

Points of View

A forum for sharing perspectives from across the Canadian Sheep Industry



CANADIAN SHEEP FEDERATION

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Myth: Provincial government involvement in the Canadian Sheep and Lamb Food Safe Farm Practices Program gives government control over the program.

Having the government involved in the program only makes it stronger. While there is no requirement for the provincial government to participate – outside of a request for them to participate on Technical Review of the program by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency – provincial government staff has sat on the Canadian Sheep Federation's On-Farm Food Safety Working Group (OFFS WG) since it was created in the mid-90s.

All of the provincial government reps on the OFFS WG are sheep specialists and/or vets from their respective provinces, and have been vital in creating a credible program. They provide valuable insight both as sheep specialists, as well as knowing their own provincial laws and regulations that could work in conjunction with elements in the program.

In Manitoba, for example, training for the Food Safe Farm Practices Program is being conducted by the Manitoba provincial government. This is not the only province or commodity where the provincial government is involved in delivering training for these types of programs. Quite often, due to lack of resources, government representatives play a significant role in helping provincial sheep associations offer programming to the producer.

Provincial staff who are willing to act as trainers and/or auditors MUST have the same qualifications as any other individual, including taking and successfully passing a "Train the

Trainer Course" and/or the CSF Sheep-specific Auditor Training Course.

There is still time to submit your viewpoint on this topic. Let us know:

- Should more funding be provided to commodity groups to allow industry to lead the training programs?
- Do you feel government has a role to play in delivering these programs?
- Would the program be better supported by producers if it was delivered through representative commodity groups?

Please send your comments to pointsofview@cansheep.ca, or contact me directly. I'm looking forward to hearing from you, and sharing your point of view in a future issue.

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P.S. Please turn to pages 6-7 to read about the successful implementation of the Turkey Farmers of Canada (TFC) OFFS program. TFC's Executive Director, Phil Boyd, and Associate Manager - Technical Affairs, Science and Regulation, Colleen McElwain discuss the benefits of government involvement in the development of their program.

Letters to the Editor

Comments in response to fines for animals without tags (January edition of Points of View)

"I am still not clear as to what we, the slaughter facility, are supposed to do with untagged live animals. Will all the lambs and sheep sold through the stockyards come with ear tag sheets? If not, how do we determine to whom the lambs/sheep belong?" - Luke Desimone

Luke Desimone

Plant Manager, Abingdon Meat Packers Ltd.

It is totally mind numbing how anyone can support a \$1,300 fine for untagged animals. Does anyone know how many lambs or sheep one has to sell to make that kind of profit?

Given the nature of lambs and sheep, how do you visually inspect 300 lambs as you try to load and unload these animals? We all know that they like to run as a bunch and this is the only way to load them effectively and humanely. We have all experienced the effort it takes to load single lambs or sheep.

I am still not clear as to what we, the slaughter facility, are supposed to do with untagged live animals. Will all the lambs and sheep sold through the stockyards come with ear tag sheets? If not, how do we determine to whom the lambs/sheep belong? How can you keep multiple lots separate on the truck? Without producer lists of ear tags supplied to the auction barns and a flow through of that information to the trucker and slaughterhouse it will rapidly become an unsupportable system.

If our purchased lambs become co-mingled at the stockyards, as we buy multiple lots, and lambs start to lose ear tags, how do you determine which lamb belongs to which producer? Better yet, does my driver leave those lambs sitting at the stockyard and if so, who owns those lambs? Rest assured that I will not pay for product I did not receive or that I had to leave behind.

We are already suffering a shortage of lamb in Ontario. Please continue doing your utmost to drive lamb farmers out of production that way we can increase our imports even more.

Unbelievably yours,
Luke Desimone

Letters to the Editor

Comments in response to fines for animals without tags (January 2011 edition of Points of View)

" How many diseased animals, since pink tags became the law, have been traced back to the producer? How many producers have been fined? What is the total amount of fines collected? " - Ernie Hildebrand

Ernie Hildebrand

Crystal City, MB

I've mulled over the Jan 2011 issue and am troubled with the whole traceability issue as a producer. At this point, I would like to know if CFIA produces any material on their accountability to their mandate.

How many diseased animals, since pink tags became the law, have been traced back to the producer? How many producers have been fined? What is the total amount of fines collected?

How about fines to truckers, auction yards?

I have sold many female replacements over the years with pink tags attached, and some of these have been sold and resold several times. I suspect 10-20% of the tags get torn out. How does the current producer ever figure out the flock of origin in these cases?

I did read an article in the Manitoba Co-operator last fall, in which an official stated that the pink tags never really worked. So it seems to me, that the only thing that CFIA is doing is fining people in an ill-conceived program. Can you reassure me?

Editor's Note:

You have raised some excellent questions. We are following up with CFIA regarding the number of fines that have been laid on industry. While I agree there have been tremendous problems with the pink tags, such as infection and retention, the focus on enforcement needs to be on compliance and should not reflect dysfunctional tags. Therefore, producers who tag their animals but tags are lost due to functionality or infection should not be penalized under the current regulations. There has been increased concern in moving forward with RFID tags to ensure proper protocols and testing to approve tags with optimal readability, retention, ease of application and, of course, cost. CFIA is currently working on formalizing those standards for tag approvals.

Letters to the Editor

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"It doesn't matter how many tags or what type you put in a sheep or other livestock – without a paper trail showing to whom you sold or where you got them from there is still no real Record of Movement." - Lorna Wall

Lorna Wall

Manitoba

In response to the following statement in the January Points of View: *"Although, the majority of industry stakeholders have fully embraced mandatory traceability, according to Sloik there is still a small group that have not. He says this is the group the CFIA are targeting."*

This statement by a government official is a very serious statement and tells a lot about how our industry as a whole is going to be targeted. I have long been against the moving from CSIP to RFID because I feel that the more expensive tags still do not address the issue, which CSF claims is the actual traceability. It doesn't matter how many tags or what type you put in a sheep or other livestock – without a paper trail showing to whom you sold or where you got them from there is still no real Record of Movement. I have dutifully filled these out from the very beginning, but I also know that many other producers don't have a clue what they are. When I sell an animal privately I even supply the reverse copy of the Record of Movement to the purchaser with all applicable information filled in.

But having a government agency targeting our industry, even some members, is a very negative attitude and not one of respect for the rest of us.

Also, it is hard to believe that the CSF would be working this hard on traceability without having such a large monetary carrot being fed to them. I think that if the government was not paying CSF this chunk of change, the CSF would be working harder to defend the membership from unreasonable penalty. We have already been warned repeatedly that truckers being fined for lost tags are going to start refusing to transport sheep in the future.

I have to agree with Patrick Smith who said *"Perhaps the real objective is to eliminate the sheep industry as a viable farming group so that the government doesn't have to deal with this miserably small group of hopelessly optimistic individuals."*

It seems that the government agencies are indeed trying to eliminate us from the farming scene.

Letters to the Editor

Comments in response to imported lamb from New Zealand and Australia (October 2010 edition of Points of View)

"Canada should remain independent, so as to retain a fair share of our domestic market, otherwise we will be gobbled up by bigger international participants. This is not "protectionism;" this is reality, as we cannot out-produce New Zealand and Australia." - Gil Carter

Gil Carter

I still feel that Canadian lamb DOES face stiff competition from New Zealand/Australian lamb, because their market price is lower, they have larger numbers of lamb to fill demand, uniformity of carcass, cost of production – even with shipping costs added, our climate and provincial parochialism. They (NZ-Aus) are unified – we are not! In BC, the negative aspects are even more pronounced: distance, lack of plants, new meat regulations that are not practical or enforceable (e.g. Pitt Meadows Meats incident), combined with added costs, small producers (many different breeds, carcass size), reduced government services (provincial and federal), and poor support for agriculture.

As an ex-marketer for the B.C. Sheep Federation with a purchasing background, I have seen flocks decline and frustration grow with less domestic lamb in BC on offer at retail outlets.

Canada should remain independent, so as to retain a fair share of our domestic market, otherwise we will be gobbled up by bigger international participants. This is not "protectionism;" this is reality, as we cannot out-produce New Zealand and Australia. They will always sell to any market requiring lamb, as agriculture is their major industry and source of revenue.

We are now seeing more New Zealand beef in our stores (why, when we have an abundance and high exports?). It seems oil, politics, and urbanization hold the populace's attention. Sadly, Canadian agriculture is low on the agenda – years ago it was otherwise.

Turkey Farmers of Canada On-Farm Food Safety Program

Phil Boyd, Executive Director & Colleen McElwain, Associate Manager - Technical Affairs, Science and Regulation

Developing and implementing a nationwide on-farm food safety (OFFS) program is a big task that requires the joint efforts of different industry stakeholders. Most of Canada's commodity groups have been working on OFFS programs in recent years but one industry has been leading the way. The Turkey Farmers of Canada (TFC) developed their first OFFS material in 1996. Since that time TFC has created a complete OFFS manual that is in line with HACCP and has been accepted by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA).

The Canadian Sheep Federation recently spoke with TFC's Executive Director, Phil Boyd, and Associate Manager - Technical Affairs, Science and Regulation, Colleen McElwain, about the organization's successful implementation of their OFFS program.

TFC's On-Farm Food Safety Program

The goal of the TFC OFFS program is to provide turkey farmers with the most current measures around food safety. The program is based on turkey production practices and scientific literature; it meets regulatory and best management practices and is reviewed annually by TFC.

McElwain says that the program was implemented so that Canadian turkey farmers have the necessary means to continue to produce high quality, safe food and the capacity to prove it. "Our program falls under the HACCP concept of say what you do, do what you say and prove it," she says.

Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point is an internationally recognized system to control food safety during the production process based on sound science.

Stakeholder Involvement

A number of stakeholders have worked together to make the program a reality. Taking the reins on program development and implementation is the TFC On-Farm Programs Committee - a group mainly made up of turkey farmers.

There are also provisions within TFC's process to ensure that processors are consulted so they can provide input on program elements that have a direct impact on them.

The federal government is involved in the TFC OFFS program too. Their participation is related to the technical recognition process offered by the CFIA for on-farm food safety programs. McElwain also notes that TFC acknowledges Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada for its funding contribution under Growing Forward, used towards the development of the TFC On-Farm Food Safety Program.

Importance of Government Involvement

Boyd says there are three main areas of importance when it comes to working with the government.

First off, government involvement provides a sense of comfort in the marketplace. It shows that the OFFS program is one based on science and is not a program for a program's sake.

Government involvement is also important on a trade level. Although exporting is not the focus of the domestic turkey sector, the industry wants to be confident that what is being imported into the marketplace meets equivalent standards.

Finally, government involvement goes some way towards reassuring producers. "Producers understand that there is validity in the work they put into food safety because it has been reviewed and passed by a third party," Boyd says.

The Implementation and Audit Process

According to McElwain, implementation of TFC's OFFS program is going well across the country. The program is voluntary in some provinces and mandatory in others, depending on the province's marketing board. To date, 67% of all producers have been certified under the program, and 87% have received training.

The program is monitored by auditors who have to meet specific training and education requirements. Auditors need to also successfully complete an auditor training course and a HACCP training course.

McElwain says auditor training is critical because it ensures that auditors understand the program criteria and it creates consistency in the application and auditing process.

Who acts as program auditors varies from province to province since the program is implemented by the provincial turkey marketing boards. In some cases TFC auditors are board staff and in others the auditors are contracted by a provincial board. In one of the provinces, provincial government employees have been trained to act as auditors.

When asked if there is any concern about a provincial government employee acting as an auditor, Boyd replies, "I can't see any issue, as long as he/she meets the right criteria. Every auditor is trained and accredited under the same protocol."

Boyd also adds that producers do not need to be concerned, so long as the auditor is appropriately trained, and that the training is provided by the appropriate party, in our sectors' case, TFC.

"There's a comfort for our producers that the program has been essentially designed by their own peers and met CFIA review standards. An auditor cannot change that," says Boyd.

Your feedback is essential!

This forum will only be successful if everyone weighs in with their own perspectives from their place in the industry. Tell us:

- What you think about "Points of View"
- If you had a strong reaction – either good or bad – to the first feature editorial
- If you want to contribute to an upcoming issue
- If you have a topic you'd like to see addressed
- If you have a story that would make a good case study for others to learn from

What's in it for you? Most people don't often get a chance to have their opinion heard. This is yours. Use it to help make an impact on the future of our business. **Send your comments, suggestions and questions to pointsofview@cansheep.ca or call CSF at 519-824-6018 or 1-888-684-7739.**

In the next issue...

Myth: Some producers feel it is acceptable to use beef cattle ID tags in sheep.

We have fielded some questions from sheep producers about using beef cattle ID tags in their flock. The fact is that beef cattle tags are not approved for use in sheep.

- Do you know of sheep producers who are using beef cattle ID tags?
- Why do they prefer these tags over approved CSIP tags?
- Given that beef ID tags are not approved for use in sheep, what should the industry do to discourage their use?

Please send your comments to pointsofview@cansheep.ca, or contact Barbara Caswell directly at 1-888-684-7739 or barbara@cansheep.ca.