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From the flock

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FOR THE CANADIAN SHEEP INDUSTRY

Bluetongue Insurance Policy for Sheep Producers

By Jennifer Fleming, CSF Executive Director

The Canadian sheep industry has taken an innovative step to protect sheep farmers in the event of an outbreak of Bluetongue disease (BT). The Bluetongue Insurance Policy for Sheep is a new commercial insurance program developed by the Canadian Sheep Federation in co-operation with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. It is designed to provide producers with affordable coverage for mortality, business interruption and consequential losses due to Bluetongue. This voluntary program will supplement but not replace funding provided through current government programs.

The impetus for the development of the new Insurance program was provided by recent BT import policy changes initiated by the CFIA, as well as the discovery of BT in the UK and in several EU countries.

On July 10, 2006, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) announced that it was revising its BT Import Policy, "...based on an updated scientific risk analysis, to eliminate currently bluetongue-related control measures for cattle, sheep and other ruminants imported from the United States". These policy changes were designed to enable the CFIA to fulfill its international reporting obligations to trading partners and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

In concert with this announcement, the Canadian Cattlemen's Association developed an indemnity fund to provide financial assistance to Canadian sheep producers who experience on-farm animal mortality due to BT (introduced due to cattle imported from the United States). While generous, the indemnity fund was capped at \$150,000, raising fears that there may not be enough money to compensate producers with infected flocks.

Not long after the CFIA's announcement, BT was discovered in Northern Europe. On August 18, BT was found in Kerkrade, the Netherlands and a few days later, German and Belgian authorities confirmed cases in their territories, near the Dutch border. The disease then spread into France and, eventually, into Great Britain. The number of confirmed cases in the UK is reported to be 70.

When the BT outbreak first struck Europe, officials were not certain what serotype (group of microorganisms or viruses) of the disease was infecting the animals. There are 25 known BT serotypes, five of which occur in North America (2, 10, 11, 13 and 17). The serotype that was determined to cause the outbreak in Europe in August was serotype 8.

[Continued on next page](#)



Bluetongue Insurance Policy continued

This serotype has never been reported in Northern Europe before, which means that the disease occurring in Northern Europe is considered to be of exotic origin. It is believed that this serotype is of a sub-Saharan lineage, although the precise origin is not yet known, nor is the way in which the virus was introduced into Europe. That being said, authors of an article entitled "Climate change and the recent emergence of Bluetongue in Europe" suggest that the unprecedented spread of the disease further north in Europe "...has been driven by recent changes in the European climate that have allowed increased virus persistence during winter".

Given all of this, the Canadian sheep industry thought that the best course of action would be to develop a mechanism that would make sure that Canadian sheep producers were taken care of in the event of a Bluetongue outbreak. The result is the Bluetongue Insurance Policy for Sheep.

This policy is designed to provide producers with peace of mind in the event that BT appears. The insurance program will cover producers for: mortality; consequential loss (drugs and treatment materials; veterinary fees; diagnostic fees; humane euthanasia) and; business interruption (loss of productive capability, additional feeding and management costs). Acknowledging that not all of the 25 serotypes of BT have been removed from the CFIA's reportable disease list, the policy has been designed in such a way that producers who have coverage, and have been diagnosed with any of the 25 serotypes of BT, will receive compensation above and beyond CFIA compensation.

The BT Insurance Policy for Sheep has to be affordable for producers. While the final touches are still being put on the policy, it is anticipated that coverage will cost 0.75-1.75% of the sum insured, depending on the province of residence.

The CSF is anticipating having this policy available for producers in April 2008. Further details on the new program, enrollment and insurance services will be forthcoming. In the interim, if you have questions about the new program, please call: 1-888-684-7739.

Funding for this project has been provided by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada through the Public Sector Risk Management Program.

CSF Update

CSF Welcomes Stevenson as New OFFS Coordinator

Wednesday February 27, 2008 – Guelph, ON – The Canadian Sheep Federation (CSF) announced today the hiring of a new National On-Farm Food Safety Coordinator. On March 10, 2008, Lorraine Stevenson will join the CSF team.

Stevenson has worked for the Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency since July 2007 as their Project Coordinator. Prior to that, she was the HACCP Coordinator for the Egg Farmers of Ontario, for seven years. While there, she implemented their voluntary OFFS and Quality Program and worked with producers on developing farm-specific HACCP plans.

"Having Lorraine join the CSF with her On-Farm Food Safety experience is a great addition to the program," says Florence Henning, Chair of the CSF. "Henning went on to say that she is looking forward to working with Lorraine and is confident that she will build on the momentum the program has seen in recent years.

The past few years has seen increasing interest from producers in the OFFS program, with just over 400 producers trained on the program to-date and two producers certified.

Stevenson is excited about the opportunity to work with the Canadian Sheep Federation and to advance on-farm food safety initiatives.

This positing is funded by Agriculture and Agri-food Canada.

The Canadian Sheep Federation is a national, non-profit organization that represents all Canadian sheep producers. Its mission is further the viability, expansion and prosperity of the Canadian sheep and wool industry. For more information contact the Canadian Sheep Federation at 1-888-684-7739 or jennifer@cansheep.ca.



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CSF Update

Canada's Sheep and Goat Industries Get National Animal ID Coordinator - Shared position a smart resourcing solution to support traceability programs for two associations -

Wednesday, February 27, 2008 – Guelph, ON

The Canadian Sheep Federation (CSF) and the Canadian National Goat Federation (CNGF) announced today the hiring of a National Animal Identification Coordinator. This is a new position for the organizations, and one that they will be sharing. France Lanthier has been selected to fill this position beginning March 1, 2008.

Lanthier comes to the role with two years experience as the CSF's On-Farm Food Safety Coordinator. She brings a wealth of experience in advocating on behalf of producers and balancing their needs with government requirements.

"There has been over the years an increase in the demands of the national animal identification programs for small ruminants, both from the government and from producers," says Florence Henning, Chair of the CSF. "It became evident that to ensure the identification and traceability programs continue to meet the needs of producers we would require a dedicated staff person to take on this responsibility." Henning notes that sharing the role will in no way compromise the integrity of the industry-specific programs; if anything, the combined knowledge will benefit both organizations. And in addition, the creation of the joint-position makes sense from a resource management perspective.

"The importance for the goat industry to embark on a national identification and traceability program is of significant importance to the goat producers in Canada" states Susan Barker Chairperson of the Canadian National Goat Federation Traceability Committee. "Likewise to the sheep program we also felt that in order to ensure that the programs meets the needs of the producers that the consideration of dedicated staff was necessary".

Barker also noted that the joint position will have positive aspects for the goat industry of being able to share resources and also work with a sector of livestock that faces similar economic, management and regulatory challenges.

This position is being funded by the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

The Canadian Sheep Federation is a national, non-profit organization that represents all Canadian sheep producers. Its mission is further the viability, expansion and prosperity of the Canadian sheep and wool industry. For more information contact the Canadian Sheep Federation at 1-888-684-7739 or jennifer@cansheep.ca.

The Canadian National Goat Federation is a national, non-profit organization that represents all Canadian goat producers. Its mandate is to represent the interest of all goat producers across Canada regardless if they are raising meat, dairy, fiber or pet animals. The CNGF is a non profit national organization that is representing the national interests of goat producers and the industry. For more information contact the Canadian National Goat Federation at 1-613-347-2230 or info@cangoats.com.



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From the Chair

By Florence Henning, CSF Chair

The American Sheep Industry (ASI) Convention was held in Las Vegas Nevada from January 23rd to 26th. As usual, it was a very busy schedule of meetings and policy forums. Here is a brief synopsis of a few of the meetings I attended.

Predation control, as in Canada, is a very serious problem. In the US over 600 animals a day are lost to predators costing the sheep industry more than \$38 million in potential income. Various techniques for predator management are being researched. Fladry where ropes are hung from fencing works well if electrified, but trapping via a cage was unsuccessful in catching coyotes. The bromine/cafeine is currently being tested with no adverse symptoms preceding mortality and a mean time of death after consumption of 5 hours.

Currently the ASI is responding to the Environmental Protection Agency with regards to keeping M-44 sodium cyanide capsules and compound 1080 in livestock protection collars after a petition from animal rights groups requesting their cancellation.

Drs. Dan Morrill and David Anderson addressed the biofuel explosion and its economic and nutritional implications. The push to produce an alternative fuel source mandated by the government in the U.S. has created a boom in the biofuel industry, especially in ethanol and biodiesel production. The majority of these biofuel plants are in Iowa and with corn at \$5 a bushel, and an increase in the availability of distiller's grains product, an increase of livestock numbers is expected.

However, planted acres for 2008 are may decrease because of high fertilizer prices and the closure of some ethanol plants because of high corn prices. Livestock producers were advised to lock in feed prices when they had a bargain as all feed prices will follow corn prices. They were also asked to consider this as an opportunity to finish on forage, pasture and grass; "...our sheep are ruminants and we have been treating them like chickens."

Dr. Bernie Osborne who has been working with Bluetongue (BT) for over 40 years gave an overview of the northward climb of BT from 1999 in Northern Africa to the Netherlands in 2006. In California they now have 3 live cell culture vaccines which can be 70-80% effective if given to the proper serotype.

Dr. Ronnie Green from the USDA gave an update on the sheep genomics. The sheep genomics consortium, which includes the United States, the United Kingdom., Australia, New Zealand and France are working together and the sheep genome could be achieved very soon.

Dr. Diane Sutton, the National Scrapie Coordinator announced that the rectal biopsy test is now approved and they are now looking at live animal diagnostic tests and will begin Elisa testing on 3,000 goats in the spring 2008. Also being investigated is the use of mandatory sheep ID to trace animals back to their State of tagging. Sutton has a budget of just over \$1.7 million for the 2008 fiscal year to expand surveillance, clean up infected flocks and conduct testing. They hope to eliminate scrapie outbreaks by 2010 and to be declared scrapie free by the OIE by 2017.

Attending the industry wide reception meant I did meet with a variety of producers from all over the U.S. Attendance at workshops is invaluable to hear the fore front research being conducted, but lobbying with the grass roots producers and putting forth Canadian concerns and requesting their support and lobbying for open borders is also a very important aspect of attendance at these conventions.

The next ASI Convention will be in San Diego California January 22-24, 2009.



Scrapie Canada Update

By Gregory Bishop and Hossain Farid,
Nova Scotia Agricultural College

GeneNovaS is the home of the National Scrapie Genotype Database. This is a database filled with genotypes of Canadian purebred sheep at the prion protein gene that is responsible for scrapie resistance. Genotype information from various laboratories across Canada is being collected, along with pedigree information from the Canadian Livestock Records Corporation (CLRC), and added to the database regularly. The database and its website have been online since May 2005 and can be viewed at genenovas.ca.

What does the GeneNovaS website deliver? The GeneNovaS website provides a quick and easy way for sheep breeders to obtain information on the genotype of their sheep. It also provides tips on how to use the genetic information to establish scrapie resistant flocks. GeneNovaS includes the following options which have been created to help breeders to efficiently use their flock's genetic information.

1. The 'SORT' option is a convenient way of working with the genotypes of your sheep for use in breeding programs. Your flock's data can be sorted according to breed, age, sex, scrapie resistance category, etc. The results are designed to be printed if so desired.
2. The 'SEARCH' option provides breeders with tremendous flexibility in accessing genotype information. A breeder can use this option to easily find the genotype of a specific animal or group of animals in their flock.
3. The 'PREDICT' option enables breeders to predict the genotypic outcome of mating any ram with a specific ewe or group of ewes in your flock. This option facilitates designing optimum schemes for breeding scrapie resistance, particularly in large flocks. The alternative is to establish your own spreadsheet or database, which would require re-entry of the pedigree and genotype information.
4. The 'PREDICTABLE' option displays matings that will produce predictable genotypes. A breeder will be able to identify and test only those animals that need to be genotyped according to parental information. Since the transmission of genetic information from a sire and a dam to their offspring follows known genetic rules, the possible genotypes of an offspring can be

predicted using the genotypes of its parents. As selection for scrapie resistance continues, the number of animals carrying genotypes that will produce offspring with predictable genotypes will increase, and fewer and fewer lambs will need to be genotyped. This option will allow a breeder to identify those animals that need to be genotyped in each generation, thereby tremendously reducing the genotyping cost.

5. GeneNovaS can be used for marketing purposes as well. You can add any of your sheep to the 'MARKETPLACE', a public storeroom that is accessible by all prospective buyers in Canada and worldwide. This is an excellent marketing tool for your sheep. This feature will accelerate the rate of achieving scrapie resistant status because breeders could seek out animals with a desired genotype in their breed of choice to purchase for breeding. Once a sheep in the Marketplace has been sold, either the breeder can remove it from the Marketplace or transfer the sheep's genotype to the new owner.
6. The website makes it possible for you to have access to your flock's genotype results quickly via the internet. Other means of sending information out from the lab, such as mail or fax, are time consuming, subject to delays or loss of the data. A free online demonstration of GeneNovaS capabilities is available to all producers at <https://genenovas.ca/public/allb.html>.
7. The confidentiality of your sheep's genetic information will not be compromised. This is achieved by permitting you to have access to only your flock's results in a password-protected website. No other method of sending the results across the country has a comparable level of security. In case you do not have access to a computer, or are not so adept at using one, provincial agricultural extension personnel, a friend or a neighbour could likely help you view your results.
8. Because sheep breeders are not able to alter the information on the website, the website (including the 'MARKETPLACE') can be considered an official certificate for the genotype of individual sheep.

After adult sheep in a flock have been genotyped, access to a means of identifying and testing lambs whose genotype cannot be predicted with certainty, is crucial to reducing the cost of future genotyping. GeneNovaS offers this means of identification.

For more information please contact Scrapie Canada at 1-866-534-1302 or visit the website at genenovas.ca.



CSF On-Farm Food Safety Committee Update

By France Lanthier, CSF National OFFS Coordinator

In addition to the financial contributions of AAFC, the Canadian Sheep and Lamb Food-Safe Farm Practices program is in large part supported by the countless in-kind hours put in by our technical committee that is comprised of provincial sheep associations and provincial governments. Many of the committee members are also sheep producers, which assures that we never lose sight that the “on-farm” part of our food safety program, and that we always strive towards making the program feasible for sheep producers.

On the past two years I have had the pleasure to visit many towns and cities to provide Canadian Sheep and Lamb Food-Safe Farm Practices program workshops. To me, one of the most important parts of the workshop is producer feedback, and fortunately there’s been plenty! Most producers agree that the on-farm producer manual has the potential to be a useful management tool and that it is also useful for the industry to have a manual of good production practices.

There have also been many constructive comments provided by producers from coast to coast. Below are some of the issues raised by producers which are currently being addressed by the CSF OFFS committee.

Coming in at #1: “The good production practices (GPPs) and the record keeping forms shouldn’t be highlighted in gray: we can’t read the practices and can’t photocopy the forms”. The reason some of the practices and record forms are highlighted in gray is that it was a very visual way to identify the mandatory GPPs and records. While this seemed a good idea at the time it has not passed the road test and will be changed. The objective here is to have a manual that is clear, clean, and simple – and to avoid ending up with something so busy that it rivals a Christmas tree!

#2: “Some of the GPPs are a bit repetitive and some are difficult to interpret”. Initially the producer manual was designed to address all the food safety related practices on all types of sheep farms. While this is still the objective, with more experience with the program we are looking at condensing and clarifying some of the GPPs. Also, with the advent of new regulations such as the Enhanced Animal Protection from BSE, some practices surrounding the

management and labeling of ruminant feeds may now be handled at the feed mill and no longer pose an on-farm food safety risk. Great attention is being put in reviewing the practices listed in the producer manual. These practices relate back to the hazards identified in the HACCP-based generic model and it is imperative that those practices are clear and sound.

#3: “This program requires that I get my vet involved – some of this stuff isn’t 100% clear for me, how do I make sure I meet the requirements?” A simple rule of thumb is that if the animal health product is not indicated for sheep then it is extra-label drug use and needs to be accompanied by a veterinary prescription. This said, there is room to improve and clarify some of the terms and requirements surrounding the use of animal health products. The CSF OFFS committee now has 4 vets participating on the technical committee, whose experiences cover the scope of both sheep production and HACCP-based programs.

Many players at the on-farm food safety table have brought the Canadian Sheep and Lamb Food-Safe Farm Practices program to this point and continue to work tirelessly at improving it. However, special recognition is given to the CSF OFFS technical committee who through their knowledge, passion, and practical approach continue to strive towards a feasible and practical producer program.

The OFFS program currently under development by the CSF has at its heart the objective of protecting producers and consumers from food associated hazards. Whether that be bacterial contamination of meat, carcass condemnation because of sheep measles, or drug residue hazards, the program is designed to show “due diligence” on the part of the producer. The whole process of providing a safe product will also involve others in the food production chain such as the veterinarian, the packer, etc. It is impossible to control risk if do not know what those risks are.

So there is light at the end of the “pharmaceutical tunnel”. All is not lost, sometimes you just need a new map and a bigger flashlight to see the end. While food safety involves the whole food chain, identifying and controlling the risks on your farm is up to you.



Electronic identification of sheep might offer big benefits

Reproduced from : www.fwi.co.uk

Electronic identification (EID) of sheep is set to be implemented in the UK and the rest of the EU on 1 January 2010, less than two years away and could yield massive benefits for the industry.

But, says Richard Webber of Shearwell Data, unless farmers grasp the opportunities it offers it will simply become another burden on the sector. "EID can be used to massive effect for improving on-farm management and productivity, but this will require a massive step change for the industry and much greater integration between farmers, processors and their intermediaries."

Mr Webber believes that using EID as a management tool can aid breeding plans and allow farmers to identify sheep which are making the greatest contribution to farm income and profitability.

"Having used EID on my own flock for more than 10 years, I have been able to allocate lamb income against individual ewes and hence record what contribution each ewe makes to flock income. In our three-crop ewes I have some which have reared lambs worth a total of more than £300 and others which have only had lambs totalling £78. This has allowed me to split ewes into five different groups according to their total earnings and now we only breed from ewes in the top two tiers. Over time this has improved the flock's earning potential and hence profitability," he says.

But these advances require accurate recording and software to analyze the resulting information, he adds. "Having the data is one thing, what you do with the data is quite another."

To make best use of the information abattoirs will need to record EIDs at slaughter and pass this information along with slaughter data back to finishers so they can relate it back to the animal's parents to inform breeding decisions.

And while this may seem a burden, Mr Webber reckons that provided information is sent to producers electronically, data input is minimal.

Beyond economic and productivity data, EID can also yield significant benefits in terms of on-farm recording, including vet medicine records, movement information and field management records.

"All regulatory burdens can be overcome quickly and simply using EID to record the information required, particularly when it comes to movement information and vet medicine records. Using a hand-held data recorder means simple tasks, such as drenching or vaccinating can be recorded as they are undertaken."

An in-line EID reader, such as a race reader, makes this task even simpler, as sheep identities are recorded as they pass by the reader and each animal can then be allocated to a treatment.

But for these benefits to be felt farmers will have to make significant investments in on-farm hardware and software, with the most cost-effective hand-held recorder costing about £1400 and a race reader about £1200. "There are cheaper hand-held devices available, but I believe it is essential to have one which farmers are able to key data into manually, so even when sheep are not being handled, information can be entered using the sheep's visual tag to identify it."

All of this, though, is far beyond what EU rules will require farmers to do in 2010, he says. "The most basic requirement of the legislation is for farmers to identify sheep with an EID device. It's that simple and the only extra cost for farmers will be the increased cost of an electronic tag over a visual one. At the moment our electronic tags are 75p each, although for large volume orders that could be nearer 60p."

The costs of on-farm recording gear could also fall as more farmers take it on board. "Simply identifying sheep without using the EID device as a means of recording data is a negative step. It adds a cost to the industry for no benefit. What we need is for EID to be used to improve management and provide benefits beyond the costs.

[Continued on next page](#)



Electronic ID Benefits continued

"Recording movement data electronically would also result in significantly less paperwork for farmers and allow movements information to be sent to Trading Standards in electronic format, even from a mobile phone," believes Mr Webber.

On farm, producers could also see benefits by recording lamb performance from different areas of farms. This could help identify pastures where sheep perform poorly, aiding reseeding plans and reducing reliance on bought-in feeds.

And he is convinced this could offer benefits in terms of disease management, too. "At the moment there is a significant time-lag between movements occurring and information being received by Trading Standards EID could allow it to happen in real time.

"I've already been able to register a calf birth with BCMS from my mobile phone, so there's no reason why movement information can't be managed the same way." But this would need investment by other parts of the industry, including haulers, markets, abattoirs and, most importantly, government.

"At the moment DEFRA has no plans to implement a national database to record sheep EIDs, something every other EU nation plans to do. Without a database EID is redundant and provides few benefits to industry."

In Mr Webber's ideal vision, sheep identities would be recorded at birth, at every movement and at death, providing complete traceability of every sheep from field to fork and reducing the paperwork burden on farmers.

"If haulers invested in EID reading equipment for vehicles, they would be able to record the identity of every animal boarding and disembarking their vehicles and report the movement to a national database. The same is true of markets and abattoirs, with markets recording animal movements in and out of markets and abattoirs recording every sheep as it passes down the slaughter line."

Equipping a lorry would cost about £4000, while a market would cost about £10,000 depending on throughput and an abattoir would need to spend about £6000 on hardware. "There are issues over market throughputs, but most scenarios could be managed."

All of these benefits rely on sensible implementation of EID in the UK, he warns. "The biggest stumbling block is how EID numbers are allocated to animals. There are two ways of doing this: What You See is What You Get (WYSIWYG) or relational.

"With WYSIWYG, the 12-digit EID number would also be the visual identifier, but these numbers are random and would not relate to the current system, which uses a flock number and individual number related to the farm's holding number.

"The relational option would mean sticking with the current system of tag numbers and allocating EIDs to tags once they are in place. This will be much simpler and avoid having to completely rethink the system.

It would also mean sticking with a system farmers understand rather than working with random numbers which will mean nothing to anyone," says Mr Webber.

Moving to WYSIWYG will mean having to replace both visual and EID devices at the same time and will mean regathering sheep to insert new identification devices after losses are initially found and replacement tags have been ordered and delivered, he adds.

"I reckon this could cost the industry about £40m a year in lost time. However, using the relational system would mean replacements could be cross-referenced to visual tags, so they could be inserted as replacements when the loss is spotted, saving the need to regather at a later date."



News From Around the World

Good News for Sheep Farmers

Reproduced from *The Dominion Post* (www.stuff.co.nz)

Sheep farmers can look forward to higher demand and increased prices for sheep meat, according to a report from agribusiness bank Rabobank.

After two years of easing world sheep meat prices, the report says the tide appears to be turning as production in some key producing countries declines. However, report co-author and senior Rabobank analyst Hayley Moynihan, said that while sheep meat availability was tightening, the challenge of exposing more consumers to lamb and mutton remained.

"Current global market demand is likely to outweigh the ability of New Zealand farmers to supply sheep meat over the short to medium term, which will strengthen prices," Ms Moynihan said. "However, the ability to capture longer-term gains from this favourable market position will require additional industry investment in consumer education, promotional activities and greater efficiencies throughout the supply chain."

Sheep meat producers were also likely to continue facing challenges in the form of currency, climate and competing land use in their quest for larger markets and increased production and profitability.

Drought and reduced returns to wool producers had together depleted the Australian flock and Rabobank expected falling sheep meat production in other countries.

Europe, the largest market for New Zealand lamb, had a declining sheep flock and virtually static consumption - presenting an opportunity to meet a growing import demand, she said.

Developing countries were expected to lead global meat consumption growth over the next 10 years, with a volume increase of 27 per cent projected.

This general growth in meat consumption should also provide opportunities for sheep meat sales into these markets.

Sheep meat production volume had been static over the past 10 years at around 535,000 tonnes. But value from production and export lifted by more than 50 per cent because of the increased proportion of lamb, versus mutton, exported and higher export returns.

Changing land use would have the greatest impact on New Zealand's sheep industry, with the proliferation of lifestyle blocks and larger, mainly lamb-finishing units, being snapped up for conversion to dairying or to provide dairy support units on the back of strong dairy returns.

Sheep Numbers Down to 50 Year Low

Reproduced from: www.nzherald.co.nz

Counting sheep is not something only done by insomniacs - Statistics New Zealand also has the task of keeping a tally of our woolly friends.

The number of sheep in New Zealand has fallen to its lowest level since 1955. Statistics New Zealand said there were 38.6 million sheep in New Zealand in 2007, down 4 per cent from 2006. Sheep numbers peaked in 1982 at 70.3 million.

Dairy cattle numbers though were up 2 per cent on 2006 to 5.3 million. The number of deer fell 12 per cent from 2006 to 1.4 million. Beef cattle numbers remained the same at 4.4 million.

The numbers were from provisional figures from the 2007 agricultural production census.



News From Around the World

Sheep Farmers Must Hold Lambs Back

By Andrew Forgrave, Rural Affairs Editor

Reproduced from: www.dailypost.co.uk

A group of English and Scottish sheep farmers believe their industry will not survive without a radical overhaul of the live and deadweight market system.

Producers need more control over the sale of prime lambs while at the same time increasing the proportion of lambs hitting market specification, they insist. And the only way to achieve this is for farmers to form lamb groups and refusing to sell stock without pre-agreed forward pricing.

One of the farmers, auctioneer Archie MacGregor from Allanfauld, said: "I'm worried the current live prime lamb sale system is failing at many marts and I would like to see an alternative that ensures a better price for vendors."

Seven prominent lamb producers met in Carlisle recently week to discuss ways forward. Calling themselves the "Carlisle Discussion Group", they say many sheep farms are increasingly unviable - even if EU subsidies are included as income.

Group member Hans Pörksen, from Northumberland, said: "HSBC bank recently forecast that a typical 180-hectare upland farm in the North England with 750 breeding ewes and 50 suckler cows is likely to lose £16,533 in 2008, even if SFP and ELS payments are counted as income. "If this proves correct, it is unlikely that many of those sheep farmers still in business can survive unless more money is earned from the prime lamb market."

The group insists it is not "anti-auctioneer" and indeed envisages a future where markets act as collection centres, with auctioneers acting as agents in the setting of prices. Auction staff would continue to use their expertise in the assessment of stock quality.

Prices would cover production costs and leave a net margin. Mr Pörksen added: "If a revised marketing system was adopted nationwide it would not only lift prime lamb prices to realistic levels but would also encourage more farmers to breed and finish better quality lambs. It would also create more work for auction companies which would also be able to continue to stage the important store lamb and breeding sheep auction sales."

Such a system would seek to address producer shortcomings which currently see 40% of prime lambs failing to meet the customers' required specifications.

The Carlisle group has already relayed its proposals to the Livestock Auctioneers Association and Institute of Auctioneers and Appraisers Scotland. Mr MacGregor added: "None of the ideas the discussion group has put forward are set in stone. I would like to see more debate so the industry itself can determine the best way to make sure prime lambs are sold at realistic prices and more farmers can look forward to a less harrowing future.

"Every member of the discussion group wants to see a viable and strong auction mart sector which all consider is essential when selling farmer to farmer in the store and breeding sales.



News From Around the World

Alberta-Hawaii pig route slammed as groups campaign against animal shipments

TORONTO - Millions of farm animals, including pigs from Canada, are routinely brutalized every year during transportation for slaughter in far-flung foreign destinations, a practice international animal-rights groups are denouncing as cruel and unnecessary.

In a global campaign to be launched Tuesday, complete with undercover video footage, a coalition of groups under the auspices of the World Society for the Protection of Animals is calling for an end to the long-distance transport of live animals.

"The suffering that these animals must go through is quite appalling," said Melissa Tkachyk, programs officer with WSPA Canada. "We treat our furniture with more respect."

The campaign follows a year-long investigation by the coalition, dubbed Handle With Care, that aims to expose the horrendous conditions animals are subjected to during their long one-way journeys, which can cover thousands of kilometres. One of the worst routes starts in Canada, the group said.

During a trip that can last from a week to nine days, about 15,000 pigs are stuffed into containers each year, then trucked and shipped about 6,000 kilometres from Lethbridge, Alta., to Hawaii, via Oakland, Calif.

En route, the animals are exposed to extreme temperature changes, suffer from motion sickness and forced to lie in their own filth. Deprived of food, water and rest for long stretches of time, many of the animals perish before reaching their destination, the coalition says. "These pigs are being shipped like garbage on its way to a landfill," Tkachyk said. "They're not being treated like sentient animals." In Hawaii, the animals are slaughtered and sold as "Island Produced Pork" to meet a consumer demand for fresh-killed meat that cannot otherwise be met locally.

Shipping live animals vast distances makes little sense, the groups argue. Instead, they assert, livestock should be raised and slaughtered locally, then shipped as frozen meat - a practice they say would offer economic benefits close to home.

Canada has rules regarding the humane transportation of live animals, but the 30-year-old regulations are of no force and effect once the border is crossed, a situation the Canadian Food Inspection Agency wants to remedy.

Federal Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz said the agency is proposing changes that would ban the export of live animals if transportation conditions anywhere along the route fail to meet Canadian standards. "It is unacceptable for animals to suffer and to die under inhumane conditions," Ritz said in a December letter to several of the animal-rights groups, including one based in Honolulu.

The Handle with Care investigation also uncovered severe suffering inflicted on animals on other international journeys, which activists say could become breeding grounds for the spread of diseases. For example, millions of sheep reared on expansive pasture land in Australia are shipped to the Middle East every year, a journey that takes between three weeks and a month. New Zealand, on the other hand, has essentially ended all exports of live animals.

Tens of thousands of cattle a year are moved from Brazil to Lebanon, a three-week odyssey the coalition says has a mortality rate of 10 per cent. From Spain, thousands of horses are trucked for up to 36 hours to Italy, a practice the coalition maintains is already in violation of European Union regulations.

Handle with Care, which comprises animal-welfare organizations such as Humane Society International and respected agencies in Australia, Holland and Denmark, kicks off its Canadian campaign in Calgary. Other events are planned for Tuesday in cities such as London, Madrid, Rome and Sydney, as well as in Denmark and Brazil. American coalition members are launching ad campaigns in Hawaii.

The video footage and photographs along with the various shipping routes will also be released on the website www.handlewithcare.tv.



Profit opportunities raising sheep

By Matthew Wilde, Courier Staff Writer; Reproduced from : www.wcfcourier.com

GREENE --- High corn prices are like a wolf in sheep's clothing. Grain farmers rejoice every time they check out the Chicago Board of Trade or what the local elevator is offering these days. Livestock producers purchasing corn and soybeans, to feed animals, feel sick. With cash corn and soybeans approaching a very profitable \$4.50 and \$11.80 per bushel, respectively, that makes getting into the livestock business a risky venture. But for those who still want to take the plunge, livestock experts and farmers say raising market lambs may be the best bet.

Iowa State University Extension will sponsor a sheep production program Monday at the Kelvin and DaMaris Menken farm near Greene. Speakers will present information at 7 p.m. on sheep markets, cost of production, new insurance products and facilities. Experts say farmers gamble any time they raise animals or put seed in the ground, but risk can be tempered with proper management and planning. "We're trying to point out this is a low-cost investment for an ag enterprise for people on acreages and beginning farmers," said Dale Thoreson, ISU Extension livestock specialist in Butler County, which ranks fifth in the state in sheep production with nearly 7,000 head. "It costs far less to start, feed and house a sheep flock compared to other livestock", he said. For example, quality Holsteins cost several thousand dollars to buy and eat more than 80 pounds of feed a day. While a good ewe that's already bred costs about \$125, Thoreson said, and it takes about 347 pounds of feed (corn, 280; protein supplements, 32 and hay, 35) to get a feeder lamb to market.

As far as housing, Extension personnel say sheep don't need modern buildings to thrive. Iowa acreages are filled with old livestock buildings, requiring little to no work, that are more than adequate to keep sheep dry and out of the wind in the winter, the two requirements for productivity. However, if a young person wanted to raise hogs like the vast majority of other Iowa farmers --- in a climate-controlled hog confinement building --- investing hundreds of thousands of dollars to build a confinement or two would be needed. That's why raising sheep may be the route to go for enterprising livestock farmers, officials said. Less overhead costs potentially means more profit potential. On the flip side, entrepreneurs have less to lose. "There's nothing that's risk free, but the investment (in sheep) just isn't there," said Pat Derdzinski, Butler County Extension director.

Extension says opportunities exist lately for beginning Northeast Iowa farmers, unlike other parts of the state, to get into the sheep business or for existing producers to expand their operations. Even though the state doesn't have any large commercial slaughter plants, the area has two strong markets --- The Waverly Sale Barn and sheep buyer Stacey Scherburne of Kesley. Both serve as conduits to end users around the country. A diverse ethnic population locally that favors lamb also props up on-farm sales, officials said.

Fat lambs, weighing between 115 to 125 pounds brought between \$97 to \$105.50 per hundred weight at The Waverly Sale Barn's latest sheep sale on Jan. 7. Lambs 25 pounds heavier topped out at \$96.75. All are excellent prices, sheep experts said, considering the highest average price in Iowa between 2003 and 2006 was \$45 per hundred weight. "In this part of the state, we're quite fortunate to have two active markets. The fat market is holding up quite well," Thoreson said. "The way we look at it, if the enterprise is run properly, it has the potential to make money." However, good prices don't necessarily translate into high returns. Profitability, like in any business, depends on cost of production and management.

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Profit raising sheep continued

Dennis DeWitt, and Extension livestock specialist based in Dickinson County, said \$4-plus corn instead of \$2 corn makes it difficult but not impossible. If a producer buys all their feed, spent money on facilities and has labor costs, the break-even rate is \$100 per hundred weight or slightly more. For producers like the Menkens, who raise most of their feed, have little to nothing investing in facilities and do most of their own veterinary work, the farmers said they need in the low \$60s to earn a profit. The Menkens use old hog buildings and a dairy barn built in the early 1900s to house their flock of 103 ewes and three rams.

Since multiple births for sheep are common, the Menkens usually sell 150 to 170 head a year and keep 15 or more females back as replacements. The typical breeding cycle is once a year for four to six years, though the couple have has productive ewes provide nine years worth of babies.

"It's a profitable hobby," Kelvin Menken said. Though he and his wife, DaMaris, farm 300 acres and raise sheep, both have off-the-farm jobs. Kelvin was already raising sheep when the couple got married 16 years ago. They bumped the flock up from 50 to 75 in 1996 to make the machinery payment when they bought their current farm from DaMaris' parents. In 2004, the Menkens added more Suffolk and Suffolk cross ewes to the current level to afford a \$10,000 investment in an ethanol plant. To make sheep farming pay, the couple says good management is key. DeMaris keeps thorough feed and birthing records. They also buy quality breeding stock, that have a history of healthy lambs and multiple births.

Sheep experts say if the flock average isn't at least 1.5 lambs per ewe, profitability is questionable. "Records are very important. If (a ewe) is not at 1.25 to 1.5 she's going down the road after three years," DeMaris said. "You have to get a return on them."

The Menkens said they wanted to participate in the sheep program and open up their farm to help the industry that's been good to them, and possibly help it grow. "It's easier to see it than read about it," DaMaris said, referring to what sheep farming is like. "We're proud of our operation."

As of Jan. 1, government statistics show Iowa is ninth in the nation in sheep production with 235,000 head. Texas is No. 1 with a little more than 1 million. Though a little more than 100 ewes may not seem like a lot compared to farms with thousands of hogs, the Menkens actually operate a larger-than-average operation in Iowa. Most flocks range between 25 to 50 head, officials said. The lack of vast pasture lands, unlike in the West or South, due to crop farming is the reason, officials said.

The Menkens, who've been involved in other types of livestock production, prefer sheep. For small or part-time farmers, they said sheep are easier to raise. When babies are born in the late winter or early spring, the Menkens said the sheep farming becomes quite time consuming. Making sure ewes and lambs are healthy and nursing is an around-the-clock job. That's only a few weeks a year though. Otherwise, daily chores take less than an hour. "During lambing it's very intensive, a lot of worry. After weaning and the sheep go to pasture, it's a breeze," DaMaris said.

The program is free to the public courtesy of the Iowa Sheep and Wool Promotion Board and the Waverly Sale Barn. Contact Matthew Wilde at (319) 291-1579 or matt.wilde@wcfcourier.com.



Wal-Mart To Push For Uniform Standards For Suppliers

By Janie Gabbett, Reproduced from: Meatingplace.com

Wal-Mart wants to lead an effort over the next three years with other major global retailers to create common social and environmental standards for suppliers, CEO Lee Scott told employees. "We believe that there should be one framework of social and environmental standards for all major global retailers. And there should be one third-party auditing system for everyone," he told 7,000 Wal-Mart managers at an internal leadership meeting. Scott said Wal-Mart is working on such a system with global retail and CIES, a consumer goods network, starting with social standards then planning to expand to environmental stipulations.

Wal-Mart supplier standards: Scott also said Wal-Mart would build specific environmental, social and quality standards into its own supplier contracts. He said these standards would apply to all suppliers who work with Wal-Mart through global procurement, who are domestic importers, or who are manufacturers of Sam's Club or Wal-Mart private brands. "We have already started doing this, and we hope to extend the requirement to all the suppliers I mentioned within the next three to five years," he said in prepared remarks. He said the company believes suppliers can reduce the amount of energy they use to make Wal-Mart products by 20 percent.

Wal-Mart will only work with suppliers who maintain these standards, will make certification and compliance part of supplier agreements and will ask suppliers to report to them regularly. To underscore the seriousness of Wal-Mart's commitment, Scott said, "We will favor — and in some cases even pay more in for suppliers that meet our standards and share our commitment to quality and sustainability."

Wal-Mart Chief Pledges Higher Prices for Sustainable Suppliers

Reproduced from: AP-foodtechnology.com

The chief executive of the world's biggest retailer yesterday promised to favour suppliers providing high quality and ethically sourced products. Wal-Mart will launch a major retail-industry effort to improve social, ethical and environmental standards in the factories of its suppliers, CEO and president Lee Scott told a meeting of store managers. "The drive will see the retailer favour - and in some cases even pay more - for suppliers that meet our standards and share our commitment to quality and sustainability".

"Paying more in the short term for quality will mean paying less in the long term as a company. Higher quality products will mean better value, fewer problems, fewer returns and greater trust with our customers," Scott told the audience. But the firm will also raise the bar for suppliers on sustainable sourcing, putting pressure on them to provide evidence that they are meeting ethical and quality criteria.

Wal-Mart says it is already demanding that some of its suppliers demonstrate that their factories meet specific environmental, social and quality standards and this will increase in coming years. It will also make certification and compliance part of its supplier agreements and ask suppliers to report on their activities regularly. "Any supplier that fails to keep its word will be required to take prompt and serious action. If a supplier fails to improve and fix the problem, we will stop working with that supplier," said Scott.

The speech comes after a series of recalls linked to products made in China have made consumers increasingly aware of risks associated with a global supply chain. Scott said he would also put pressure on Chinese suppliers to comply with environmental regulations.

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Wal-Mart continued

He also called on all major global retailers to join Wal-Mart and CIES, the global retail and consumer goods network, in its effort to improve sustainable sourcing and pledged to meet with CEOs of its competitors to make socially and environmentally responsible sourcing a reality across the entire retail industry.

The speech also included commitments to a reduction in energy use of 25 percent on products sold in the store. Wal-Mart plans to increase its sourcing of products that are more energy efficient but also more affordable. Coming months will see the US retailer asking suppliers to reduce prices on energy-saving items, with the goal of doubling the sale of products that help make homes more energy efficient, according to the chief executive. It will also take the lead on informing customers about the energy required to make and use more energy-intensive products.

"Our customers want products that make them feel good about their purchases," said Scott. "They want to walk into our stores and be confident that the products on our shelves are safe and durable. They also want products that are made in a way that is consistent with their own personal values."

Canadian Sheep Statistics

The sheep statistics released by Statistics Canada

The sheep statistics released by Statistics Canada on February 15, 2008, indicate that only two provinces in Canada saw an increase in ewe flock size from January 1, 2007 to January 1, 2008.

New Brunswick saw the largest increase, from 3,600 ewes to 4,000 while Newfoundland's flock expanded by 1,000 ewes. Although the ewe flock size remained constant in Ontario and Prince Edward Island, all other provinces saw their flocks decrease. British Columbia and Alberta saw the largest decreases; 14 per cent and 17 per cent respectively. Overall the ewe flock size decreased from 558,100 to 532,500 ewes; a drop of 4.8 per cent.

This marks the fourth straight year that the Canadian ewe flock has decreased after reaching 622,000 in 2004. Despite the fact that the number of ewes, replacement ewes and market lamb are decreasing – by 4.8 per cent, 7.9 per cent and market lambs by 10.7 per cent respectively – the number of ovines slaughtered in Canada has increased by 1 per cent.

Ewe Flock Numbers

Province	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004
British Columbia	25,600	29,900	32,000	43,000	40,500
Alberta	80,100	96,300	96,100	101,500	102,600
Saskatchewan	49,400	51,700	51,000	65,200	61,700
Manitoba	33,200	33,900	34,500	39,900	41,500
Ontario	159,200	159,500	158,900	177,800	183,600
Quebec	166,000	167,800	170,600	165,600	170,000
New Brunswick	4,000	3,600	3,800	4,100	4,400
Nova Scotia	11,000	11,500	12,200	12,800	12,700
PEI	2,000	2,000	1,900	1,800	1,800
Newfoundland	2,000	1,900	2,200	3,300	3,400
Total	532,500	558,100	563,200	615,000	622,200



American Sheep Statistics

Released February 1, 2008, by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), Agricultural Statistics Board, U.S. Department of Agriculture. For information on "Sheep and Goats" call Scott Hollis at 202-720-4751, office hours 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. ET.

Total Sheep and Lamb Inventory Down 2 Percent:

All sheep and lamb inventory in the United States on January 1, 2008, totaled 6.06 million head, down 2 percent from 2007. After consecutive increases in 2005 and 2006, inventory has now declined for the past two years.

Breeding sheep inventory decreased to 4.51 million head on January 1, 2008, down 2 percent from 4.61 million head on January 1, 2007. Ewes one year old and older, at 3.62 million head, were 2 percent below last year.

Market sheep and lambs on January 1, 2008, totaled 1.55 million head, down slightly from January 1, 2007. Market lambs comprised 95 percent of the total marketings. Twenty-four percent were lambs under 65 pounds, 14 percent were 65 - 84 pounds, 26 percent were 85 - 105 pounds, and 36 percent were over 105 pounds. Market sheep comprised the remaining 5 percent of total marketings.

The 2007 lamb crop of 4.05 million head, was down slightly from 2006. The 2007 lambing rate was 110 lambs per 100 ewes one year old and older on January 1, 2007, down 1 percent from 2006.

Shorn wool production in the United States during 2007 was 34.5 million pounds, down 4 percent from 2006. Sheep and lambs shorn totaled 4.71 million head, down 3 percent from 2006. The average price paid for wool sold in 2007 was \$0.88 per pound for a total value of 30.3 million dollars, up 23 percent from 24.5 million dollars in 2006.

Total Goat and Kid Inventory Up 3 Percent: All goat inventory in the United States on January 1, 2008, totaled 3.02 million head, up 3 percent from 2007. Breeding goat inventory totaled 2.50 million head up 2 percent from 2007. All market goats and kids totaled 520,000 head, up 4 percent from a year ago. On January 1, 2008 meat and all other goats totaled 2.50 million head, up 4 percent from 2007. Milk goat inventory increased 4 percent to 305,000 head while angora goats were down 12 percent totaling 210,000 head. The 2007 kid crop totaled 1.94 million head for all goats, up 1 percent from 2006.

Mohair production in the United States during 2007 was 1.14 million pounds. Goats and kids clipped totaled 185,000 head. Average weight per clip was 6.20 pounds. Mohair price was \$3.78 per pound with a value of 4.31 million dollars.

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