

By Jennifer Fleming, Executive Director

On December 29, 2004, the Office of the Management and Budget in the United States completed its review of the proposed rule on Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE). This is a major step forward in the struggle to once again resume the export of live animals into the U.S. The rule was published in the U.S. Federal Register on January 4th and will become effective on March 7, 2005.

While the details of the rule focus on the movement of live cattle and beef products into the U.S., there is some good news for the sheep industry as well. **As of March 7 sheep under 12 months of age can be exported for feeding or immediate slaughter.** Lambs exported to the US have to be slaughtered at less than 12 months of age. Details in regards to how the age of the animals will be determined have yet to be finalized although it is expected that dentition and a record of age will be used.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency will, over the next few weeks, work with the USDA and develop export certificates that producers will need in order to be able to ship their animals. As soon as further information on this documentation becomes available, it will be circulated. The documentation will require information on the sheep's animal health certification, animal identification, origin, destination and responsible parties.

The animals being exported to the U.S. will need to be identified with a CFIA approved tag that can trace the animal back to the farm of origin. ***In addition*** to the tags, the animal will also have to be branded with a "C". The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is working on getting written confirmation from the USDA that our CSIP tags will be acceptable identification. In regards to the animals being branded with a "C" - sheep will *"require humane identification with a distinct, permanent, and legible "C", properly applied with a freeze brand, hot iron, or other method before arrival at the port of entry, and easily visible on the live animal and on the carcass prior to skinning. The mark must not be less than 1 inch or more than 1-1/4 inches high."* It does not appear as though a tattoo is going to be an acceptable form of permanent identification as it is not easily visible on the live animal.

What are excluded from the rule are live animals over 12 months of age, breeding animals and animals in transit. In order for these animals to be allowed to be exported from Canada, another rule making process has to be developed. The initial stages of this process are currently underway and we will continue to press towards a fully opened border in the future.

Canada has been deemed by the US to have a minimal risk of BSE which means as a country we can have one case of BSE per million animals and still be able to maintain trade with the U.S. Therefore, ***the new case of BSE that has just been confirmed will not affect our ability to begin export lambs on March 7th.***

The minimal risk standards that Canada has met include (but are not limited to): The prohibition of specified risk materials in human food; Import restrictions sufficient to minimize exposure to

BSE; Surveillance for BSE at levels that meet or exceed international guidelines; Ruminant-to-Ruminant feed ban in place and effectively enforced and; Appropriate epidemiological investigations; Risk management, and risk mitigation measures imposed as necessary.

Still Waiting for Federal Announcement

By André Trépanier, Chair

The ringing in of the New Year has brought what we thought was some much needed good news to our Industry; with the USDA finally making the announcement that Canadian lamb will be able to flow into American markets in March of this year. Upon review of the Final Rule, however, it appears as though there are still questions that need to be answered. Despite this we welcome the news as it is an important step forward.

Over the course of the last two years the landscape of the Canadian sheep and lamb industry has changed significantly. Most notably is the movement towards increasing Federal Kill capacity in Ontario and Sunterra's commitment to paying for quality through their grid payment system. However, some of the changes we need to see in our Industry require Federal government support.

The early October meeting with Federal Agriculture Minister Andy Mitchell and his staff was an excellent first step in helping the Federal government better understand our Industry and the difficulties that the border closure has caused for lamb producers. We presented a strategy for Industry recovery and then after discussion with senior staff redrafted the strategy for the Minister's consideration. We have now been waiting two months for a response from his office.

While the CSF has waited for a response to our strategy, the Saskatchewan Alberta and Nova Scotian governments have moved forward and announced support for "other ruminants" (i.e., not cattle). The three provinces have indicated that their producers would be receiving direct cash support. For more information on the details of the provinces producer support program I encourage you to visit their websites at www.gov.ns.ca, www.gov.sk.ca and www.gov.ab.ca.

It is our hope that the provincial announcements will put pressure on the Federal government to announce their support for our industry recovery strategy. A strategy which we feel will provide growth and stability to the industry. Until there is an announcement from the Federal government, we must continue to communicate to them our need for assistance. Although the border opening is good news, in order for the industry to fully recover and be stronger and better than ever, Federal assistance is required.

On-Farm Food Safety Update

By Ryan Van Loon, National On-Farm Food Safety Coordinator

The Food Safe Farm Practices Program is continuing to gain momentum as we look forward into the New Year. A number of provinces have committed to producer training workshops in February and we are currently organizing program implementation in Quebec including supplying the service of French-speaking trainers and support members.

One of the major initiatives over the next year will be to develop a strategy whereby existing provincial flock health programs can be incorporated within the umbrella of our Food Safe Farm Practices Program. There is a natural affinity between food safety and flock health, and it is appropriate that the CSF explore the amalgamation of like programs to reduce costs on training and auditing, and to promote a streamlined approach to program implementation at the producer level.

One of the fundamental requirements for governmental recognition of the Food Safe Farm Practices Program is demonstration of ‘control’. The development of a management system will enable the CSF to effectively direct and control the program by providing a flexible, systematic framework in which continual program development, maintenance and improvement will be controlled. The management system will be documented through the formation of a management systems manual and will provide the description of how the CSF and provincial delivery agents intend to conform to the given set of requirements. This management system will provide a means to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of the Canadian Sheep and Lamb Food Safe Farm Practices Program.

In addition to a general management system, the development of a risk management planning guide outlining a risk management strategy will ensure that all organizations are adequately protected and that our national program covers all potential risk areas. A model and a process to facilitate a consistent approach will aid in the identification, prioritization, management and mitigation of potential risks for the NPO, provincial delivery agents and stakeholders.

It will be increasingly important over the next year to ensure that the program is economically sustainable into the future by exploring marketing and promotional opportunities. As government funding decreases, our provincial organizations, along with the CSF, will need to develop a strategy for long-term sustainability. A clear definition of both the funding and resources required in order to maintain self sustainability as well as the sources from which the funding comes will need to be explored in further detail.

Commodity-specific auditor training will also be a priority so that those producers who wish to complete training and become certified have the opportunity to do so. Auditor-training material has previously been developed, and the CSF is in the initial stages of developing an auditor training implementation strategy. Upon receiving funding, the Food Safe Farm Practices Program will incorporate auditor training and progress towards the final goal of a fully implemented and nationally recognized audit system.

Animal Care in the Marketplace

By Monica Séguin, Administrative Assistant

In today’s consumer society, niche markets, like the one occupied by Whole Foods Market®, are providing patrons with more choice. The supermarket chain, claims to be a world leader providing their clients with natural and organic foods, but is also a pioneer in ensuring that all products meet strict standards and values which include raising farm animals with compassion. In 2003, Whole Foods Market began consultations with animal welfare

scientists and advocacy groups to enhance their farm animal welfare standards, which they expect to put into effect in 2008. To be eligible to do business with Whole Foods Market, farmers and processors must follow certain production criteria. For sheep producers, this means that lambs must be pasture raised without ever being fed animal by-products or given added growth hormones or antibiotics. Producers must also undergo an annual *Verification statement of affidavits* as well as an on-farm inspection and a mandatory third party audit. The comprehensive audit, designed by Dr. Temple Grandin, covers both animal welfare practices and food safety practices which meet the Food and Drug Administration requirements.

On top of the steps already taken by Whole Foods Market to provide their consumers with credible ‘welfare-friendly’ products, in celebration of their 25th year, five percent of global sales on January 25th, will be allocated to create an Animal Compassion Foundation. This independent, non-profit organization with its own board of directors will provide education and research services to assist and inspire producers to achieve a higher standard of animal welfare excellence while still maintaining economic viability.

As an industry, already introducing programs such as the On-Farm Food Safety which may require participating producers to undergo third party audits, we should begin thinking about creating and implementing auditable animal welfare standards that can be tied into current programs. If some commercial enterprises, such as Whole Foods Market and McDonald’s are already requiring that producers meet their prescribed standards, we as an industry should be proactive and create industry standard welfare practices that are dynamic in nature. This would enable us, as an industry to meet both the consumers’ needs, in terms of addressing animal compassion, and the needs of producers in terms of economic viability. Enabling all producers’ access to this information will give them the opportunity to follow the same practices will ensure that no one is left out of the marketplace.

Welcoming OSMA’s new General Manager

The CSF would like to welcome Jonathan Wort as the Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency’s new General Manager. Before accepting this position, Jonathan farmed Polled Dorsets for twenty years in Nova Scotia and for the previous four years he has been the President of the Canadian Sheep Breeders Association. This past December, in addition to becoming OSMA’s General Manager, Jonathan was elected Chair of the Canadian Animal Health Coalition. He has also been the sheep industry’s representation on the Veterinary Drug Directorate for the past year.

“Over the last 20 years I have come to realize that as much as I enjoy farming and tending my sheep flock, what I really enjoy is interacting with other people in our industry; industry staff, producers, suppliers, packers and government. I enjoy being part of finding solutions to problems that challenge our industry and get great reward from the success of a project that improves our industry. It was with this in mind that I applied for the position of OSMA General Manager.” (Taken from the General Manager’s report – Jan/Feb Edition of OSN).