

*By Jennifer Fleming, Executive Director*

Since the inception of the Canadian Sheep Identification Program (CSIP), the Canadian Sheep Federation has been committed to recognizing a radio-frequency identification (RFID) tag as part of the program. With the increase in the use of electronic identification in the livestock industry, and the growing need for the sheep industry to have access to these tags; the Allflex tags have recently been approved for use in the CSIP.

The Allflex plastic dangle tag and RFID tag are available to producers as of November 1, 2004. The tags can be used in place of the Ketchum Kurl Lock #3 pink tag as the use of the Allflex tags is not mandatory. *The only exception is that producers, who are shipping animals to Quebec, must use the Allflex RFID tag in conjunction with either the Allflex dangle tag or the Ketchum tag as of January 1, 2005.*

In Quebec rather than an ID system the livestock sector is implementing a traceability program. This program is administered by Agri- Traceabilité Québec {ATQ}. As part of this program animals, including sheep, are identified before 30 days of age with an RFID tag and a dangle tag. The movement of animals in Quebec is tracked using these RFID tags. Truckers, sale barns, and slaughter plants will all record the movement of animals through their premises using the RFID tags and electronic readers, these records of movement are then reported to ATQ. This allows ATQ to effectively track the lifetime movement of an animal.

For producers in provinces other than Quebec you need to be aware of the regulations that are being implemented in Quebec so that you can continue to conduct business with producers and packing plants within that province. This has generated several common questions;

*If I am transporting sheep through the province of Quebec to another province do they have to be tagged with RFID tags?*

- No. As long as the sheep are in transit through the province to a destination outside the province of Quebec all that is required is the standard Ketchum Kurl-Lock #3 CSIP tag.

*What happens if I sell a breeding ewe or ram to a producer in Quebec?*

- The animal must be identified with an RFID tag before it crosses the Quebec border.

*If I sell lambs direct to a packing plant in Quebec what do I do?*

- In order for the lambs to be accepted by a packing plant in Quebec they will have to be identified with both an RFID tag and either a Ketchum Kurl- Lock #3 CSIP tag or the Allflex CSIP dangle tag. Packing plants in Quebec are not allowed to apply tags so it will be the shippers' responsibility to make sure that the lambs are tagged.

*What happens if I ship lambs to a plant in Quebec without the proper tags?*

- It is an offence for either a trucker or a packing plant in Quebec to accept lambs not identified with adequate ID. You will not be able to sell these animals in Quebec and will have to bring them home until they are tagged.

*What happens if sheep I consign to a sale barn are bought by a Quebec buyer for a Quebec packing plant?*

- It is the responsibility of the transporter and the buyer to make sure that the sheep has the correct tags. They will have to ensure that the animals are tagged with CSIP RFID tags and this information is recorded and passed on to ATQ.

*Do I have to tag my sheep with RFID if I am taking them to a livestock show in Quebec and then bringing them home?*

- Yes.

*If I have sheep consigned to a breeding stock sale like the All Canada Sheep Classic that was held in Richmond Quebec in 2003 would the sheep have to be tagged with RFID?*

- Yes.

For more information on the subject of RFID in general and its application in Quebec please contact CSF at 1-888-684-7739 or ATQ at 1-866-270-4319.

---

## **From the Chair**

*By Randy Eros, Chair*

When I look back over the last year the vision is clouded by the ever present US Border closure. The loss of our US market has had a devastating effect on our market and producers from all parts of the country have felt the hurt. As the spring lambs start to hit the market we are still faced with prices that will for many of us bring returns that are below our costs of production.

But we are a resilient lot and though I can't give you a time line and I can tell you things will get better. With the US election now over, hopefully the USDA will begin work on the proposed rules that will allow trade to resume.

In addition to watching what is happening in the south we are currently take action here at home. The industry has been working on a strategic plan that will help ensure the long term viability of our industry. This plan outlines a greater commitment to expanded scrapie surveillance and flock certification programs. It also outlines how the CSF can aid provinces in areas of market development and the gathering of market intelligence. If there is a small silver lining in this crisis it is that we have finally got the Federal Government (at a Ministerial level) paying attention to our Industry.

The last year has seen our Industry move forward on several other fronts. The Canadian Sheep Identification Program (CSIP) was introduced January 1<sup>st</sup> and met with wide spread acceptance from producers. As with any program there were a few bumps along the road but the reports from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency show that we are getting excellent compliance. As of November 1<sup>st</sup> producers from all across Canada will be able to purchase an electronic ID tag or and dangle tag that is also a CSIP tag. This is a case of the program responding to the needs of the producer. This program will continue to evolve as the market place and producers make new demands of traceability.

The CSF is a founding member of the Canadian Livestock Identification Agency. This is the multi-species group that will provide a central body for work on animal ID and traceability programs for the livestock industry in Canada.

This fall the CSF has also started to roll out the Farm Safe Food Practices program. This is our industry's On Farm Food Safety program and it will position producers to take the next step in meeting consumer expectations for food safety.

The work done on behalf of producers across this country happens at several levels. There is a core of dedicated volunteers across this country that spend countless hours in meetings and on conference call discussing industry issues at local, provincial and national levels. These same folks run provincial sales and take part in producer extension programs. They host out of province visitors and attend industry events all with an eye to bettering the industry.

There is equal dedication at another level. The staff at our Provincial and National offices has done an incredible job over this last year. The demands that we have put on these folks have been met with unwavering enthusiasm. As a shepherd I know that the day is 24 hours long and there is many a day when I see all 24 of them. Something I am sure many of you are familiar with. What thrills me about our staff across this country is that they carry this same work ethic into their jobs. These folks are often the voice and face of our Industry to the public and government and we can be proud of them.

For my part as chair of the CSF I would like to take this opportunity to thank the CSF staff for their hard work and dedication in 2004. Jennifer Fleming, our Executive Director has endured me saying "Oh and Jenn, just one more thing" way too often and always with the same answer "I'm on it". Unreasonable deadlines and insurmountable tasks have become her everyday challenges.

Ryan Van Loon, our Farm Safe Food Practices coordinator will have spent many an hour in airports and meeting rooms this fall as he talks about our new program to producers all across the country. And Monica Séguin our Administrative Assistant has not only added the finesse of official bilingualism to our office but has also developed the talent of softly nagging the chair for his From the Flock missives.

Now my challenge to you is this. Dig up your Provincial Associations phone number (you may even remember it from the last time you called to complain about check-off dollars or lamb prices or the provincial sale dates) and call the staff there and thank them for the good work they do on your behalf.

---

## **Update on the Food Safe Farm Practices Program**

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

Since taking on the position of National Coordinator for On Farm Food Safety in April we have been gearing up to implementing the Food Safe Farm Practices Program for this fall. Thanks to the continued support from the sheep OFFS committee and provincial organizations, we have begun implementation. Some provinces have elected to go ahead with the Producer Training Workshops while others are encouraging producers to attend our information sessions to become more familiar with the program before choosing to enrol.

On October 23 the first information session was held in Stephenville, Newfoundland. Producers, while cautious about the program, were appreciative of the opportunity to become more familiar with the state of food safety in our industry and recognize the need for our industry to be proactive.

On October 29 the first training session was held at the Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency's AGM. The turn out to the workshop was good and the participants provided constructive feedback on the place that this program has in our industry. It is important that producers have the opportunity to voice their opinion so that we can ensure that we provide a program that balances the needs of industry with the practicalities of farm management.

We are still on board for providing the producer workshop through mail out and the Internet. This will ensure that those who do not have an opportunity to attend a Workshop will nonetheless have equal access to participating in this program.

Over the next two months I will be visiting all 10 provinces to deliver the message of our Food Safe Farm Practices Program. I am looking forward to the journey ahead!

---

## **Prospects of a 'National Farm Animal Care Council'**

*By Monica Séguin, Executive Administrative Assistant*

Currently less than 3% of Canadians are directly involved in agriculture. As a result, consumers are, by and large, unaware of farming practices or of livestock and poultry production. It is only recently that the general public is becoming more concerned about where and how their food is being produced. Food safety is at the forefront of consumer concerns whereas animal welfare appears to be a low profile issue, although it is an issue that is growing in popularity.

To date, the Canadian Sheep Industry has been relatively free from animal welfare criticisms. As a consequence, it has not attracted a great deal of attention compared to other livestock commodities. However, in the past few months, there have been a few reports of sheep-related neglect and one incidence of animal cruelty charges being laid. This past summer, the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) investigated a case of animal neglect at a farm in the Eldorado area and charged a Toronto man

with animal cruelty, after several hundred sheep were found locked in a small paddock deprived of food and water for several days. Incidences of this nature are quite disturbing and they cast a shadow on our industry.

Regardless of the type of production system, sheep producers are charged with the responsibility of providing their animals with the necessities of life. The Codes of Practice for Sheep were designed as a tool to promote sound management and proper welfare practices but in some instances they can be subjective. Although following the Codes is voluntary, both the public and commercial/retail sectors are beginning to request accountability from their partners in food production. To address this situation some commodity groups are investigating ways to convert their Codes of Practice into objective, auditable standards. This process should not be alarming as the majority of producers are already caring for their animals according to the guidelines.

Due to the changing times, it is critically important that organizations look after their own animal care standards before someone else does it for them. As an example, McDonald's will only do business with egg producers that increase their cage size to a minimum of 72 square inches per bird, which exceeds the guidelines laid out in the 'Recommended Code of Practice for Poultry.' We cannot afford to wait for the retail sector to determine the minimum requirements for our commodity; we should be proactive and determine the criteria for ourselves with help from individuals that are knowledgeable in the sector of sheep welfare but that keep the producer's interest in mind.

The problem all industries currently face is that consumers are not well informed about the animal welfare issues surrounding livestock and poultry production. There seems to be tremendous opportunity here to coordinate a national approach to public education and auditable welfare standards. Provincial farm animal care associations are doing a tremendous job educating the public and working with producers, however these organizations are only represented in four provinces, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario and they lack national coordination. Therefore, a national approach to farm animal care would in concept, be a collaborative, cross commodity, whole value chain approach, that can incorporate current provincial organizations into its infrastructure and provide on-going support to producers and stakeholders. This body would be structured in order to respond to national and international issues such as research priorities, the codes of practice, and trade.

There is general support from stakeholders, in the livestock sector, for developing a national and collective approach to animal care, although there is resistance in developing a new organizational structure with more bureaucracy. A possible avenue is to use an existing organization that would coordinate animal care initiatives in our country. During the next few months, stakeholders will be discussing the future and development of a *National Farm Animal Care Council*. The CSF has been involved with animal care initiatives in the past and will continue to be a representative, for sheep producers, at the table.