

By Jennifer Fleming, Executive Director

On March 29, Agriculture and Agri-Food Minister Andy Mitchell announced that sheep and other ruminants would receive \$21 million to help producers deal with "...continuing cash flow pressures and to continue to implement a strategy to reshape the sector..."

For sheep producers, this announcement equates to "up to" \$14 per head for market lambs that were on farm as of December 23, 2003. "Up to" means that producers will receive 80% of the \$14 per head up front, and then once inventories are registered, the remaining 20% will be paid. In addition, producers are also eligible for \$4.3 million under the general payment based on their eligible net sales under NISA for the period of 1998 to 2002.

The Minister has also called on provinces to top up this support package by 40%.

While the industry does appreciate this cash infusion, there are some questions surrounding this support package.

The inventory date of December 23, 2003, marks a time of year when producers have sold their lambs to meet the Christmas demand and ewes have not begun to lamb yet. As a result, animal inventories are at their yearly low. In short, while the direct to producer payment is needed, and appreciated, it will not have the widespread benefit to producers that we would have hoped for. This is a position that CFS clearly articulated when the last TISP payment was issued.

Producers, who did not participate in TISP, can find application forms at www.agr.gc.ca.

Provinces that have implemented a direct to producer payment program have recognized the need to use a more realistic inventory date and as such have used September inventories to base their producer payments. However, these direct to producer payments are only occurring in select provinces (B.C., Alta, Sask, Man, & N.S) and are not considered part of the funding announced on Tuesday. In response to the Minister's request for the additional 40% support, the provinces responded with a unanimous no. (This does not affect the up to \$14 per head).

Although the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food has yet to make a commitment of a cash payment to producers, it has indicated that it will be providing \$800,000 to expand federal kill capacity in the province. OSMA sees this investment as very progressive.

The sheep industry is still in need of government support to implement the other components of our Border Closure Recovery Strategy which include domestic market development, a scrapie surveillance program and stronger industry infrastructure. The Minister did acknowledge in his announcement that the "Government of Canada will be consulting with the industry to develop other transformative initiatives including market development" and the CSF has already contacted

the Minister's office, anxious to get this consultations started.

March 29 also saw the announcement of the changes to the import regulations for U.S. Commodities. Effective immediately the border is open for sheep under 12 months of age for feeding or for immediate slaughter and for animals of any age destined for animal semen production centres. The importation policies in regards to BT/ANA have not changed.

During the past month, the CSF has also had meetings with Charlie Angus, the NDP Ag Critic and Diane Finley the PC Ag Critic, requesting their support for the implementation of our Border Closure Strategy.

The CSF has also been part of the Health Canada's Legislative Review, including the Veterinary Drug Directorate, and providing feedback on the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's (CFIA) Fair Labeling Practices Program. We are also continuing our work on ensuring that the CFIA is aware that SRM disposal is a serious issue for the sheep industry and the lack of disposal options poses a serious threat to the industry. For more information on these issues, please contact the office.

And, finally, I wish to express my deepest thanks to Monica for all her hard work over the past year. Monica will be leaving the CSF office as she has accepted a PhD position at the University of Saskatchewan. However, she has graciously agreed to continue to write articles for *From the Flock* and help out whenever she can.

This is an excerpt from a submission made to the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food by Jonathan Wort General Manager of the Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency.

The CSF is strongly encouraging all provincial organizations to work with provincial agricultural ministries to ensure that disposal methods for sheep offal are made available.

The sheep industry in Ontario and Canada is dependant on the meat packing industry in Ontario for its growth and future prosperity. We feel that one of the limiting factors in the expansion and growth of our industry is the lack of kill capacity, particularly federal capacity. In light of the continued problems created by the boarder closure with the US as the result of BSE, it is vital that our kill capacity be expanded and enhanced.

Unfortunately the opposite seems to be happening. Processors are faced with lower margins and higher costs associated with killing sheep and higher margins on cattle. With the additional costs associated with regulatory change associated with Specified Risk Management disposal and the review of the Ontario Meat Regulations, OSMA is gravely concerned that there will be loss of kill capacity for sheep at the very time that we need it the most.

Ontario is currently the largest processor of lamb in Canada with over 45% of the kill capacity for lamb in Canada. Of this only about 3% is federally inspected. With this in mind the current deliberations over the meat inspection regulations have a significant impact on the sheep industry in the rest of Canada as well as the sheep industry in Ontario. There are currently 128 plants in

Ontario licensed to kill sheep. These plants killed over of 250,000 head of sheep in 2004 and show an average of 12% increase in kill in the 2005 year to date. This despite the increased cost and challenges of doing business and the comparative cost and opportunity profit they could make by killing cattle.

Having said that, it is becoming abundantly clear that the current discussions about regulatory changes federally related to Specified Risk Material {SRM} and these deliberations over the Meat Inspection Regulations are having a significant impact on the Meat Packing Industry and consequently the Sheep Industry of Ontario.

The disposal of sheep heads and offal has been a problem since the early 1990's when the rendering industry implemented a voluntary ban on the processing of sheep by-products. At that time several plants stopped killing sheep and many required the removal of the by-products by the producer in the case of custom kill. The plants that continue to kill sheep are faced with the disposal of these products themselves, either by burial or composting. This creates considerable cost and inconvenience.

In the light of the current deliberations over SRM disposal we are seeing sky rocketing offal disposal costs even before implementation of any regulations. This is putting packers at a considerable financial disadvantage and putting many in financial peril.

Producers are faced with similar problems because of the lack of dead stock pick up for dead sheep. This leaves only two options composting or on farm burial. Ideally it would be better if dead stock pickup for sheep was available across Ontario. This would have several benefits: enhanced food safety, improved animal health, reduced environmental concerns and reduced predator problems.

To this end OSMA requests that OMAF and the federal government find economical and effective disposal options immediately for both SRM and waste sheep products and dead stock. Failure to address these problems will continue to put our industry at risk. The possible loss of kill capacity due to the lack of disposal options or increase cost will make it impossible for local packer's to compete in the international environment.

We cannot over emphasize our concern about this issue and the importance finding economical and effective answers to this problem immediately.

On-Farm Food Safety Update

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

This year's funding has come to an end and with it all the projects are winding down. A new set of funding for the coming year will be underway shortly as we proceed down the road of implementation. I am pleased to say that all provinces expressed a willingness to participate in the national objectives of the Food Safe Farm Practices Program. The first round of producer workshops was a great success. This was made possible in large part by the cooperation of provincial organizations and industry members.

It was evident at the outset of the year that both producers and industry participants wanted to know more about the program requirements and the state of food safety in agriculture before committing to producer workshops. As a result, the first step was to deliver information sessions to all the provinces. The information delivery ran through October/November and in December we prepared to deliver the producer training workshops.

Producer training workshops commenced in February and all provinces were given the opportunity to hold these workshops. The producer turn-out was very good, averaging about 20 people per workshop with a total of 21 producer workshops delivered since January in every province but one.

To sustain training into the future in an economically feasible manner, it was decided that trainers at the provincial level should be selected and trained to deliver future producer workshops based on local demand. As funding for these projects will not be available in the future it is necessary to ensure that the national program will continue through these provincial arms while retaining central managerial control at the national level. A series of “train the trainer” workshops were delivered in February and March. A total of 12 trainers to date from PEI, NL, NB, QU, MB, SK, AB, and BC attended these workshops and are eager to carry on this job as we proceed into the next year.

The next phase of funding will bring new challenges and new potentials for the program. Many producers have expressed an interest in taking the program and working with it on farm. Some producers would like to carry through with implementation and proceed towards certification, gaining national recognition for following the requirements set out in the producer manual. To meet this demand and prepare producers for the future, the next phase of implementation will involve training commodity specific auditors so that producers can be validated. At the same time we will continue to provide training workshops and work on marketing strategies that will give further exposure not only to producers but to the customers that buy our products. A significant part of Food Safety is about creating linkages between the different levels of industry to ensure that everyone is producing food under a similar standardized system (HACCP/HACCP-based) as the product moves through the chain from farm to fork.

Linkages will take on many forms. Producers have made it very clear that the cost incurred for audits is a deterrent to taking the next step toward certification. At present the CSF is working towards the most economically efficient way to deliver audits in the provinces. The Sheep Technical Committee and the CSF continue to support the investigation into the development of a national certification body that will oversee the administrative and managerial process of certification. It will be a challenge to ensure that the industry is equipped to offer a program that will be available to ALL who want to participate.

The following is the second part to a two part series of commonly asked questions that have been collected as the producer workshops were delivered.

1. Is this national certification body (Certifarm) a government body?
No. The concept of Certifarm was put forward by representatives of the industry in

consort with other commodities who felt that a central organization could deliver the certification process in a more economically feasible manner and by a body that is structured to be 3rd party objective and organized according to ISO standards. This would provide both national recognition and international legitimacy.

2. If I fail an audit will I be required to take another one?

No. At present the Food Safe Farm Practices Program is a voluntary program. As such participation is not mandatory, even if you fail an audit. It is up to the individual producer to decide whether or not he/she feels it would help them to gain official recognition. It is possible that in the near future there will be funding available to provide on farm assistance to those producers who would like help before they apply for an audit, to ensure that the process will go smoothly on the day of the formal audit.

3. Why are all of the records necessary?

The records are the proof for what you are doing on farm. Without records there is no way to verify at the time of certification that a producer is doing what s/he says they are doing. Some of the records included are only recommended to help in the organization of your management system. Required records are directly linked to potential food safety issues on farm. Must Do's in the producer manual are often associated with a record for this very reason. Thus, the need for records for the giving and storing medications, mixing medicated feeds, pesticide application and storage and others. Just because a record is 'required' does not mean you have to use it if you are not including that process on your farm. So, if you do not spread pesticides then, you do not have to be concerned with Record 9: Pesticide use in Grazing Areas. Producers do not have to use the records supplied with the producer manual, as long as all of the required information is included in your record keeping system.

4. My customers aren't asking for this. Why should I participate?

Consumers already expect that they are purchasing a food safe product. Marketing food safety is not straightforward. Directly marketing products as food safe has the potential to create a perception among consumers that those who are not on a food safety program are not producing a food safe product—which is false. Products should be marketed according based on components of quality rather than safety. However, the reality is that packing plants are showing an increased interest in obtaining product from farms that participate in a HACCP based food safety program. As well, consumers are becoming more educated and those who direct market fresh lamb may find an advantage in showcasing their participation to those who request additional proof of the product they are purchasing. Finally, producers may find it useful to participate in the early stages of program implementation to ensure that they are ready for an audit should the program become mandatory beyond the forces of the CSF—i.e. government or retail. It is possible that a producer may want to only partially participate. The manual can viewed as a

toolbox, of which s/he can use the parts that directly apply or areas where s/he may feel it is necessary to improve upon.

5. I only have a few sheep. Why is it going to cost the same for an auditor to come on my farm as it is for a large operation?

HACCP is a system of identifying potential hazards within a production system. As such, the focus is not on the individual product (the animal); rather it looks at the system through which the product is produced. Therefore, ewes in a small flock will be subject to the same 'processes' that larger flocks are subject to, whether it is administering or storing medication, mixing and storing feed, etc. Each farm, no matter how big or small is subject to the same generic principles of production and this is what is audited. The time required to perform an audit (observation and verification of on farm procedures) will be relatively similar no matter the size of farm. The pre-audit work and post-audit report are not any more or less involved depending on the size of farm. The CSF does recognize that the average flock size is 72 ewes and those with less ewes will have to spread those costs incurred over less animal units. The CSF will strive to ensure that costs are reduced as much as possible at the farm level to ensure that producers are not 'forced out' of farming.

Non-Ambulatory Livestock Cannot be Loaded, Transported or Unloaded

By Monica Séguin

On February 1st, 2005 the Canadian Food Inspection Agency introduced new rules regarding the transport of non-ambulatory livestock. The new policy makes it illegal to load, transport and unload non-ambulatory livestock, regardless of their destination. The only exception is if livestock are being transported for veterinary treatment. A non-ambulatory animal, also known as a 'downer', is an animal that is unable to stand without assistance or to walk without being dragged or carried. Examples include an animal that has fractured limbs that hampers its mobility or causes severe pain, or an animal with a body condition score indicating extreme emaciation.

Non-ambulatory livestock **MUST** be humanely euthanized on-farm. Approved methods include overdose by a barbiturate anesthetic (by veterinarian only), the use of a firearm, and captive bolt guns followed by bleed-out. The main concept is that animals should be rendered unconscious with minimal distress. Safety precautions should be taken in all cases to minimize injury to both the producer and the animal. If not used for personal consumption, carcasses should be disposed of according to provincial and federal regulations.

The CFIA will be examining animals in transit and at final destinations. Should the transport of a non-ambulatory animal be discovered, a thorough investigation will be conducted. If it can be demonstrated that the animal was unfit for travel and should not have of been loaded appropriate individuals will be fined. Both producers and truckers are responsible for ensuring that only fit animals that are able to withstand the journey are loaded onto a truck. During transport the trucker

and trucking company are liable. CFIA officials can lay charges and fines if they feel the regulations were not followed. Fines can go as high as \$4000 per contravention or under severe cases can be sent to court. More detailed information is available through the CFIA website at www.inspection.gc.ca or from the Canadian Sheep Federation.

Greenhouse gases and sheep production

By Monica Seguin

The Kyoto Protocol came into effect on February 16th, with a commitment from the federal government to reduce greenhouse gases (GHG) to levels below those of 1990 by the year 2012. Like all Canadians, the agriculture sector has been asked to do its part to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Agriculture contributes just under 10% of Canada's GHG emissions, an increase of 3% since 1990. In 2001, the Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Program for Canadian Agriculture was created in hopes of promoting the adoption of management practices that have the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the dairy, beef and pork sectors.

Sources of agricultural GHGs include not only carbon dioxide (CO₂) but also nitrous oxide (N₂O) and methane. The processes that produce these emissions are enteric what does enteric mean fermentation in livestock (methane), manure management systems (N₂O and methane), and cropping practices (CO₂ and N₂O). One third of the total emissions from the agricultural sector are produced by livestock through enteric fermentation, which has risen 11% over the past decade. This is mainly due to the increase in livestock numbers.

Sheep generally produce a small amount of methane each day as part of their normal digestive processes (20-30L), which compared to cattle that can produce 250-500L per day, is minimal. Regardless, GHG emissions from the agriculture sector are expected to increase along with the world-wide increasing demand for food.

Is there anything the sheep industry can do to help in this effort? Opportunities to reduce GHG emissions in the sheep industry are quite simple. As our industry is mainly pasture based enteric methane and methane from manure piles are the main source of GHGs, albeit a very small percentage. By providing higher quality forages, pasturing on legumes rather than mature pastures, providing sheep with additives in their grain, (such as) rotational grazing, penning or grouping strategies so they can more efficiently meet their nutritional needs can all reduce GHG from sheep and sheep manure.

Enhancing carbon sequestration within your land or 'carbon sinks' will also minimize GHG emissions, and can be done by turning it over land regularly and fertilizing grass lands so they do not starve of nutrients. Enhancing carbon sinks in agroecosystems can also be done by using a silvopasture approach. For example, a poplar plantation of 111 trees/hectare is able to support 52 sheep a year with a carbon balance in the soil of zero and that without the trees the field capacity

would have been of 19 sheep a year.

For more general information please visit www.climatechange.gc.ca.

Manitoba Sheep Association Appoints New General Manager

The Manitoba Sheep Association is pleased to announce the appointment of Robert D. Smith as part-time General Manager for the Association beginning April 1 2005. Robert Smith lives in MacGregor, Manitoba and has extensive experience in the livestock industry, and in producer organizations. He was a director of the Manitoba Cattle Producers Association from 1984-1993, and served as President from 1989-1991. During Robert's time as an MCPA Director he also served as treasurer, Vice-President, Past president and chaired the Finance, Advisory, Vendor security, and RD committees. He served as representative to the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, KAP, MB Red Meats Forum.

Robert was a founding Director of the Canadian Beef Export Federation and served as chair of the Promotion and Finance committees. In addition he was a founding director and past President of the Manitoba Farm Animal Council. From 1975-1995 Robert operated a mixed grain and cattle operation, and currently provides secretarial and management services to the Green Tree Cattle Feeders Co-op Inc Carman, Manitoba. He has also served as a Director for the Austin Credit Union.

The Manitoba Sheep Association is confident that Robert's extensive experience in the livestock sector and the provision of management and financial services to agricultural organizations will provide the sheep industry with the expertise and management support required as it moves into a recovery phase following the closure of the US border.