

Notes from our Chair **2003 – The Year in Review**

January 1, 2004

2003 has proven to be a very challenging year for the Canadian Sheep Federation. We started the year with an ambitious plan of clearly defined objectives centered around issues like better communication, the Canadian Sheep Identification Program and On Farm Food Safety.

With the discovery of BSE in May we found that our focus for the year would have to be broadened. The initial realization of how our industry would be implicated in the US border closure was compounded by the difficulty in being seen in the shadow of the cattle industry.

An incredible amount of time has been spent by staff and board members at both the provincial and federal levels. At times it feels as if it is all to no avail. The arguments that decisions be based on science seemed to have fallen on deaf ears in both Ottawa and Washington. I would like to thank our provincial organizations for their excellent work in bringing the issue to the media. With our limited resources, CSF will continue to work diligently to respond to this industry crisis. On a more positive note the challenge of the US border closure has led the CSF to be more focused on a number of issues.

Changes to the National Scrapie program, identified as a priority in 2003, has been highlighted for action. A quick look at this year's agenda shows that there will be significant movement on this issue. The interest is both provincial and national with members coming to the table ready to support this program. Thanks to Ian Clark and Jonathan Wort for the considerable time and effort on this issue.

The need to discuss the border closure with US producers and to work with the ASI on the issue has seen the CSF reestablish stronger communications with our major trading partner. Our delegation to Washington in early September opened the door for better industry understanding. We have, so far, been unable to move the USDA or ASI beyond the point of accepting market animals over 12 months of age. We were encouraged by the reception we received in D.C. Thanks to Cathy Lennon, OSMA General Manager, for both her input and administrative support during the mission.

The approval of a CAFI grant will allow the CSF to continue to work with the ASI and to explore developing a relationship with Mexican producers.

Outside of the border issue the CSF has still been able to undertake the major goals for the year. Our CSIP is about to become mandatory and the tags are moving into producers hands across the country. We still have a lot of work to do as the January 1st start date approaches.

One of the benefits of the discovery of BSE in Canada has been the acceptance of mandatory animal identification by the vast majority of Canadian sheep and lamb producers. The issue quickly went from "Why should I tag?" to "How do I get my Tags?"

I am confident that our CSIP will change. As we are taking these first steps this year and next we will not only be expected to iron out the wrinkles in the system we have

created but to also look forward to the changes that may be required. The CSIP committee's dedication to this project is to be commended. The time difference across this great nation had some folks missing supper to participate in our conference calls while others were staying up way too late. A thank you also goes to Maureen Duffy and the ASWC for their diligent work on the difficult and continuing revisions of the various CSIP contracts.

The COFFS program, now known as the Farm Safe Food Practices program, took some giant steps forward. Jennifer Fleming, National coordinator was hired in March and assumed the task of completing the producer manual and moving the project through it's many steps. We are now about to start of CFIA review. The New Year will see the start of training for both trainers and producers. Much work still needs to be done as Jennifer works to develop further material for the audit portion of the program. Many thanks to John Hemsted, chair of the COFFS committee, the committee members and to Beth Kyle of OSMA for all the work she put into the project.

The day to day operations of the CSF fall to our Executive Director, Jennifer Vollmar. On part time basis she has the demanding task of shepherding this board through the maze of projects and activities. Our \$75,000 in producer dues has been multiplied 3 fold through CAFI, AAFC and COFFS grant applications. All of this means that the workload of the Executive Director has expanded considerably. As Chair, I would like to extend my thanks to Jennifer for her hard work and dedication during this very difficult year.

As Chair, I have found this to be and extremely challenging but rewarding year. The disappointment of not being able to accomplish more, nationally or internationally, on the border issue has been my greatest frustration. It has taught me that as important as WE know the sheep and lamb industry is, we need to raise our profile outside of our industry.

On the other side I have had the reward of getting to work with a variety of dedicated producers and staff from across the country. I like to say "It is a good day when you learn something" – 2003 has, from that perspective been full of very good days.

Much more needs to be accomplished.

Randy Eros
Chair, Canadian Sheep Federation