

Points of View

A forum for sharing perspectives from across the Canadian Sheep Industry



CANADIAN SHEEP FEDERATION

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Myth: Allowing sheep to transit through Canada from the northern US states to Alaska puts the Canadian industry at a disadvantage.

The continued closure of the US border to Canadian sheep does prohibit Canadian producers from reaching lucrative Mexican markets, which have shown keen interest in Canadian genetics. However, having the Canadian border open to the northward movement of US sheep offers significant benefits to the Canadian industry, including providing a needed source of live animals for Canadian processors to fill the growing demand for lamb, as well as an opportunity to access US breeding stock.

This Points of View is an opportunity for everyone to voice their perspective on what the US border closure means to the Canadian sheep industry and to individual operations. One of our regular contributors writes that turnabout is fair play – that the Canadian border should be closed to US sheep. I, on the other hand, believe there are benefits to keeping our doors open.

More than 30,000 US sheep are shipped live into Canada for slaughter each year to help us to meet market demands. In addition, we have access to a larger genetic pool through the US market.

Of course, the ideal situation is having both borders open. Producers can be assured that there are continued efforts to get the border open to Canadian sheep moving south.

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

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P.S. Please turn to pages 5-6 for an update on the status of the US-Canada border and the movement of sheep from two veterinarians with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

Contributions

Lorna Wall

Wall 2 Wall Sheep Ranch, MB

Do you think it's time the US opened its borders to the southward movement of Canadian sheep?

- I think that it is time for Canada to have the balls to stand up to the US and shut our borders to their animals in equal measure and by the same criteria that they use to shut out our animals whether they be for market, breeding stock or just travelling through. This would then possibly allow our animals to pass through the US to Mexico to allow trade to resume with Mexico who I would be more interested in pursuing a trading system with.

Should the Canadian government be pushing harder to open the US border to Canadian sheep?

- I do not care about sending sheep to the US but it should be equal both directions no matter what. But then we all know that free trade is only to benefit the US not Canada.

Should the fact that Canada allows US sheep to pass through this country on their way to Alaska be used as a bargaining chip?

- It should not be a bargaining chip but out-right stopped until our sheep are allowed the same right though the US to reach Mexico.

Would you be interested in tapping Mexican genetics markets?

- Yes, they have need of our genetics and we could also benefit from some of their genetics.

How would an open border with the US impact our industry and your operation?

- It would not change my personal operation.

What opportunities or challenges would an open border with the US present?

- It would not change my personal operation, other than possible ram sales.

Letters to the Editor

Letters in response to Peter Stockdale's letter in Points of View, May 2011

"Systems/programs must be created to meet the needs of commercial producers while bearing in mind the impact on all producers and the supply chain." - Margaret Cook

Margaret Cook

Executive Director, Alberta Lamb Producers

I'd like to clarify some information presented by Peter Stockdale (British Columbia) in the last issue of Points of View.

- Developments to the Canadian Sheep Identification Program (CSIP) are being recommended by industry, not government.
- Change to Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) CSIP tags is just that – a change to the tag used, no additional mandatory requirements for the producer.
- As always, the producer is required to apply a CSIP tag before the animal leaves the farm of origin, the use of management tags or other means of identification is an individual producer decision. Use of RFID tags throughout the animal's life enables the collection of data for management purposes.
- There is no requirement to use a tag reader, the visual number on the tag is a much easier read than earlier tags (also better retention, less infection, etc.) and there is no requirement to change any management practices or apply the tag before the animal leaves the farm of origin
- Tagging in the animal's right ear is recommended – not mandatory – to assist reading of tags through the supply chain

- Systems/programs must be created to meet the needs of commercial producers while bearing in mind the impact on all producers and the supply chain.
- Producers are encouraged to visit www.sheepcentral.ca to review the cost/benefit analysis from the AB Lamb Traceability Pilot and discover opportunities producers may CHOOSE to take with the implementation of RFID.

We appreciate hearing producer comments as it enables us to improve and target communications.

Thank you for this opportunity to address these concerns.

Lorna Wall

Wall 2 Wall Sheep Ranch, MB

BRAVO! Well said! Thank you for speaking out on this.

Letters to the Editor

Letter in response to Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program (VSFCP) in Points of View, May 2011

" I think that the powers to be should loosen this a bit." - Bill Duffield

Bill Duffield

Ontario

On the scrapie program, I do not like the temporary suspension. It doesn't look right for people looking at the program. Here is an example:

I sent in all my data for my update and either I mixed one ewe or the scrapie programmer misplaced the item. I went into temporary suspension. I feel that the farm should have say 30 or 60 days before that happens. A person could send in the information and go on a two-week holiday or other items. I think that the powers to be should loosen this a bit. Yes, I am in favour of temporary suspension, but not at the rate it has been used the last few years. In fact, if I was at level E and this happened I would have said "I'm not going to participate any more."

My two cents on this.

Editor's note: *The Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program outlines that if there is information missing from an application, producers are notified and allotted 30 days in which to submit the missing material before a temporary suspension is issued. If producers respond to the request by supplying the information, the advancement is completed without the assignment of a suspension. In addition, the temporary suspension of a file is not accompanied by a change in producer status, and once the non-compliance is addressed, producer status is re-instated at the same level (unless, of course, there is some serious contravention of program regulations).*

US border status and the in-transit movement of sheep through Canada

Dr. Amy Snow and Dr. Ann Allain, Canadian Food Inspection Agency

We asked Dr. Amy Snow, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's Veterinary Program Specialist for the imports of small ruminants and Dr. Ann Allain, Acting National Manager for CFIA's Import Export Section of the Terrestrial Animal Health Division, for an update on the status of the US-Canada border and the movement of sheep; the benefits of allowing US sheep to come to Canada; and whether in-transit rules that allow US sheep to pass through Canada pose any risks to the Canadian flock.

Current status of Canada-US border

Currently, the CFIA does permit the northward – from the US to Canada – importation of small ruminants like sheep and goats for uses such as breeding, feeding for slaughter, immediate slaughter as well as the in-transit movement of US sheep through Canada to Alaska and vice versa.

While Canada's border has been open since 2006, CFIA explains that movement from Canada into the US has not been permitted since May 2003 because of the discovery of BSE in Canada during that year. "Since then, the US has modified some of their restrictions to allow importation of certain commodities from Canada, including small ruminants under 12 months of age for either feeding for slaughter or immediate slaughter, but they have not reopened the border for small ruminants for breeding purposes or for transit to Mexico."

US legislative process slows border opening

Dr. Allain explains that US border rules have proven difficult to change because "the rules that govern movement are contained within legislation – so they have legislative rules that they apply that can only be changed through regulatory amendments," she says. "These are not policies that someone sits and drafts and are more easily changed. They are actually legislative rules that take many years to change. That is the process that we are waiting on now."

"Unfortunately, because the process can take so long, it is very difficult for us to give a timeline on when any decisions may be publicized. It is completely out of Canadian control," Dr. Allain adds. "It is strictly a US legislative issue."

Dr. Allain says the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) faces a number of hurdles as it works toward amending the legislation, and CFIA is doing all it can to move the process along as quickly as possible.

CASE STUDY

"We have put forward the science and they (USDA) have not argued against the science. That being said, they have a certain process that they have to follow to amend their regulations and this can be a lengthy process – the regulatory system in the US is not flexible and is more detailed and more time consuming to amend (than policy or procedures)."

CFIA notes that the US legislation also covers in-transit rules, including the in-transit movement of small ruminants from Canada through the US to Mexico. Until the US changes these rules, Canada will remain shut out of the Mexican market by land transportation.

Canadian flock not at risk from in-transit rules

One of the issues that has caught the attention of Canadian producers is the in-transit movement of animals through Canada to Alaska. CFIA wants to clarify that situation and points out that this "is a modification of existing policies to meet US needs" (for movements to and from Alaska). It wasn't something that CFIA created recently – "there was some concern that there were some unfair and unequal situations that were developing there, but it really was something that already existed," according to Dr. Snow. The in-transit movement of small ruminants through Canada has not been prohibited since 2006, but until recent modifications, the US would not allow the animals back in the US after transiting through Canada, which resulted in such transits not occurring.

Dr. Snow believes CFIA has taken the necessary steps to protect the Canadian flock from any risk posed by in-transit sheep.

"We feel that the import conditions we have in place adequately mitigate those risks. The development of our import conditions is based on science and we have evaluated and worked with our domestic scrapie disease control and eradication program people to make sure that when we are importing animals we are not creating a situation where we are putting the Canadian national herd or flock at risk," says Snow.

Opening Canadian border provides industry benefits

Canada's open border may act as an olive branch to spur the US to reciprocate and open its border, but Dr. Snow says there are many other considerations that factor into Canada's border situation. "I think anything we do to improve relations between the countries will have benefits. We also have to look at what will benefit our industry and our industry right now is benefiting from access to the US market."

Currently, other than the US, Canada only allows the importation of small ruminants from Australia and New Zealand. "Based on geography, it's much more difficult to tap into those resources from a transport perspective as well as a financial position," says Dr. Snow. ***"So I feel that our industry has benefited from being able to access the US market – it (sheep) is not a huge industry within Canada so having access to additional genetic pools has benefited the breeders within Canada."***

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...

We need your help to evolve Points of View!

We don't know what the next issue of Points of View will look like or what it will be about – that's where YOU come in. After four years and 47 issues, it's time for change. This is your opportunity to shape the direction of Points of View to better meet your needs.

Our objective has always been to generate discussion and ideas on issues that are currently facing the Canadian sheep industry. We still aim to provide you with a forum to discuss issues, but the way in which we do this will change depending on your feedback. Here are some of the things we want to know:

- Frequency – how often is ideal?
- Format – what format should the forum take, and how would you like to receive the information?
- Content – what issues would you like to see covered, and how can we identify topics that are relevant to you?
- Interaction – how can we make it easier for you to provide your perspective?
- Length – how long is just right?
- Technically speaking – are there any technical issues to consider (e.g. download speed)?

Stay tuned for your invite to participate in a quick survey that poses these questions and more. In the meantime, feel free send your comments to pointsofview@cansheep.ca, or contact Jennifer MacTavish directly at 1-888-684-7739 or jennifer@cansheep.ca.