



10 January 2012

Hon. G. Ritz
Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Ritz:

RE: Scrapie Eradication in Canada

Over the past few years, small ruminant organisations have been working with industry, government and producers on the issue of scrapie eradication. Increasing concern over animal health and food safety has created the need for improved and sustainable disease risk mitigation. Outbreak of disease results in economic losses for producers, concern over animal welfare and well-being, increased risk to both domestic and wild animal populations and poses risk to individuals, populations and society. Increasing awareness of direct and indirect links between animal health and human health exists in light of the appreciation of emerging and re-emerging diseases.

National scrapie eradication measures protect the national flock

In 2010 the small ruminant industry received funding through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's (AAFC) AgriFlexibility program to develop and implement the National TSE Eradication Plan. This comprehensive project was designed to address growing concern over scrapie both domestically and internationally. The project set out to determine the prevalence of scrapie in the national sheep flock and goat herd, develop a scrapie eradication plan and implement an effective and globally recognized domestic scrapie risk mitigation program. Prevalence studies in both the sheep and goat industries are underway and will continue to prove useful in establishing a blueprint for Canada to eradicate scrapie. Measures taken to eradicate scrapie will improve the overall health of the sheep flock and goat herd in Canada. In 2005 the CIFA, in co-operation with provincial governments and industry, launched a national scrapie surveillance program with the goal of eradicating the disease and moving the country towards a disease-free status.

The Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program (VSFCP), an integral part of the National TSE Eradication Plan, has evolved as a CFIA recognised disease control program, fashioned on international standards established by the OIE and endorsed as a globally recognized sanitary measure by the World Trade Organization. The VSFCP allows producers the opportunity to

participate in a disease control program that protects participants against the risk of developing scrapie and provides disease surveillance for producers. The Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program remains a valuable scrapie risk mitigation program for producers.

Scrapie has international implications

Not only is scrapie eradication important to the industry, the perception of pro-action is essential to industry success. Recognition of domestic efforts to mitigate the risk of disease can help build a robust trade based industry on both domestic and international levels where international trade is essential to the vibrancy and long-term sustainability of the Canadian livestock industries.

The USDA has been clear that they will only continue to keep the American and Canadian industries harmonized if Canada's objective *is* total eradication and we fully commit to working towards this. The US is the largest market from which for Canadian small ruminant producers can obtain new genetics, and the industry will want access to their market. Equally importantly, when the US does become internationally recognized as scrapie-free, they will be a stronger competitor in international markets, leaving Canada disadvantaged if we too do not achieve the same scrapie-free status.

The CFIA is developing a pilot project that would be made available to certain producers whose flocks/herds have been declared infected with scrapie. The objective of the project is to evaluate an approach that both meets the CFIA's scrapie control requirements and allows the preservation of rare or valuable genetics where a producer cannot replace breeding stock or reconstruct the flock/herd due to a shortage of available equivalent genetics. The industry applauds the initiative and efforts of the CFIA to support the nation's preservation of valuable genetic material.

The small ruminant industry remains dedicated to the eradication of scrapie in Canada.

The initiatives taken by the small ruminant industry and CFIA to eradicate scrapie in Canada continue to be supported by its stakeholders. Industry partners recognize and appreciate current concerns over disease risk mitigation, scrapie eradication and the development of voluntary national biosecurity measures on multiple levels. The small ruminant industry endorses the need for a continued collaborative approach on this front. In order to move our industry forward, the Canadian Sheep Federation and the Canadian Sheep Breeders' Association remain dedicated to scrapie eradication in Canada and support existing eradication policy.

A positive case of scrapie is a devastating event for any and all producers involved, regardless of the nature of their operation. Any situation where a positive case of scrapie is identified certainly speaks volumes to the need for moving towards scrapie eradication in our country, so these devastating situations cease to exist. Positive cases of scrapie not only lead to the destruction of carefully crafted breeding programs, they continue to pose a considerable threat to the health of the national sheep flock and goat herd. Positive cases of scrapie can span the provinces and affect a large number of producers and animals. In the absence of any form of

disease treatment, scrapie needs to be controlled to protect the remainder of the domestic population. Scrapie investigations truly are regrettable scenarios.

The small ruminant industry recognizes the need to move forward on the front of disease control and resolves to continue efforts towards the control of an internationally concerning disease that currently exists in Canada.

Sincerely,



Andrew Gordanier
Chairman, CSF



Trenholm Nelson
Chairman, CSBA



Roger Turner
President CLGA

BRIEFING NOTE TO THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

INDUSTRY SUPPORT OF SCRAPIE ERADICATION IN CANADA

ISSUE

Re-confirmation of the Canadian sheep industry's support of current scrapie eradication measures at both the industry and government levels.

INDUSTRY POSITION

The initiatives taken by the small ruminant industry in the past to eradicate scrapie in Canada continue to be supported by its stakeholders. Industry partners recognize that there is the need for disease risk mitigation on multiple levels and endorse the need for a continued collaborative approach on this front. In order to move the industry forward, it is necessary to remain focused on and dedicated to scrapie eradication in Canada and support existing eradication policies.

A positive case of scrapie is a devastating event for any and all producers involved, regardless of the nature of their operation. Any situation where a positive case of scrapie is identified certainly speaks volumes to the need for moving towards scrapie eradication in our country, so these devastating situations cease to exist. Positive cases of scrapie not only lead to the destruction of carefully crafted breeding programs, they continue to pose a considerable threat to the health of the national sheep flock and goat herd. Positive cases of scrapie can span the provinces and affect a large number of producers and animals. In the absence of any form of disease treatment, scrapie needs to be controlled to protect the remainder of the domestic population. Scrapie investigations truly are regrettable scenarios.

BASIS FOR INDUSTRY SUPPORT

The CSF has been working tirelessly with industry, government and producers on scrapie eradication. The growing concern over animal health and food safety has created a need for improved and sustainable disease risk mitigation. In the case of scrapie, positive disease results in result in economic losses for producers, concern over animal welfare and well-being, increased risk to both domestic and wild animal populations and poses a risk to individuals, populations and society.

Not only is scrapie eradication important to the industry, the perception of pro-action is essential. Recognition of domestic efforts to mitigate the risk of disease can help build a robust trade based industry on both domestic and international levels where international trade is essential to the vibrancy and long-term sustainability of the Canadian livestock industries.

A HISTORY OF SUPPORTING SCRAPIE ERADICATION

Scrapie has been a reportable disease in Canada since 1952 and disease control measures have been in place since that time. In 2005 the CFIA, in co-operation with provincial governments and industry, launched a national scrapie surveillance program with the goal of eradicating the disease and moving

the country towards a disease-free status. This surveillance program has proved effective in identifying and controlling positive cases of scrapie, and reducing the national prevalence of the disease. Implementation of these programs are another strong step in the direction of eradicating scrapie in the national small ruminant population and these effective efforts must continue in support of the health and safety of the national flock and herd.

The small ruminant industry launched The National Genotype Survey in 2005. The survey results were used to create a database of scrapie resistant genotypes in Canada that would allow producers to breed for increased scrapie resistance and move the country towards scrapie eradication. Participating producers gained information to help them develop breeding programs which increased the scrapie resistance of their flocks, while maintaining productive and high quality sheep. By pro-actively working to increase the resistance of the Canadian flock to scrapie, it is possible to decrease the negative impacts of this disease and serves to reduce international trade barriers.

In 2010 the small ruminant industry received funding through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's (AAFC) AgriFlexibility program to develop and implement the National TSE Eradication Plan. This comprehensive project is designed to address growing concern over scrapie both domestically and internationally. The project sets out to determine the prevalence of scrapie in the national sheep flock and goat herd, develop a scrapie eradication plan and implement an effective and globally recognized domestic scrapie risk mitigation program. Prevalence studies in both the sheep and goat industries are underway and will continue to prove useful in establishing a blueprint for Canada to eradicate scrapie.

The Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program (VSFCP), an integral part of the National TSE Eradication Plan, has evolved as a CFIA recognised disease control program, fashioned on international standards established by the OIE and endorsed as a globally recognized sanitary measure by the World Trade Organization. The VSFCP allows producers the opportunity to participate in a disease control program that protects participants against the risk of developing scrapie and provides disease surveillance for producers. The Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program remains a valuable disease risk mitigation program for producers, and is endorsed by Canada's small ruminant industry.

The CFIA is developing a pilot project that would be made available to certain producers whose flocks/herds have been declared infected with scrapie. The objective of the project is to evaluate an approach that both meets the CFIA's scrapie control requirements and allows for the preservation of rare or valuable genetics where a producer cannot replace breeding stock or reconstruct the flock/herd due to a shortage of available equivalent genetics. The industry applauds the initiative and efforts of the CFIA to support the nation's preservation of valuable genetic material.

The small ruminant industry recognizes the need to move forward on the front of disease control and resolves to continue efforts towards the control of an internationally concerning disease that currently exists in Canada.

BACKGROUND

Scrapie is a legacy-based disease in sheep and goats that is controlled in Canada by due-diligent attention to prevention and husbandry practices. It is a naturally occurring, infectious, neurodegenerative disease present in sheep and goats, that is passed horizontally and has a long incubation period; that is to say that an infected animal can transmit the disease without exhibiting clinical signs. For these reasons, classical scrapie is endemic in many parts of the world.

Scrapie is a prion disease of the same classification as Creutzfeldt-jakob disease in people and although scrapie has not yet been proven to pose a risk to human health, the extreme chemical and physical resistance of the scrapie agent, and the fact that it is experimentally transmissible by injection to a wide spectrum of mammalian species, suggest that prudence is required in preventing human exposure.

Due to the nature of the disease, the OIE has designated scrapie as globally notifiable and, as such, all positive cases must be publicly published. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has listed scrapie as one of this country's reportable diseases requiring by law that a positive case must be reported to government authorities in the interest of allowing authorities to monitor the disease and providing early warning of outbreak.

Members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) are encouraged to base their domestic sanitary measures on international standards, guidelines and recommendations. The WTO recognizes the Terrestrial Animal Health Code suggestions for the control of many diseases including scrapie. The suggested disease control measures include official veterinary surveillance of the disease (which includes reporting and regulatory control measures), veterinary authority with jurisdiction over all establishments in the country, compulsory notification of the disease, testing of suspect animals and maintenance of investigations for at least seven years.

The USDA has been clear that they will only continue to keep the American and Canadian industries harmonized if Canada's objective is total eradication and we fully commit to working towards this. The US is the largest market from which for Canadian small ruminant producers can obtain new genetics, and the industry will want access to their market. Equally importantly, when the US does become internationally recognized as scrapie-free, they will be a stronger competitor in international markets, leaving Canada disadvantaged if we too do not achieve the same scrapie-free status.

The National Farmed Animal Health and Welfare Council recommends that Canada needs, for health, economic, security, and trade reasons, a national farmed animal health surveillance program. Scrapie surveillance protects the health of farm animals and provides information on the health status of the farmed animal population. This information allows early detection of disease and the identification of emerging disease events so that rapid response can be initiated and minimal damage sustained.

The CFIA recognizes that, in some scrapie investigations, there may be a limited number of specific situations in which deviation from the standard program could be justified and permitted in the interest of protecting Canada's animal resource base. As such, a pilot project would be made available to certain producers whose flocks/herds have been declared infected with scrapie. Producers would be allowed

delayed destruction of animals with susceptible genotypes thereby allowing reconstruction of the flock through breeding to more resistant genotypes before the original animals are depopulated. The design of this pilot project ensures that the national flock/herd is not compromised, the welfare of the animals involved is not compromised and Canada's animal resource base is protected. The small ruminant industry applauds the innovation of this project and CFIA appreciation for the need to preserve our national genetic base while remaining committed to scrapie eradication.

The disease needs to be controlled in order to prevent the tremendous financial and emotional losses that producers experience when scrapie is identified or suspected in their operation. Outbreak of disease results in the loss of economic benefits derives from animals, concern over animal welfare and well-being, increased risk to both domestic and wild animal populations and poses risk to individuals, populations and society. Due to the nature of the disease and given the lack of effective live animal testing and the lengthy incubation period of the disease, scrapie needs to be effectively contained in the interest of protecting the national sheep flock and national goat herd.

Positive cases of scrapie not only lead to the destruction of carefully crafted breeding programs, they continue to pose a considerable threat to the health of the national sheep flock and national goat herd. Scrapie investigations can implicate a large number of producers in multiple provinces and effect a large number animals. In the absence of any form of disease treatment, scrapie needs to be controlled to protect the remainder of the domestic population. Scrapie investigations truly are regrettable scenarios and every precaution possible needs to be taken to minimize their occurrences in the future.