality and effectiveness of veterinary drugs administered to food-producing and companion animals. That means that both the rabies vaccine administered to Rover the dog, as well as the Oxytetracycline administered to your sheep, is approved for use in those animals in Canada by the VDD. The VDD sets standards and promotes the prudent use of all veterinary drugs and works both nationally and internationally with veterinarians, drug manufacturers, livestock producers and producer organizations like CSF, and feed manufacturers in maintaining Canada's high standards for food safety.

The VDD is staffed by a multi-disciplinary team of people with skills and experience, from veterinarians to biologists to chemists. When a drug company is interested in marketing a drug in Canada, they must first make an application to the VDD to have the drug approved. All applications for new drugs go through an exhaustive review process, and must satisfy all the requirements under the Food and Drugs Act and Regulations. Following the review, the VDD assesses the drug and makes a recommendation to either approve or reject use of the product in Canada. The review must include research studies to support maximum residue levels, which are the maximum levels of the product to be considered safe in meat and milk products, and appropriate associated withdrawal times. If a new drug application is accepted and the product approved, Health Canada issues a notice to the manufacturer, specifying the terms and conditions governing the sale and use of the product in Canada. The drug is issued a Drug Identification Number or DIN, an eight-digit number located on the label of over-the-counter and prescription drugs.

Ideally, having a drug approved for use in Canada in sheep means that you have the necessary information available on the package insert to ensure safe use of that product without posing a risk to food safety. The outcome of the approval process dictates the label requirements that have been considered as safe, such as target species, dosage, route of administration, and withdrawal times. Unfortunately, one of the setbacks for the Canadian sheep industry is that there are few products that are licensed for use in sheep in Canada. This creates a very limited arsenal with which the industry can battle disease, parasites, and other afflictions which can be detrimental to the welfare of the animal and possibly the industry.



Food Safety continued

The Canadian Sheep Federation (CSF) has recognized this as both a disadvantage to our industry in relation to competing with other species of livestock produced in Canada as well as in competing with sheep and lamb products imported from other countries. It also creates an increased food safety risk with the usage of drugs in an extra-label manner. CSF has expressed this to the VDD, who have recognized this as an issue and have been working with CSF to identify drugs that are needed by our industry.

Extra-label drug usage, as defined in the Food-Safe Farm Practices Program, is the use of an animal health product in a manner other than what is specified on the label. This includes using a product for a different species, weight or age of animal and for diseases or other conditions not listed on the label; administering a product at a different dosage, route, frequency, duration or timing of treatment, or failing to observe the stated withdrawal. While some products are approved for use in Canada, they may be approved for use in another livestock species. Use of these products in sheep requires the product to be used extra-label, and could represent an increased risk for a food safety hazard. The specifications on the label have been tested to ensure residues are not found in the meat or milk at unsafe levels. In changing any of a drug's label specifications, using the product in an extra-label manner, withdrawal times may be influenced in an unpredictable way. This is precisely why the Canadian Sheep Federation created their 'Extra-label Drug Use Policy' (February 2009, *From the Flock*), requiring as part of the Food-Safe Farm Practices Program that all extra-label drug use be done under veterinary prescription.

Products that are not approved for sale and use in Canada can only be used in clinical trials or for emergency use by veterinarians.

In terms of emergency use or extra-label use of unapproved drugs, Veterinarians extrapolate from what they know about other species (indications, dose, route, withdrawal) or from literature or other experts. Therefore, they are providing you with all of the necessary information that you would normally get from the drug's label. They have the expertise required to prescribe a product in a manner that ensures efficacy and food safety. Having these practices as part of the Food-Safe Farm Practices Program reduces your risk of having a food safety hazard as a result of something on your farm (i.e. drug residues in meat or milk) and allows you to demonstrate due diligence in preventing a hazard – the program helps to protect you as a producer in providing a safe product for the Canadian public. Ideally, producers would have sufficient resources available in treating their animals to greatly reduce any need for extra-label drug usage. CSF will continue to work closely with the VDD, pursuing the need to get more drugs approved for use by Canadian producers, so that if the need arises producers can be sure they are using drugs both safely and effectively.

For more information on the approval and usage of drugs in Canada, contact your local veterinarian or see the Veterinary Drug Directorate's website at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/branch-dirgen/hpfb-dgpsa/vdd-dmv/index-eng.php

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Wild Canids and *C. ovis*

By Brad De Wolf

The parasite *Cysticercus ovis* (*C. ovis*) is the metacestode (larval) stage of the canine tapeworm, *Taenia ovis* (*T. ovis*) (Taylor et al. 2007). The lifecycle of *T. ovis* is indirect – meaning it is carried out in two or more different host species. In the case of *T. ovis*, the definitive host of the parasite is a canid, while the intermediate host of the parasite is a small ruminant (sheep or goats) (Taylor et al. 2007).

The *T. ovis* worm is the adult stage of the parasite and inhabits the small intestine of canids. The eggs of *T. ovis* are released into the environment when the canid defecates. The sheep is infected when the animal inadvertently ingests the eggs of *T. ovis* from an environment contaminated with infected canid faeces. The consumed eggs hatch within the intestine of the sheep and the larvae burrow through the intestinal wall and proceed to migrate through the animal's tissue until they reach the musculature (Taylor et al. 2007). Each larva forms a lesion, known as a cysticercus, within the sheep's muscles (Taylor et al. 2007). The lesions are commonly found in the animal's heart, diaphragm and masseter muscle; but certainly other skeletal muscles are routinely infected as well (Taylor et al. 2007).

Canids can only become infected with the parasite following the ingestion of viable lesions. Therefore in order for the canid to become infected with *T. ovis*, it must consume the muscles of a sheep infected with *C. ovis*. Following the ingestion of infected muscle, the prepatent period in the canid is six to nine weeks (Taylor et al. 2007). The prepatent period is defined as the amount of time between the consumption of *C. ovis* lesions and the shedding of *T. ovis* eggs in the canid's faeces.

It is well known that a wild canid is capable of acting as the definitive host for *T. ovis*, if it is exposed to infected cysticerci from small ruminants. In Canada the prevalence of *C. ovis* in lambs has increased substantially in recent years. Furthermore, regardless of the control strategies implemented, predation by wild canids continues to be a significant problem for the Canadian sheep industry. Therefore, wild canids are being exposed to *C. ovis* lesions when they feed on lambs and subsequently develop infection with *T. ovis*.

Besides predation on infected lambs, wild canids may also be exposed to infective *C. ovis* lesions through the scavenging of inadequately disposed deadstock. The opportunistic nature of the coyote means it is content on scavenging its meal. Just as with live prey, the scavenging of sheep carcasses provides a substantial energy source with virtually no energy expenditure on behalf of the coyote. If the deadstock is not kept in a secure location, it is most certainly going to be scavenged by wild canids which potentially expose them to *C. ovis*.

Wild canids carrying *T. ovis* act as a natural reservoir for the parasite and make it challenging to control. What remains unknown is the extent to which wild canids are transmitting the infection to the intermediate hosts – the sheep. In order for the sheep to become infected with *C. ovis* they must ingest the eggs of *T. ovis* from an area contaminated with canid faeces. It is not known how frequently wild canids defecate on pasture while preying on sheep. The open pasture would be considered a high risk environment. This high level of stress experienced by the predator may result in no scatting on pasture; all but eliminating the risk of parasite transmission to the sheep.

Studies by Grainger and Jenkins (1996), in Australia show a positive correlation between hydatid cysts in sheep and the amount of predation on a farm.

Hydatid cysts are the larval stage of the canine tapeworm *Echinococcus granulosus* which has a very similar lifecycle to *T. ovis* – with sheep acting as the intermediate host and canids acting as the definitive host (Taylor et al. 2004). The increased risk for hydatidosis in sheep likely results from the canids contaminating the pasture with *E. granulosus* eggs during predation (Grainger and Jenkins, 1996). Although the risk for hydatidosis in sheep dramatically increased when sheep predation was significant, the predators were wild dogs (*Canis lupus familiaris*) or dog-dingo hybrids (Grainger and Jenkins, 1996). Perhaps the domestic lineage results in predators more relaxed on pasture. If so, these canids would be more likely to defecate during, or following, a kill compared to purely wild canids.



C. ovis continued

Additionally, as wild canids become experienced preying on sheep on pasture, perhaps the level of stress they experience declines and they become more likely to scat on pasture –increasing the risk of transmission to sheep.

There is currently no evidence describing the scatting patterns of wild canids in Canada. Although it is certain wild canids are acting as a definitive host for *T. ovis*, the role they play in re-infecting the intermediate host (sheep) is not known at this time. If wild canids are commonly exposing sheep to the parasite by defecating on pasture, they have the ability to dramatically increase the spread of the disease between farms and pastures.

Over the past couple of years *Cysticercus ovis* has become an increasingly common cause of carcass condemnations in market lambs. The prevalence of *C. ovis* in Canada appears to be on the rise and has the potential to cause substantial financial hardship for the Canadian sheep industry. Flock predation by wild canids has always been and, will likely continue to be an obstacle faced by sheep producers in Canada.

The ability of wild canids to act as the definitive host of *Taenia ovis* is well documented and, due to predation, a proportion of the wild canid population is likely harbouring *T. ovis*. However, it remains to be determined the extent wild canids can transmit this infection back to the intermediate host. Further research is needed in this area.

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Brad De Wolf also authored the Livestock Predation article featured in the May 2010 From the Flock.



Changes to Importing Female Sheep and Goats

By Courtney Denard, National Scrapie Coordinator

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has announced that requirements around the importation of female sheep and goats into Canada from the U.S. are set to change at the end of June 2010.

These changes are in line with the message the CFIA has been communicating to the Canadian sheep and goat industries since 2002: as Canada moves towards scrapie eradication we have to tighten up our import protocols to reduce the risk of bringing scrapie into the country.

One of the ways this is accomplished is by establishing import conditions that keep in line with the policies laid out by the World Organization for Animal Health, more commonly referred to as the OIE. Such is the case with the June 2010 changes.

The changes that are being implemented were announced to the industry in January 2009. The industry was given the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes and did so a few months later after collecting letters and opinions from producers and stakeholders. In the summer of 2009, the CFIA met to review the industry's comments and made a decision on which changes would be implemented. This decision was announced in November 2009 with an implementation date set for June 2010.

The previous importation regulations that were set in 2007 stated that female small ruminants for breeding, domestic or captive purposes could be imported from a U.S. premises enrolled in a Scrapie certification program that was determined to be a "negligible risk premises." Or, females could be imported from a U.S. premises enrolled in a Scrapie certification program at an equivalent or higher status than the importing premises in Canada.

The new policy continues to fall in line with the above mentioned requirements; however, now both the exporting premises in the U.S. and the importing premises in Canada must be enrolled in a Scrapie certification program for at least 12 months and have completed at least one annual inventory.

This means, for instance, if a Canadian producer enrolls on the Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program on July 1, 2010, he/she will not be permitted to import until July 1, 2011 (after the first annual inventory is completed).

No new changes have been implemented or proposed around the importation of rams and bucks from the U.S. The industry continues to communicate with the CFIA on this topic. If any new changes are proposed, the industry will be given an opportunity to comment as they were in regards to the latest set of changes. Any new information will be forwarded to producers and stakeholders as it comes to light.

Often times when changes happen, information can get tossed around from one source to the next, at which time the information can be misconstrued or misinterpreted. Scrapie Canada encourages producers who have any questions or concerns about importation regulations to contact the office and ask directly.

Funding for this initiative has been provided by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada through the Canadian Integrated Food Safety Initiative under Growing Forward.



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