

By Jennifer Fleming, Executive Director

My From the Flock article this month was going to outline what producers needed to do in order to export feeder lambs and lambs for slaughter into the United States on March 7th. Despite the fact that some of the requirements for exporting lambs into the U.S. were raising concerns (e.g., branding), there was hope in knowing that we at least had *some* access to the U.S. market. Wednesday, however, much of this hope vanished as we learned that a U.S. District Court in Montana granted a preliminary injunction supporting R-Calf's partition; effectively delaying the implementation of the rule that would allow the opening of the border. The American Meat Institute is expressing "strong disappointment" with the injunction and continues to support the proposed rule.

With the subsequent action of U.S. Senate, which narrowly voted to overturn the USDA's rule to lift the 22-month-old ban on livestock imports from Canada, the boarder closure seems doomed to continue. President Bush is indicating that he will veto any resolution that seeks to disapprove the USDA rule to re-open the border, if it one were to cross his desk. The Canadian government is indicating that it cannot appeal the court decision and the USDA, is expressing "disappointment" in the ruling. Both are currently reassessing the outcome of the court decision and Senate action.

I have been told that we should not expect anything to happen soon.

The federal, provincial and territorial Ministers met this week in Ottawa, were they reaffirmed commitment to "...*continue to respond to industry needs*". We are in desperate need of a response to the Sheep Boarder Closure Recovery Strategy. The Canadian sheep industry has been waiting since November for a response from the federal government on the Border Closure Recovery Strategy. While individual provinces have indicated their support for producers with cash payments, we have yet to hear anything from the federal government. The length of time that is taking for a decision to be made is quite *frustrating and an issue that CSF continues to lobby hard to have resolved*.

The industry also needs to begin to explore other opportunities, both domestic and international, and look for markets that we have not traditionally considered. Given the current situation we need to change the way we think. As an industry we can use this time to reassess our goals and develop a plan that moves away US market dependencies (as the Cattle industry is doing) and build an industry that will expand and prosper to its full potential.

In addition to the sheep industry needing support from the Federal government with regard to the Border Closure Recovery Strategy, we also need to ensure that our voice is heard when it comes to the issues related to the current deliberations over regulation of Specified Risk Material (SRM). There is \$80 million in the federal budget for the government to find solutions to the issue of the disposal of SRMs. The sheep industry *must* be included in the solutions. We are currently seeing expansion of the lamb and sheep processing industry in Canada and must ensure that Government programs include options for disposal of lamb and sheep offal. Our industry has

been faced with the problems of waste disposal for over a decade and there have yet to be any solutions found to our issue. The CSF has commented and is lobbying on this issue and will continue to do so. It is vital that our voice be heard and our problems of waste disposal be addressed. The national consultation on this issue is winding down and individual provincial groups need to be actively involved on this issue in their own province, to make sure that our industry's issues are included in the problem solving process that is proposed.

National Traceability Conference

By Randy Eros, Manitoba Sheep Association

National Traceability Congress – Ottawa, February 21 & 22, 2005

This two-day congress brought over 75 Industry and government stakeholders and policy makers together to discuss the issues around Traceability in Agriculture. The objectives of the congress were:

1) To reach common understanding among key stakeholders on:

- a) the domestic and international drivers for traceability by 2008; and
- b) the steps Canada needs to take to prepare for this challenge.

2) To establish the mechanism or process required to move forward on these steps.

3) To ensure that all the stakeholders leave the room with:

- a) a sense of momentum; and
- b) an understanding of what role, if any they may be required to play in implementation.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada has a stated goal of 80% traceability in Agriculture by the year 2008. That goal, however, has largely been left undefined. This congress provided AAFC with some much needed input on how *industry* views that goal and exactly what it means to different players.

A wide range of speakers touched on the importance of Traceability from primary production right through to the retail level. While breakout sessions were spent looking at issues like Tech Trends, Commercial and Legislative influences and how National Traceability could/should be governed. Industry Challenges at the Primary, Processing and Distribution levels were also identified.

Time was also spent discussing how to develop an overarching Traceability Strategy, how best to deal with privacy and security issues and how “Whole Chain traceability” might operate. Current Traceability initiatives and their direction were also discussed.

The wrap up of the congress had the group trying to decide on next steps and who the key players are in these steps. The 3 main groups identified were the Canadian Livestock Identification Agency, the Federal, Provincial, Territorial Ag. Ministers and CANTRACE.

The need to inventory all that is going on in Traceability in this country was identified. Right now there are a wide variety of initiatives (from programs like our CSIP and ATQ right up the food chain to DNA tracking in pork) and a comprehensive list of these initiatives are needed.

One challenge is that not all of the players are currently at the table. One example of this from our Industry was the lack of representation from the small and medium sized processing facilities. A large portion of the lamb consumed in Canada is processed in these facilities and the creation of a Traceability program that does not involve them is a risky undertaking. We understood the needs of this segment of our industry when we created the CSIP and we need to keep it in mind as the Federal government expands the demands of traceability in agriculture.

One of the challenges we face as an Industry over the next year is to re-evaluate our idea of Traceability and determine if our current CSIP program will meet both today's needs and tomorrows.

On-Farm Food Safety Update

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

The first wave of implementation for the producer training workshops is well under way and there has been a lot of good feedback from producers. The turn outs are very promising and I want to thank all of the members of the sheep OFFS committee for helping to organize these workshops.

There have been a lot of good questions about the requirements of the program. While production systems differ somewhat from province to province many of the concerns and questions that arise at these workshops are similar. The following is a list of frequently asked questions that I have compiled from these workshops. The March edition of From the Flock will include more of these questions.

1. Is this program going to be made mandatory and who is going to make it mandatory?

The Canadian Sheep Federation has no intention of making the program mandatory. It is, however, the CSF's responsibility to inform producers on the future trends of the industry and in this respect there are two main drivers to this program—retail and government. In the future it is *possible* that retailers and packers will demand that farms comply with the same standardized process of production (HACCP) that all other levels of industry are moving towards. With the publication of the Haines Report in Ontario and other legislative changes being introduced, it is possible that the government could make on farm food safety systems mandatory in the future. The CSF wants to ensure that producers are aware of the drivers of this program, so that producers are prepared to react to the demands of the industry.

2. Do the requirements of the program supersede the requirements on import lamb?

Currently, the major offshore lamb producing countries are developing food safety systems that are based on the same HACCP principles. International equivalency in standardization has been referred to continuously within the Canadian On-Farm Food Safety Program. While this program remains voluntary, it is difficult to lobby for imposed import restrictions based on a perceived discrepancy between the food safety programs from the countries in question.

3. I believe that the program is good in theory, but it is too costly. What is the CSF doing to ensure that smaller producers aren't going to be squeezed out of the industry?

The program has many potential cost benefits, but there will be costs that the producer will have to incur if he/she would like to become certified. Audits in general are not cheap procedures. The CSF is cognizant of this and is taking measures to reduce the impact these costs will have on both small and large flock producers. The COFFS Working Group, comprised largely of national food safety representatives, is currently negotiating with the CFIA towards a producer declaration tier of participation that will reduce the number of on farm audits while retaining the national and international recognition afforded to producers through CFIA approval. This level of participation will greatly reduce the costs associated with certification. There will be funding available in the future to pay for on farm assistance, as well as funding for producers who wish to take the training workshops in the future. The CSF will continue to lobby for the first audit to be federally funded as this the most effective cost saving initiative that will provide incentive for producers to become certified. The CSF looking at ways in which producers can be financially rewarded for participation. Value chain formations are a natural outgrowth of linking all industry levels to the same standardized system of production. The success of market strategies will depend in large part on the level of producer participation. With a national flock average of 72 ewes, the CSF recognizes that many producers will find the costs difficult to bear. The CSF will ensure at every step of the way that the cost of participation is reduced to the lowest possible number. The CSF does not seek to profit from the producer cost associated with the audit process.

4. There is a lot of similarity between already existing programs and this program (organic certification, flock health programs, biosecurity programs etc.).

The CSF is currently looking at ways in which we can dovetail these types of programs under the umbrella of the food safety program to reduce the redundancies in training. The advantage that the Food Safe Farm Practices Program has is that it will be a nationally recognized CFIA approved program.

5. Will I have to request a separate audit for each commodity on my farm?

While each commodity has its own food safety program with its own specific requirements, there is, nonetheless, a lot of likeness of farm management practices. It will be up to the industry to build relationships between these commodities both with respect

to auditor training as well as the audit design itself. In a mixed farming scenario, producers can't afford to pay for an auditor to come on farm for each commodity they have. The industry will have to ensure that auditors are multi-commodity trained and that they can audit all commodities on a farm in one audit.

AUDITING

Individuals interested in becoming future auditors of the Canadian Sheep and Lamb Food Safe Farm Practices Program (and other food safety programs) should take notice of the following dates. This is for the generic week long auditor training course. This provides you with the necessary background to attend a commodity-specific auditor training course which will be required to become a recognized auditor. The commodity specific auditor training will be offered to interested individuals in the near future.

The upcoming schedule of courses for the on-farm food safety auditor training program is as follows:

APRIL 18 - 22 - Surrey, BC (English)

MAY 2 - 6 - Saskatoon, SK (English)

MAY 16 - 20 - Fredericton, NB (English) - Instructors will be bilingual. Participants can use English or French course manuals, although the group discussions will likely be in English.

Please reply directly to Cory Rybuck (cory.rybuck@sgs.ca) if you are interested in participating.

What is Traceability and What Role Does the Canadian Sheep Industry Play?

By Monica Séguin, Administrative Assistant

Most of us, by now, have heard or read that the government has a goal of having 80 per cent of domestic products (at the retail level) fully traceable by 2008. What impact though, will this have on the Canadian Sheep Industry and what role do we have to play?

Traceability is defined as the ability to trace the whereabouts of a product, for example a lamb from birth to slaughter. What this means is that where an animal has been born and raised, or if it was moved from its farm of origin and mixed with other animals, could all be quickly determined. Such information would be critically important in the event of an animal disease outbreak as it would mitigate economic losses by quickly isolating infected areas, thus preventing livestock from moving into or out of, the identified area. Traceability will not prevent disease, however, it is a tool, which can be used to minimize the impact of a foreign animal disease outbreak.

Currently, Agri-Traçabilité Québec operates a fully automated traceability system for beef, pork and ovine sectors. The USDA is also moving towards establishing a system that would be able to

identify all premises and animals that have come in direct contact with a foreign animal disease within 48 hours. Other commodity groups are also in the midst of evaluating or creating traceability systems to meet their specific needs.

So where does the sheep industry fit scheme of things? The Canadian Sheep Federation is currently investigating potential traceability strategies. However there are many questions that need to be answered before a strategy can be developed. Collecting and reporting animal movement information to establish a travel record of each animal's life is an enormous undertaking, requiring significant development as well as substantial infrastructure. Furthermore electronic ear tags as well as the technology required to read the tags are costly. And if our goal is to provide a timely and cost-effective program while ensuring that it is functional, practical and reliable, we need to know what kind of economic impact this will have on our producers. However, in order for us to be able to develop a strategy that meets our industry needs but that at the same time is economically viable – WE NEED PRODUCER INPUT.

The Canadian Sheep Federation in conjunction with provincial organizations are asking producers to participate in a National Sheep Producers Economic Survey. This survey asks detailed information about farm operating revenues and expenses but also basic questions about flock identification and management. The information collected from this survey will be compiled and used to determine the economic impact of a full-electronic traceability system.

If you are interested in participating in the economic survey, please contact your provincial organization or the Canadian Sheep Federation.