

## Myth: The Canadian sheep industry is sustainable and will grow without embracing traceability.

Traceability is no longer optional for the Canadian sheep industry. We must adapt to the changing requirements of an evolving food production system to sustain current markets, remain viable and realize our immense potential.

Mandatory Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) tags are a tool needed to deliver traceability. RFID is the best system currently available to provide traceability and it will deliver benefits for producers and stakeholders.

The CSF Board of Directors' decision to decommission all other tags in favour of RFID tags has been the subject of much deliberation and many factors have been considered. To date, other options such as group lot identification have been explored, but given the small number of lambs in the industry, we can't make it happen. We need more lambs if we're going to start looking at group lot identification.

One of the most significant challenges we continue to face as a national industry is how to effectively prioritize issues and decisions. Quite simply, not all decisions that support the sustainability of our sheep industry benefit each and every producer in Canada.

In making this decision, CSF consulted with the entire value chain – from producers and their provincial organizations to buyers, processors and retailers. For some individual producers, there is a limited perceived value in the investment in RFID technology. However, the ability to function as a business within this or any industry will be limited in the future without the use of technology.

The choice of not accessing or adopting technology is the producer's choice, but as an industry we can't function even at a basic level without it.

Preliminary information we have on RFID presents a compelling case for adopting the technology. As that research is finalized, CSF will be sharing it with producers in the coming months in the From The Flock newsletter and other communications. When it comes to the cost of RFID technology, producers are urged to consider it more of a tool for sustaining their business and making it more profitable by identifying profit leaks and providing the information to remedy those losses.

When it comes to supporting RFID adoption, we do recognize the need to make workshops and tools as easy to access as possible. You'll also be hearing more on that in the future.

Send your comments to [pointsofview@cansheep.ca](mailto:pointsofview@cansheep.ca), or contact Jennifer MacTavish directly by phone at 1-888-684-7739 or [jennifer@cansheep.ca](mailto:jennifer@cansheep.ca).

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P.S. Please turn to pages 3-4 to read views on traceability from other industry stakeholders including buyer, processor and retailer perspectives.

# Contributions

Rebecca Parker  
Bethany, Ontario

I feel that RFID will help my operation, making it easier to keep records and therefore know what my sheep are doing. This will help improve flock performance. On the other hand, for the industry overall, the RFID tags are going to be seen as a burden, adding up to \$2 per lamb cost – this being more than 1% of their value. I know that sheep producers feel this is unfair especially compared to the beef industry. Many commercial producers will not use RFID, but just put the tag in to ship.

What information and education tools do you require to help integrate RFID technology into your operation? I have done a lot of research on available products, but it would be helpful for the industry as a whole to have one location to source the information on available options, software and hardware. Many people don't have the time to do the research. Education sessions would also make it easier to implement the technology into the industry.

*"... it would be helpful for the industry as a whole to have one location to source the information on available options, software and hardware."* - Rebecca Parker

*"This is one more nail in the coffin for those of us with a very few animals whose sales are done to friends and family."* - Angela Beltane

Angela Beltane  
Widdershins, British Columbia

I am a very small producer on Vancouver Island. I have been a supporter of tagging programs in the past and have given other small producers information and encouragement on this. However, I do not support mandatory RFID tags! I, and many like me, do not ship to feelots, nor do we have any interest in selling meat to retail outlets or outside the country. This program is for the convenience of large slaughterhouses and to appease some political whim. The small flock owners concerns and needs seem to be consistently left out of these decisions. There are NO benefits to me from this program...none.

British Columbia has lost several small slaughterhouses in the last couple of years due to the change in regulations; adding the cost and complexity of the RFID system has the potential for closing more doors to small-scale sheep processing. This is one more nail in the coffin for those of us with a very few animals whose sales are done to friends and family.

# Mandatory RFID and Traceability

The decision to make Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) ear tags mandatory for all sheep produced in Canada is one that impacts the entire industry. From producers, to processors to retailers, many members of the industry will be changing the way they do business. The Canadian Sheep Federation wanted to know how the industry felt about mandatory RFID so it recently contacted three different people on the sheep value chain for more information.

## Blaine Kellington

Lamb and Sheep Dealer  
High River, Alberta

"I support the Canadian sheep industry's move towards full mandatory traceability because it protects us as an industry. I think it keeps people on their toes and keeps producers' vaccinations up. It offers the industry a trace-out component as well. If there's a problem we can follow it.

"Mandatory traceability also protects me as a buyer. If I get a shipment of animals that are infected with any kind of disease, it gives me something to go back on because I would know where the animals originated. I could get my money back from the seller and know not to buy animals from that farm anymore, which would reduce my chances of bringing more sick animals onto my farm. The

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information would be helpful to the seller as well who would then know there's a problem. If the seller doesn't know his/ her animals are being condemned, how is he/ she supposed to fix things?

"My advice to the Canadian sheep industry regarding mandatory traceability is this: get it done now or don't do it at all. There are so many different tags currently on the market so a retirement plan is essential. You don't want to get into a situation where the industry is working with half conventional tags and half RFID tags for too long.

Get a RFID system in place and get it implemented nationwide right away.

"My second piece of advice is to work with the entire industry on this initiative. Make sure there are people set in place to read tags at the processing plants. I've had experiences with condemned animals where nobody was there to read the tags so I wasn't able to get any information to follow up on. Someone needs to be in place to read the tags or the information is useless."

## CASE STUDY

### Maggie Pearce

Food Safety Specialist  
Newmarket Meat Packers Ltd.  
Newmarket, Ontario

"I think the Canadian sheep industry's move to full traceability is an excellent decision. Without it we really don't have a traceability system in place, we're simply working with a tagging system and there's a difference. With full mandatory traceability, the system will be complete from the farm to the processor to the retailer to the consumer.

"Newmarket Meat Packers was the first provincial plant in Ontario to implement a traceability system. There have been some challenges with this, however, because the system is not fully RFID. We're capturing tags but we can't RFID read them so we have to write the information down. This significantly

***"Full traceability also strengthens the value chain and gives more credibility to the food safety system, which is extremely important to consumers."***

increases the margin of error and the time it takes to run animals through the plant. Working with a RFID system is a lot more accurate and 90% faster.

"Full traceability also strengthens the value chain and gives more credibility to the food safety system, which is extremely important to consumers. Consumers are more and more educated on exactly what it means to have a food safety program in place; they're very well informed and they know where the gaps are. Consumers are also more willing to pay a premium for safe food and this is where producers can benefit. If producers can operate a complete system and say they've got safety every step of the way that's definitely worth a premium for everybody along the line."

### Danny Iuglio

Director of Meat and Seafood  
Longo's Grocery  
Mississauga, Ontario

"Longo's Grocery supports the Canadian sheep industry's move to full mandatory RFID traceability. I think any efforts that can improve the reliability of our supply chain are very important to our business especially in the eyes of the consumers. With full traceability we're able to tell our consumers that if something goes wrong, we have the information to trace it back.

"Traceability equals integrity of our product and in this business, it's all about integrity. It protects our reputation and increases our level of accountability when it comes to providing safe products to our customers.

"Longo's is working towards sustainability, and traceability is the fabric in which sustainability stands on. We need to know where things are coming from and how they're being supported along the food chain.

"Generally speaking, traceability is growing in importance throughout the entire retail sector. There's very little tolerance on behalf of consumers when it comes to food safety. People are no longer accepting 'I don't know' as an answer."

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## 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](mailto:pointsofview@cansheep.ca) or call CSF at 519-824-6018 or 1-888-684-7739.**

## In the next issue...

**Myth:** Producers are not interested in genotyping their flocks to help identify animals that have increased resistance to scrapie.

Between 2005 and 2008, the National Genotyping Survey offered genotyping for sheep to help determine animals that are genetically resistant to scrapie. During that time, the program helped fund the testing of about 18,000 purebred sheep across Canada.

Overall, the program attracted a relatively low numbers of producers. But since the program's completion, producers continue to contact CSF and ask if the program and funding will continue.

- What's your perspective on the value of genotyping Canadian sheep to protect against scrapie?
- Should the industry have a greater focus on genotyping?
- Did you participate in the program? Was it valuable? Did it make a positive impact for your operation? Would you recommend genotyping to other producers?
- Does genotyping present challenges for your operation (i.e. cost)?

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