



## Canadian Sheep Identification Program Update

By Jennifer Fleming, Executive Director

The Canadian Sheep Identification Program (CSIP) has been designed to be a dynamic program that can easily adapt to changes in producer needs and industry requirements. The program was also designed to be neither financially prohibitive nor labour intensive. While it is focused around producers, and their requirements, it is also important that it meet consumer and international demands for traceability. As the demands for traceability evolve, so too must the CSIP program.

Six months after implementing the program, its first evolution has begun. The CSF is working in conjunction with Allflex to ensure that RFID tags will be available this fall to all Canadian sheep producers that wish to use them. The use of these tags, identical to those currently approved for use in Quebec, **will not** be mandatory.

The introduction of the RFID tags will be made for three reasons. The first two are in response to producer requirements. Due to the nature of the pink Ketchum Kurl-Lock tag (size etc), most producers are applying this form of mandatory identification only as a shipping tag.

Around the world many studies have been conducted that document that the greatest cost of any form of identification is the labour to apply it. Only by negating the need (and thus the labour) for application of any other form of identification, either for management or registration purposes, will the industry truly minimize the cost of any mandatory identification system. Thus the first reason for introduction of an approved RFID tag and dangle tag set across Canada is to enable producers the choice of this single form of identifica-

tion that meets all needs.

Secondly, as of January 1, 2005, producers marketing their animals into Quebec will have to have them tagged with an RFID tag. What that means is that each sheep and lamb entering Que-



bec will have to be wearing either an RFID tag and a pink Ketchum Kurl Lock tag **OR** an RFID tag with its corresponding dangle tag.

The third identification issue on the CSF radar is the Can-Trace initiative. Can-Trace is a

national initiative that is focused on the ability to trace and trace products as they move through the entire food chain. Launched in 2003, this initiative was led by the retail sector. Today, 20 national trade associations, several provincial governments and the federal government are all participating in Can-Trace. The objective of the initiative is "to identify the minimum requirements from all industry sectors for a whole-chain Canadian food industry traceability program." (For more information visit [www.can-trace.org](http://www.can-trace.org))

More importantly for the sheep industry, however, is the fact that Can-Trace would like to see 80 per cent of all Canadian products traceable by 2008. In order for our industry to be able to meet the goal set out by the Can-Trace initiative, we need to be investigating means with which to fully trace our products.

## Notes from the Chair

By Randy Eros, Chair

I sat down this evening with my calculator and reviewed some of Statistics Canada's major census data for farms between 1996 and 2001. The sad and somewhat frightening truth is that at the rate we are going, Canada will one day be a hungry country. In that 5 year time frame we lost almost 30,000 farms and nearly 40,000 farmers.

At this rate by Canada Day 2042 we will be down to 1 farm, being operated by one farmer. Now granted this will be one very large farm but this farmer will be 68 years old and ready to retire. Then what are we going to eat?

The answer is, quite simply, lamb. While the general number of farms is going down our industry is fighting that trend. If we look at the data for the number of sheep and lambs over the same time

frame and project out, that one farm will have over 4,500,000 sheep; more than three times the total for 2001.

What this tells me is that our industry must be doing something right. I would suggest that what is being done right is the marketing, extension and lobbying activities of our local, provincial and National

producer organizations. These activities are helping to move our industry forward. We have all seen these types of programs; the local lamb promotion that helped build sales, a provincial program that helps reduce producer input costs during drought, and national lobbying efforts that helps

bring some cash during market crashes.

At the same time the producers have been taking advantage of positive growth in our industry. They have increased their flock size by almost 20%



while exploring new and expanding markets. In addition, (or as a result) we have seen a 25% increase in the consumption of lamb in the last decade and see no reason for that trend to stop.

Now it's not all downhill with the wind at our backs, that's for sure. The

last 13 months without the US market has put quite a bend into things. But we will recover either with or without the US markets. Our resilience as producers and our ability to adapt are part of what makes us successful.

Our industry will continue to grow and because of that growth it will become more and more prominent on the agricultural landscape.

This year's Federal election saw the leaders racing across the country stopping everywhere and talking about everything except agriculture. If you get the chance over the next few months to speak to your newly elected MP you may want to ask them what they think their grandchildren will be eating at the Canada Day Picnic in 2042. My guess is lamb.

## On Farm Audits: Their Place in Our Food Safety Program

By Ryan Van Loon, Food Safety Coordinator

The validity of a food safety program is established on the ideology that producers' management systems are measurable and testable. Justification of this process is provided through an on farm audit. Recently there have been a number of producers who have

voiced their concerns about the potential challenges and implications of on farm audits. It is in fact one of the biggest mental and financial hurdles to producer participation in a food safety program. With the newly developed and auditable medicated feed mixing regulations as well as revi-

sions to the meat inspection act, producers are feeling increasingly regulated and scrutinized as their management practices become government regulated and auditable. It could be said that the audit process, the act of a stranger coming on to one's farm and 'testing' farm procedures against a

set of prescribed regulations, is arguably the most invasive component of any program. These are real concerns and they must be addressed if the program is to get off the ground and operate in a cost effective manner for all.

## On Farm Audits continued...

Presently, the COFFS Audit Task Group is researching a system comprised of both full third-party and first-party audits. Under this system, third-party audits would be separated by yearly 1<sup>st</sup> party audits (or partial audits). The frequency of third party audits would in part be a reflection of the audit results—ideally, those who are successful would receive third party audits on a less frequent basis. The actual audit model is being constructed in part by researching other industries' audit frequency protocols as well as statistician formulae and recommendations to create a blueprint

The CFIA plans to audit farms that mix medicated feeds—however, by belonging to a food safety program, you may in fact exempt yourself from these redundancies. Mr. Yves Labbé from the CFIA states in a letter addressed to COFFS:

“Farms that have an approved HACCP based Food Safety management program as promoted by COFFS WG will be credited for their efforts. A matter of fact, non-approved premises will have to provide substantially more information and likely will have to provide additional assurances that the information sent to slaughter is credible. It could also mean

that plant operator may have to implement additional controls when processing animals from non-approved farms.”

The audit itself does not have to be a daunting experience. It is in the best interest of everybody that the producer completes his/her audit successfully. Additional training will be available to producers to aid them through this process, and the pre-audit checklist should cover the important aspects of your operation and highlight any possible failures within your management system before an audit occurs. Under normal circumstances, with the proper

training, the audit process will be a ‘validation’ that your processes are being carried out as you state they are in your documented records. What are some of the points to consider as we move towards implementing an auditable on farm food safety program? Is there a place for a food safety system that allows for different levels or stages of participation? The Food Safe Farm Practices Program is voluntary, and as such we will have to ensure that we implement an audit system that balances the needs of government and industry with the practical realities of the producer.

## Animal Care – Emerging Issues

By *Monica Séguin*

The well-being of farm animals is becoming increasingly important not only on the international scene but right here in Canada. At a recent meeting of the Expert Committee on Farm Animal Welfare and Behaviour (ECFAWB) issues relating to farm animal welfare and the development/implementation of on-farm animal welfare audits were discussed. Representatives from a variety of organizations including the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency (CEMA), Chicken Farmers of Canada (CFC), the Canadian Pork Council (CPC), the Canadian Farm Council (CFC) and the Canadian Sheep Federation

(CSF) were invited to present their ideas and current projects relating to animal welfare. It was interesting to learn that some commodity organizations (e.g., Chicken Farmers of Canada) are writing Good Production Practices (GPP) for animal welfare, with an eventual goal of auditing them. The Codes of Practice are an important part of the GPP's.

Unfortunately, in 2001 due to the lack of funds, the Canadian Agri-Food Research Council (CARC) could not sustain the Code development process. While they are maintaining their commitment to ensuring that Codes are up-to-date



they will not be providing financial support for the revision of the Codes of Practice; including the conversion of the Codes into auditable Good Production Practices.

Since CARC's financial crisis, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) hosted a workshop and other consultative meetings in hopes of determining the needs

and alternatives for promoting high quality farm animal care and handling standards. A diverse group of representatives from all sectors, including producers, processors, consumer groups, animal welfare organizations, academics and government representatives are involved in this process which will ultimately establish who will be responsible for achieving the identified needs and to determine how the stakeholders will work together to that end.

Humane livestock management is a critical component of animal agriculture and our industry should support the ongoing development of the Codes of Practice.