MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FOR THE CANADIAN SHEEP INDUSTRY

FROM THE flock

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IN THIS ISSUE:

RECOGNITION

Funding for the Canadian Sheep Identification Program and the Canadian Sheep Federation's Food Safe Farm Practices Program , has been provided by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada through the Canadian Integrated Food Safety Initiative under Growing Forward.

Funding for the Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program has been provided through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's (AAFC) AgriFlexibility program.

Opinions expressed in this document are those of the Canadian Sheep Federation and not necessarily those of AAFC.

Renewal Process

By Andrew Gordanier, Chairman - Canadian Sheep Federation

The Canadian Sheep Federation's (CSF) is preparing for its Annual General Meeting, November 14-16 in Winnipeg. The focus of the AGM this year, will be on setting the scene for what the CSF will be focusing its time and energy on for the coming twelve months.

The CSF was formed as a national federation in 1990. Since that time, the CSF mandate and the need to engage and serve its members has changed dramatically. As a result of these shifts, the current structure of the CSF is out of sync with how it needs to function moving forward, and these gaps have been undermining the Federation's ability to operate at the level of efficiency and national collaboration that is critical to the success and sustainability of the Canadian sheep industry. It is critical to act now and move the CSF from the mindset of a national federation and mode of operation to that of a national partnership, where each and every province is engaged and working collectively to take the industry to the next level of performance and growth.

The CSF, as a national organization is proposing to facilitate this exciting but challenging process to build true understanding and commitment among provincial organizations to work in partnership to enable growth and sustainability of the industry. Accordingly, a Renewal Project is under way that will take inventory of where we are, define where we wish to be, identify the gaps and how to fill them and re-align the CSF in tune with the needs of producers and the requirements of the emerging new economy.

We are starting this project with the perspective that the only people who can change the CSF to improve its service to the sheep industry are the people who are part of it. No external agent will change us and the way we work unless we are willing to make the changes. Now, everyone has an opinion on what we should do and how we should do it. One of our most important tasks is to capture all of this information and design a path forward that can involve everyone.

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State of the Sheep Industry

Over the course of the past year, the Canadian sheep flock has shown some signs of rebuilding with the total number of ewes and replacement lambs on farms increasing. July 1, 2011 Statistics Canada numbers indicate that Canada's ewe flock grew by 1.0% to 542,900 head, up from 537,400 head in July 2010. Most provinces in Canada saw increases in their ewe flock size with the exception of Newfoundland and Labrador (12% decrease), Quebec (0.24% decrease) and Ontario (0.6% decrease). In keeping with the increase in ewe flock size there was also a rise in the number of replacement lambs. As of July 1, 2011, there were 100,900 replacement lambs reported on Canadian Farms, 5.3% higher than 95,800 head, reported in July 1, 2010. Replacement lamb numbers rose in all provinces with the exception of Quebec, which posted a decrease.

The increase in replacement lamb numbers are an indication that producers may be holding back lambs to increase the size of their flock and this may tempt some to be optimistic about the future of the industry. A mere 1% increase in the size of the flock may not be enough to spur on the kind of investment in infrastructure required to keep the industry sustainable and profitable.

There is growing concern that seven years of shrinking supply of Canadian lamb has put Canadian processors under increasing pressure and leaves the industry in a delicate position with regard to its future, particularly when it comes to needed investments in the system. The decrease in supply increases processor production costs and discourages them from pumping money into modernizing and adapting their lamb infrastructures. Given that many lamb processors are small and processing other species as well, the question becomes why continue processing lamb? The loss of processing plants for Canadian lamb producers should be a primary concern as it can lead to an increase in production costs; primarily trucking.

Canadian slaughter fell again in 2010 to 714 thousand head, down 3.7% from the 740 thousand head slaughtered in 2009. Although slaughter numbers were down across the country, Eastern Canada saw the biggest drop at 5%, with Western Canadian slaughter numbers only dropping by 1.4%. The decrease in the Western slaughter numbers was cushioned by a 5% increase in the number of animals slaughtered in Manitoba and a 0.9% increase in Alberta. Despite a 2.4% decrease in the number of lambs slaughtered, Ontario remains the hotbed for slaughter in Ontario representing 45% of the total number of animals slaughtered (Source: Statistics Canada)

Lamb disappearance (or consumption) in Canada dropped in 2010 to 1.07 kg per person, down from 1.16 kg in 2009. This decline is not surprising given the decrease in supply of lamb both from Canada and from international suppliers. In 2009, 41.6 thousand tonnes of lamb were supplied to the Canadian market, with 23.3 thousand tonnes being imported and only 16.4 thousand tonnes being supplied from Canadian producers.

The supply of lamb to the Canadian market dropped in 2010.

Imports decreased to 20.9 thousand tonnes and Canadian shepherds only supplied 15.7 thousand tonnes (Source: Statistics Canada). As seen by the numbers above, imports account for more than 50% of the Canadian lamb supply. Most of these imports come from New Zealand or Australia, whose production is decreasing. Given that Canada exports very little lamb meat, Canadian processing plants mostly service their provincial markets. It is critical that the Canadian industry have some major federally inspected processing plants to be able to trade across provincial lines to meet domestic retail and foodservice demand.

Exports

In terms of exporting, the quantity of meat exported, as shown in the table, combines sheep and lamb carcasses (chilled/frozen); sheep and lamb half carcasses (chilled/frozen); and sheep and lamb cuts (chilled/frozen). For meat to be exported to international markets the animal needs be slaughtered in a federal plant, therefore any closure of these plants with no substitutes would have negative implications for exports.

In 2007, 60% of the all meat exported were sheep cuts boneless, frozen, worth $168,004. In 2010, sheep cuts bone-in frozen, accounted for 68% of all meat exported with the largest market being the United States.

Canadian export of sheep meat

Year	Amount (kg)	Value
2006	181,353	$531,676
2007	327,808	$622,053
2008	249,520	$609,644
2009	168,011	$540,127
2010	280,874	$1,193,664

Source: Statistic Canada (2006-2010)

Live **Animal Trade**

Imports

The vast majority of live animals imported between 2006 and 2010 were animals going direct to slaughter or into a feedlot. 2009 saw the largest import of live purebred breeding animals at 140 head, in all other years the imports of this class were well below 100 head. This is in stark contrast to market conditions prior to the border closure in 2003, when Canada was a net exporter of live animals. For example, in 2002 Canada exported 139,300 animals, primarily into the United States.

Canadian imports of live animals

Year	# of animals	Value (million)
2006	15,834	$2.1
2007	26,129	$3.3
2008	39,249	$5.25
2009	33,601	$5.0
2010	33,458	$4.8

Source: Statistic Canada (2006-2010)

Exports

As opposed to ten years ago, Canada is now a net importer of live sheep/lambs and the international exports of live animals are negligible. This is mainly due to the border closure in 2003. In 2010 the United States was the largest market for live animals (825 head); followed by Russia (621 head); and the United Kingdom (23 head).

Canadian export of live animals

Year	# of animals	Value (million)
2006	3,159	$470,333
2007	86	$30,033
2008	14	$23,868
2009	32	$8,566
2010	1,469	$254,748

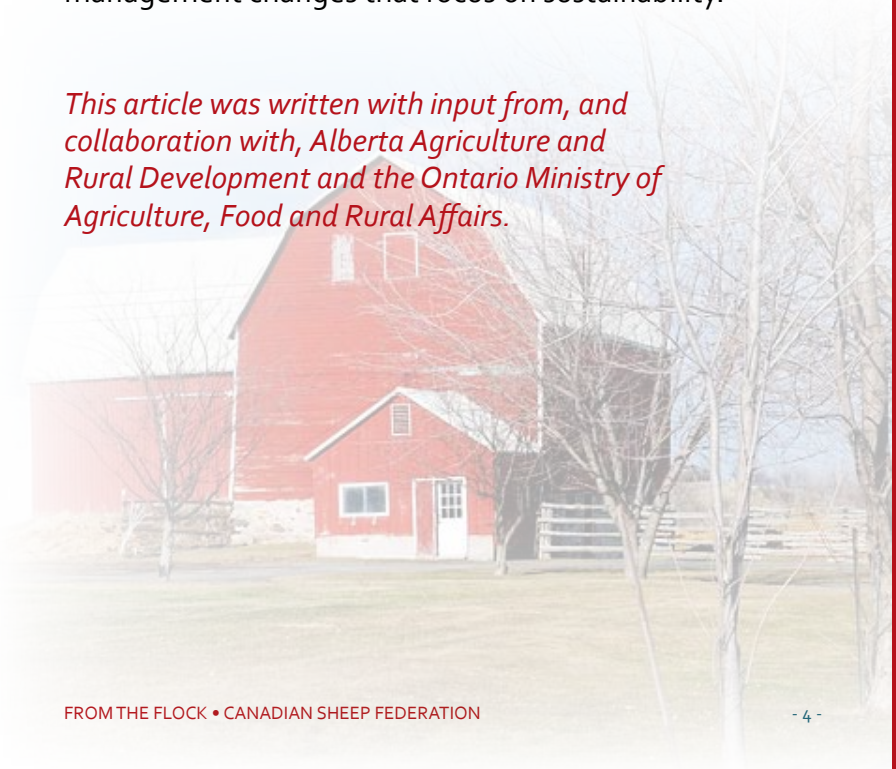
Source: Statistic Canada (2006-2010)

Farm Cash **Receipts** and Farm **Expenses**

According to Statistics Canada, farm cash receipts for sheep and lambs in 2010 totalled $142 million, an increase of 6.5% from 2009-2010. This is in part due to the strong sheep and lamb prices through 2010. As an example, SunGold Index 100 Base Rail average price increased by 13% since 2008 and 11% in the following year. The Ontario market also strengthened in 2010. The price for lambs 95 to 109 pounds was 5.3% higher at $170 per hundredweight in 2010 over 2009, while sheep prices, at $92 were 28.6% higher compared to 2009. At the same time that Statistics Canada is also reporting a drop in farm operating expenses of 4.2% to $34.5 billion in 2010; indicating that this is due to lower fertilizer, feed and pesticide expenses. The concern, however, is that for some producers, fertilizer and pesticides are not high ticket expenses when compared to, for example, feed costs.

Producers are cautioned against looking at prices of lambs in isolation. Instead, the focus should be on profit and ways that they can improve their individual profitability. Low profit margins for producers impact their ability to invest in management changes that focus on sustainability.

This article was written with input from, and collaboration with, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.



The United States

The sheep and lamb inventory in the United States, as of January 1, 2011 totalled 5.53 million head, down 2% from 2010. Their breeding sheep numbers and ewes one year old and older both fell by 2% to 4.12 million and 3.26 million head respectively. The number of market sheep and lambs also dropped to 1.42 million, down 1% from January 1, 2010. Like Canada, prices in the United States strengthened in 2010. At $125 per hundred pounds, 2010's price was 25% higher than a year ago. While prices for market sheep, at $50.5, were 55% higher in 2010 compared to 2009.

New Zealand

New Zealand has experienced many difficulties with its sheep and lamb industry. Lamb kills have been falling for about six years in a row now. Cold weather in September 2010 is estimated to have killed up to half of the lamb crop on some farms, thus continuing the trend of smaller kills and shrinking flocks for 2011. Many producers have exited the industry in the last few years due to generally low and inconsistent incomes and are switching to dairy or finding other uses for their land. A smaller sheep flock and lack of adequate meat supplies in storage have sent retail prices to record levels. As processors compete to fill orders, the price paid to farmers for lambs has risen by $30 compared to last year. Plant closures are likely in New Zealand as margins are squeezed. Lamb meat exports have suffered since 2008 as export values remain firm but total quantity continues to drop with unfavorable currency exchange rates. Export customers are starting to reject New Zealand lamb because of its price, and industry officials fear this could lead to a major market correction that the industry will spend four to five years recovering from.

Scrapie Canada Update

Some Interesting Points from the 2011 National Standards Review

Once a year, Scrapie Canada's working group convenes to review the National Standards of the Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program. The working group is an advisory committee compiled of representatives from the Canadian Sheep Federation, the Canadian National Goat Federation, the Canadian Sheep Breeders Association and the Canadian Livestock Genetics Association whose purpose is to oversee projects administered by Scrapie Canada. The annual review of the National Standards allows for regular review of the VSFCP rules and regulations, and presents an opportunity to put forward industry-proposed changes to the program. Producer and industry comments regarding the VSFCP are collected throughout the year and addressed at the annual review, in the interest of maintaining stakeholder input in the program. Proposed amendments are discussed by the working group and policy is reviewed by the CFIA, and changes are made where possible through a collaborative process. The 2011 National Standards review addressed some key policy resulting in some regulatory changes. The following points may be of particular interest to VSFCP participants.

The Use of Embryos in the VSFCP

Embryos brought into a VSFCP enrolled flock or herd have the same effect on participant status as the acquisition of live females. That's to say that using an embryo sourced from a non-enrolled flock or herd will downgrade a participant's status to entry Level E where sourcing embryos from a lower VSFCP status flock or herd will result in a participant's status being downgraded to the status of the embryo. As with live females, purchasing an embryo from a VSFCP enrolled flock or herd of an equivalent or higher status will result in no change to the purchaser's status. But how do we establish the effect on VSFCP status when using an embryo collected from a producers own farm prior to enrolment (or collected when you were at a lower status and then stored)? That question was raised recently at the National Standards review and is one worth looking into further.

How do we establish the effect on VSFCP status when using an embryo collected from a producers own farm prior to enrolment (or collected when you were at a lower status and then stored)?

The answer to this query is not a straight forward one, and the outcome depends entirely on what became of the donor female.

- If the donor female left the flock or herd before the producer joined the VSFCP, the embryo is considered as though coming from a non-enrolled VSFCP flock/herd; its use will result in the downgrade of participant status to Level E.
- If the donor female joined the VSFCP and is still alive in the flock or herd; the use of the embryo has no impact on the participant's status.
- If the donor female joined the VSFCP, remained in the flock/herd until she died and tested negative for scrapie (part of the deadstock testing requirements); the use of the embryo has no impact on the participant's status.
- If the donor female joined the VSFCP but has since been sold to a non-enrolled or lower status VSFCP flock/herd, and is still alive; the use of the embryo will downgrade the participant to the donor female's last known VSFCP status.
- If the donor female joined the VSFCP, has been sold to a non-enrolled or lower status flock/herd, has since died and has been tested negative for scrapie; the use of the embryo will have no impact participant status.

Continuing Education Survey

The Canadian Sheep Federation, in partnership with provincial sheep organizations, is responding to the need, identified by Canadian producers, for relevant production information. The plan is to offer a comprehensive continuing education program to assist lamb producers in building their farming enterprise.

The Canadian sheep industry is as diverse as the people involved in it and although we have a sense of the scope and types of issues facing producers, we need to determine the specifics of what producers, such as you, want access to. This is your opportunity to make your opinions known and to influence the content and format of the program as the material is being assembled.

The survey is divided into two parts. The first is subdivided by production topic; each will take 1-3 minutes to complete depending on how much additional detail you wish to provide. The second part addresses the need for, and availability and reliability of, existing educational resources. Feel free to add as much commentary as you wish. All responses will be kept in confidence and combined with other responses in order to make recommendations and develop the program.

Thank you for your opinions and your time in completing this survey.

You can complete the survey by going to:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/mastershepherds

or send a message to jennifer@cansheep.ca to receive a word version of the survey.

Scrapie Update continued

Good News for Quebec Producers

A new motion passed at the 2011 National Standards review saw the acceptance of Agri-Traceability Quebec (ATQ) reports as supporting documents for VSFCP annual inventory reconciliations. Previously, producers were required to provide private sales receipts, auction receipts and slaughter receipts to verify the movement of all animals out of their herds or flocks throughout the year. For Quebec producers this task represented the duplication of information reporting already provided to ATQ as part of the mandatory animal traceability reporting in the province.

This VSFCP policy change means that Quebec producers may use their ATQ report on animal movement in lieu of original receipts, saving a considerable amount of time and resources required to compile that amount of information. The changes fell short of allowing the use of ATQ inventory reports in the place of a veterinary supervised inventory. All producers, regardless of their place of residence, will continue to be required to have a scrapie accredited veterinarian conduct their annual inventory report. The inventory process is designed to do more than account for the presence of every eligible animal on-farm; a vital part of that process allows the accredited veterinarian to conduct a visual inspection of the flock/herd checking for clinical signs of scrapie. And as always, producers will be responsible for providing any information deemed absent from the annual reports. These changes will help reduce the amount of work required to complete and submit producers' annual inventory reconciliations and are anticipated to encourage program uptake by larger producers.

The review of the Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program's National Standards will take place on an on-going annual basis. We continue to encourage stakeholders to submit comments and suggestions, all of which will be given full consideration.

Funding for the National TSE Eradication Plan is provided through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's (AAFC) AgriFlexibility program. Opinions expressed in this document are those of the Canadian Sheep Federation and not necessarily those of AAFC.

The Road Towards Traceability

By Daniel Dion, National ID coordinator

1995 National identification started 15 years ago, in 1995, when the need for the sheep industry to develop an effective traceback system was first recognized by the Livestock Identification Working Group (LIDWG). This group was created by the Canadian Animal Health Consultative Committee (CAHCC) of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) to represent the national identification interests of the livestock industry, in both the private and public sectors. The Working Group quickly recognized the need to first address the potential threat of BSE in the cattle, and scrapie in sheep.

1996 In 1996, the concept of developing a national identification program was proposed to the Canadian Sheep Federation (CSF). The CSF Board at that time, decided to allow the cattle industry to develop its program and establish it as a model for other sectors.

1998 Two years later, at its Annual General Meeting, the CSF Board endorsed the concept of a national identification system for the sheep industry. A technical committee was established to begin developing the program.

2000 In 2000, the CSF received financial assistance from the federal government to initiate communication with producers. Information was published in journals and newsletters. During the summer and fall, extensive consultative meetings were held with industry stakeholders nationwide. The response indicated the sheep industry supported the development of a national identification program that would reflect its needs. Based on this response, the Board of Directors voted to develop and implement an identification system that was "affordable, flexible and effective" for the sheep industry.

2001 In 2001, the CSF requested regulatory changes to the legislation governing mandatory identification. In March 2002, a meeting was held in Winnipeg to draft amendments that incorporated the requirements of the sheep sector.

2002 The final changes to the legislation were reviewed and accepted by the current National Identification Committee of the CSF in March 2002.

2004 The regulatory amendment came into force on January 1, 2004.

Legislation brings responsibilities…

Over the past months, the CSF has continued to give producers and stakeholder's information on the Canadian Sheep Identification Program (CSIP), traceability and the changes to timelines on RFID, but the phones calls that have been received by the office from producers and stakeholders of the industry indicate that a review of producer and stakeholder responsibilities is required:

- All sheep and lambs must bear an approved CSIP ear tag before they leave their farm of origin. This includes animals leaving the premises temporarily (e.g. exhibitions, veterinarian clinics, community pastures) **It is illegal to transport animals not bearing an approved tag;**
- Approved tags must be purchased from an approved distributor. When purchasing approved tags, you will be asked to provide your name, telephone number and address;
- Sheep producers and feedlot operators are required to keep a record of:
    - All sheep or lambs entering your flock for breeding purposes.
    - All sheep 18 months or older leavingzyour farm, other than those sold directly to a federally or provincially inspected abattoir;

Traceability continued

- Imported sheep must have a Canadian-approved national identification tag applied either before importation or as soon as the sheep reaches its initial destination.
- All sheep purchased must bear an approved CSIP ear tag. If a tag is subsequently lost, you must immediately apply a new approved CSIP ear tag; report the new identification number and, if known, the former identification number; and record information about the origin of the sheep as is known;
- Approved CSIP ear tags must not be removed from any live sheep or tampered with for any reason and must not be re-used. If a sheep dies on your property, the tag may be removed. The identification numbers of the approved tags borne by the sheep carcasses disposed of by the operator must be reported within 30 days after disposing of the carcass. There are no record-keeping or reporting requirement for the on-farm disposal of carcasses not bearing an approved tag;
- Auction marts, livestock dealers and packing plants are required to accept only sheep and lambs bearing an approved CSIP ear tag;

For complete information on the regulations, please see Part XV - Animal Identification - of the Health of Animals regulation at:

http://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/C.R.C.%2C_c._296/index.html

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Growing Forward

Moving forward...

As the Canadian Sheep Identification System moves forward and continues its development, it is important to keep in mind the original objectives of the board of directors of the CSF in implementing an identification system that is **"affordable, flexible and effective"** for the sheep industry.

To do so, the CSF is working with industry partners and government to make sure those objectives are met. Specific areas of activities include:

"Affordable"

- Analysis of costs and benefits of tags, identification systems and RFID management systems;
- Review of available technologies and tags;
- Analysis of costs of traceability with industry partners and government;

"Flexible"

- Review of available technologies and tags;
- Determine which tags, identification systems and RFID management systems work best for sheep producers;

"Effective"

- RFID tags will be mandatory. As of 1st January 2013, all sheep leaving their premise of origin must be tagged with CSIP approved RFID tags (Shearwell Data Ltd SET tag or Allflex RFID Button Tag);
- National standards for tags are being developed;
- Traceability Policies are being developed;

Funding for this initiative has been provided by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada through the Canadian Integrated Food Safety Initiative under Growing Forward.

Food Safe Farm Practices Program - Am I registered? Or Certified?

By Barb Caswell, National On-Farm Food Safety Coordinator

There has been some confusion lately around the definitions of "registered" and "certified" as they pertain to the Canadian Sheep and Lamb Food Safe Farm Practices Program (FSFP).

Some of this confusion has stemmed from eligibility requirements for producers in order to access provincial funding programs to implement on-farm food safety programming. As well, the definitions of these words may not be consistent across national on-farm food safety programs for various commodities (i.e. beef, chicken, pork, etc).

Funding for on-farm food safety program implementation was taken out of the national mandate and is now offered by provincial governments directly to producers and/or provincial producer organizations. The difficulty this has created is that the funding differs for each province dependent on what that provincial government's focus and priorities are. The differences are not only in what is funded (i.e. equipment, training, etc) and in what proportions, but also in what is required by producers in order to be eligible for funding. Some provinces, similar to the national funding seen under the Agricultural Policy Framework (Growing Forward's predecessor), have allowed provincial producer organizations to apply for the funding and outline producer eligibility. While it is the goal of CSF to see as many producers implement the Food Safe Farm Practices program and take advantage of the benefits the program offers, the program is completely voluntary and it is up to each individual producer to make the choice that is right for them and their operation – whether to implement the program, how they do it, and when.

For the Food Safe Farm Practices Program, to be 'registered' or 'certified' on the program means the same. In order to be considered 'on the program', you must complete the annual audits.

This is where the confusion lies.

For example, in Alberta you are eligible for funding, sometimes confused with 'being registered', simply by taking a training session. Some provinces have no requirements for completion of training and/or audits, but simply require an on-farm food safety plan and submission of an application for eligible costs to help you implement the plan. Other provinces require the audit as part of the eligibility requirements for implementation funding.

If you are interested in becoming 'certified' on the FSFP, the first step that is required by the program is to successfully complete a training session. This can be done in person – contact the CSF National On-Farm Food Safety Coordinator or your provincial sheep association to inquire about the next potential training session, or you can also do training online and/or through an at-home workbook. The online training is currently being revamped to better suit the needs of producers.

Taking a training session of any kind on the FSFP does not register you in the Program.

While we do track your name and mailing address if you take a training session, this is simply to keep a record of the number of producers which have completed the training, as well as to be able to provide you with any important program updates, such as a new version of the Producer Manual. Some producers may take training and never consider the program again, while others may choose to implement only some of the program, or fully implement the program and follow through with becoming certified. Training provides you with the necessary knowledge to implement the program successfully in order to reduce your risk of an on-farm food safety hazard and to ensure your success during the audit.

On-Farm Food Safety continued

Training prepares you for the audit in order to minimize the time it takes to complete the audit and, subsequently, the cost of the audit, as well as increasing your chances of being successful during audit. Keep in mind that CSF does provide a signed certificate that training has been successfully completed. This certificate serves two purposes – it provides proof to the auditor of training and to provinces that require training in order to be eligible for provincial funding.

However, this certificate in no way certifies that you are on the program or have implemented the program in any way. As stated on the certificate – it simply states that you completed the training.

Once training is complete, the next step is implement all mandatory good production practices, as well as any recommended practices that you may feel could benefit your farm. Once you have implemented all mandatory practices, you must successfully keep one full cycle of required records, from lambing to lambing. For those lambing once annually, this means you will have one full year of records. A full cycle of records is required before you are eligible to apply for an audit and certification on the FSFP. Certification is only granted upon successful completion of the audit.

The audit cycle for the FSFP is a four year cycle. Years two and four, the required audit is a self-declaration, a form you sign verifying that you have and will continue to implement all mandatory good production practices on your farm. The third year audit is a records review, during which you are required to submit a subset of your records to show you continue to fully implement the program.

Keep in mind, if there are corrective actions identified as part of your audit, you may not be granted certification until those corrective actions are complete. Once you successfully complete the audit, you will receive a certificate that you are registered on the program. This certificate will include your date of registration, which is your anniversary date. Your certificate must be renewed annually based on this date.

At any time, if you do not successfully complete you annual audit, your certification is revoked. Upon successful completion of the audit each year, you will get the new certificate with the appropriate date.

For those provincial funding programs that require the full audit, the requirement is to complete the first year, full audit, although CSF hopes that producers who choose to become certified on the program will continue their certification on the annual audit cycle. Those provincial funding programs which require an audit also provide the funding necessary to cover the cost of the first audit.

Government Websites

British Columbia	www.gov.bc.ca/agri/
Alberta	www.agric.gov.ab.ca/
Saskatchewan	www.agr.gov.sk.ca
Manitoba	www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture
Ontario	www.gov.on.ca/OMAFRA/
Quebec	www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/fr/Pages/Accueil.aspx
New Brunswick	www.gnb.ca/0027/Index-e.asp
Nova Scotia	www.gov.ns.ca/agri/
Prince Edward Island	www.gov.pe.ca/agriculture/index.php3
Newfoundland / Labrador	www.nr.gov.nl.ca/nr/

If you are interested in pursuing funding, you should contact all necessary parties to be sure you are fully aware of the eligibility requirements before you submit your application. This includes contacting your provincial sheep association, the CSF, as well as your provincial government. **For more information on provincial funding programs and requirements of eligibility, the websites of provincial governments' Ministries of Agriculture or contact the CSF National OFFS Coordinator at barbara@cansheep.ca.**

Voluntary National Farm-Level Biosecurity Standard

Thank you to those of you who have already called into the CSF office expressing your interest in participating in the biosecurity project. We have been collecting your names and you should be hearing from Serecon within the next month.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), in collaboration with the Canadian Sheep Federation (CSF), is developing a voluntary national farm-level biosecurity standard and producer guidance document for the sheep industry. An advisory group is guiding the development of the standard and guidance document. This group is composed of representatives from CSF, provincial associations, producers, academia, and provincial and federal governments. The national standard is expected to be completed by the summer of 2013 and will focus on the broad issues affecting biosecurity. Funding for this project is being provided through the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada Growing Forward program.

Biosecurity refers to activities that can be done to minimize the risk of introducing and spreading disease in sheep flocks. The benefits of adopting a national approach to biosecurity include the following:

- Helping to prevent, detect and control infectious disease,
- Increasing productivity when there is no disease present, and
- Contributing to the continuation of inter-provincial and international trade in the face of a disease outbreak.

Provinces	Target number of farms
British Columbia	22
Alberta	22
Saskatchewan	20
Manitoba	28
Ontario	37
Quebec	61
New Brunswick	9
Nova Scotia	19
PEI	8
Newfoundland and Labrador	11
Canada	**237**

A national producer-level study will be conducted to help in developing the standard. The study will explore current farm-level biosecurity activities and best practices. This study is very important in the development of the standard in order to make it realistic and achievable for producers to easily implement on-farm.

Serecon Management Consulting has been engaged under contract to work with the CSF, CFIA, the Advisory Group and other stakeholders in the development of the standard and the administration of the questionnaire for the producer-level study, which will be conducted by phone or on-farm interviews. The CSF and your provincial associations are respectfully asking for volunteers to respond to the biosecurity questionnaire. The intent is to have sufficient volunteers in order to ensure that the data can be analyzed by geographic region, production type and flock size. In order to have a representative sample of the sheep industry in Canada, Serecon is looking for participation across the country (see chart above).

We are seeking your participation in the national producer-level study. The only contact information required is your name and telephone number. If you are interested we would ask that you directly contact Jennifer Mac Tavish, the CSF's director to ensure that you have the opportunity to participate in this very important process for the sheep industry. These new national voluntary standards must be based on actual experience in the industry. Your input will serve to ensure that standards are operational.

Sheep among many suspects in farm Listeria probe

SOURCE: http://www.cidrap.umn.edu/cidrap/content/fs/food-disease/news/oct0511listeria-br.html

Oct 5, 2011 (CIDRAP News) – Investigators working to discover how Jensen Farms' cantaloupe became contaminated with Listeria monocytogenes, leading to the country's deadliest foodborne illness outbreak in almost a decade, are taking a hard look at several environmental factors, including whether sheep grazing in the region may have played a role.

Dr Lawrence Goodridge, a food microbiologist in the department of animal sciences at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, was involved in the outbreak investigation as an unpaid expert consultant to the state health deparment during its early stages and is part of a team focusing on several research questions the events have raised.

So far federal investigators have detected Listeria on Jensen Farms cantaloupe collected from Denver-area grocery stores and from equipment and cantaloupe at the farm's packing facility in Granada, Colo., according to a Sep 19 US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) statement. Colorado officials have confirmed that cantaloupe from a sick patient's home and from retail outlets match the outbreak strain's genetic fingerprint.

According to an update yesterday from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the outbreak has been linked to 100 infections and 18 deaths in 20 states. Last week CDC officials called it the deadliest foodborne outbreak in nearly a decade.

All potential sources of contamination are being considered, including irrigation water, soil, "biosolids," and contamination from animal incursions, Goodridge said. Biosolids are processed residual material from sewage treatment that is used as fertilizer on farms. He said biosolids were spread on a field adjacent to Jensen Farms 2 years ago.

Though investigators haven't mentioned focusing on a suspected animal vector, Goodridge said one possibility is sheep. In the region of Colorado where cantaloupes are grown—though not necessarily at the farm implicated in the outbreak—sheep are often grazed on cantaloupe fields following harvest, he said.

> "If that practice was followed at Jensen Farms, then there is the possibility of sheep manure contaminating the cantaloupe with L monocytogenes," he said.

A similar scenario occurred in Nova Scotia, Canada, in 1981 when a Listeria outbreak caused by tainted cabbage was traced to the use of sheep manure as fertilizer, Goodridge added.

The Canadian Listeria outbreak sickened seven adults and led to 34 perinatal infections, according to a report on the outbreak published in 1983 in the New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM). After two case-control studies found no common environmental or food exposure among the sick patients, a second food survey found a link to eating coleslaw.

A coleslaw sample from a patient's refrigerator was positive for the outbreak strain of Listeria, called serotype 4b. The product trace-back revealed that a regional firm made the coleslaw with cabbage and carrots from several wholesalers and local farmers and distributed the product only in Canada's Maritime Provinces.

Environmental tests at the coleslaw plant found no Listeria contamination, but after prolonged cold enrichment, two unopened packages purchased at two Halifax grocery stores tested positive for Listeria serotype 4b. The produce-trace back led to a farm where both cabbage and sheep were raised.

Listeria probe continued

According to the NEJM report, two of the farm's sheep had died from listeriosis, though isolates from the animals weren't available for serotyping.

The farmer had used composted and raw manure from the sheep flock to fertilize the cabbage crops. The coleslaw plant had received a shipment of cabbage that had been kept in the farm's cold-storage shed over the winter. None of the stored cabbage was available for testing, and environmental samples from the farm never yielded Listeria, according to the report.

Canadian investigators wrote that the farming practices provided ample opportunity for introducing Listeria into the food chain and that prolonged cold storage of cabbage could have allowed a small amount of initial contamination to grow. Unlike other foodborne pathogens, Listeria can flourish in cold conditions.

Goodridge said another puzzling aspect of the cantaloupe Listeria outbreak is that four different pulsed-field gel electrophoresis (PFGE) profiles have been identified, falling into two distinct serotypes, which could suggest multiple contamination events or a contamination event from multiple sources, such as different animals.

The size and lethal nature of the Listeria outbreak is surprising, Goodridge said, adding, "And all this involving a commodity [cantaloupe] that had not previously been implicated in outbreaks of listeriosis."

Listeria contamination in cantaloupe, along with an even more recent recall of California lettuce for potential Listeria contamination, might prompt the FDA to revisit its Listeria risk assessment for fresh produce, which is currently considered a low-risk food category, Goodridge said.

On Sep 29 TrueLeaf Farms of San Juan Bautista, Calif., recalled 90 cartons of chopped romaine lettuce after a random check of a single bag turned up L monocytogenes. No illnesses have been reported. The products were shipped to a distributor in Oregon that sent them to at least two other states, Washington and Idaho.

It's too soon to predict how the Listeria outbreak might affect produce companies, Goodridge said. While the overall produce industry might not be hurt by the events, the cantaloupe industry will likely suffer financial fallout, because many people can't or don't distinguish between growing areas, though some who are now avoiding cantaloupe might forget about the outbreak by the next season's harvest.

"The real concern is the fact that the cantaloupe industry in Colorado is very small and typically family run, and some growers are now deciding whether or not to grow cantaloupes next year because of the outbreak," Goodridge added.