



**BRIEFING NOTE TO THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD  
AND  
THE MINISTER OF NATURAL RESOURCES  
  
A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR PREDATION**

**ISSUE:**

The lack of a coordinated national approach to predation is a major detriment to growth of Canada's sheep industry and is contributing factor to the ongoing attrition of Canada's sheep farmers.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

Canada's sheep industry is asking the Ministers of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Natural Resources to collaborate on the design and development of a national strategy on predation. The new national strategy would provide a clear and consistent framework for dealing with predation issues across Canada, while providing sheep farmers with effective, practical tools to protect their flocks and livelihood.

Since wildlife is publicly owned, the public shares responsibility in controlling wildlife damage. Federal and provincial funding designed to reduce problems created when wildlife cause damage to agricultural producers is needed as part of a comprehensive solution which assesses the problem on a national scale.

The sheep industry takes responsibility for its role in managing Canadian wildlife as a unique resource however there is also the need to ensure food security. As such, a collaborative approach to dealing with predation is vital.

**A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR PREDATION:**

As a minimum, Canada's sheep industry is requesting a National Predation Strategy that includes:

1. Consistent reporting across all provinces so that a loss history can be developed; giving the livestock industries the ability to benchmark
2. A national meeting/symposium with provincial and federal Ministry of Natural Resource and Agriculture representatives to discuss
  - Clarity on the definition of a predator



- The tools currently available to producers
  - New tools that should be available to producers
  - Expansion of the list of predators covered by provincial Acts
  - Expansion of the list of species of livestock covered to include all commercially raised livestock, including llamas and other guard animals
  - Research specific to predating wildlife as a priority in provincial wildlife management programs
  - Research and innovation on new technologies to help producers manage predation
3. A grant program for producers to implement non-lethal predator control methods e.g.,
- Predator resistant fencing
  - Purchasing guardian animals
4. Funding to ensure that multi species predator control agents can be employed to help producers manage predation

#### **RATIONALE SUPPORTING THE RECOMMENDATION:**

- Government policies have played a significant role in the increase of wildlife throughout the countryside
- The costs of wildlife predation are distributed *unevenly* among farmers, with some facing significant losses
- Alberta paid out close to \$1 million<sup>1</sup> in 2007 on predation claims; compared to just over \$100,000 in 2005-2006
- Predation cost in Saskatchewan were \$681,000<sup>2</sup>
- Ontario paid \$1.33 million<sup>3</sup> in 2008.

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<sup>1</sup> This amount represents claims for all livestock, small ruminant sector, cattle, horses *et cetera*

<sup>2</sup> This is from April 1, 2007 to March 31, 2008, \$82,000 was spent by the Ministry of Agriculture to assist producers in predation management. The balance is the cost of the lost animals to the Saskatchewan sheep industry.

<sup>3</sup> This amount represents claims for all livestock, small ruminant sector, cattle, horses *et cetera*



- The Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association paper *Probing Problem Wildlife* states that over \$41 million in damages are done each year in Ontario alone and that farmers spend \$7.5 million annual on abatement measures<sup>4</sup>
- Some provinces do not track predation losses, so the extent of the issue is hard to quantify and therefore address.
- Working on predator control/management and employing predator control agents could prove to be less expensive in the long-term

**Canadian Sheep Federation**  
**Canadian Sheep Breeders' Association**  
**Canadian Cooperative Wool Growers**

**March 18, 2009**

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<sup>4</sup> This amount represents claims for all livestock, small ruminant sector, cattle, horses *et cetera*



## BACKGROUNDER

The Canadian sheep industry is represented by three national organizations: the Canadian Sheep Breeders Association (CSBA), the Canadian Cooperative Wool Growers (CCWG), and the Canadian Sheep Federation (CSF). These organizations work tirelessly to represent Canada's sheep industry which consists of 11,000 producers who produce 789,500 lambs annually with a market value of \$125 million.

The Canadian sheep industry only fills 50 per cent of its domestic demand for lamb – demand that continues to grow. Over the last 2 years, the demand for lamb in Canada has increased by 10 per cent. There is a tremendous amount of room for growth within the industry and national organizations have been working tirelessly to encourage producers to increase their flocks.

Increasing supply, however, is not easy when production is being systematically reduced through uncontrolled predation. Predation has not only been cited as a major barrier to growing production, it has also been cited as a key cause of producers getting out of production entirely.

Coyotes pose a very serious threat to the continued livelihood of many Canadian sheep producers across all of Canada. Coyote predation is responsible for the devastating loss of valuable livestock and farm income, as well as creating additional costs for our producers and for provincial governments. The cost is high. In 2008, the Ontario government paid out \$1.33 million to producers for losses due to predation.

Despite compensation to producers in Ontario, predation remains the most limiting factor for growth as producers lack the necessary tools to prevent and manage predators. Producers from across the country are also worried that the information recorded by provincial ministries underestimates the number of animals lost.

Compensation, when offered, is often inadequate to cover the escalating livestock losses facing the industry. There are limitations on the types of predators that are covered, and administrative requirements (e.g., claim inspection, fees, proof of loss *et cetera*) which can also make accessing compensation difficult. In Alberta, compensation is only available for losses due to large predators such as wolves, bears and cougars. Yet, Alberta sheep farmers, must grapple with losses due to coyotes or ravens – losses which do not qualify for compensation.

Total compensation values tend to underestimate the real problem of predation. Most compensation programs require that a carcass be present to support a claim. Many lambs are removed from the pasture by predators, leaving no carcass behind. Additionally, where compensation exists it does not provide coverage for the loss of genetics and future income in



relation to the sale of the genetics, or the reduction in farm income associated with the loss of animals that were designated as replacements.

Canada's sheep farmers must also deal with increased management costs associated with predation including:

- loss of pasturing time because of housing at night,
- inability to use pastures,
- loss of productivity and condition due to stress on livestock and time dealing with predation losses.

Producers also have direct costs associated with predation control. A typical working dog costs \$350 in food and \$150 in veterinarian costs per year and over a 5 year working life can cost \$4.33 per ewe per year.<sup>1</sup> An Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association experimental fencing project done in 2001 gave an annual fence cost of \$3.21/ewe/year, and steel costs have doubled since then.

While the sheep industry supports non-lethal methods of predator control such as enhanced fencing and the use of guard animals such as guardian dogs, llamas and donkeys, these first line defence tools are not the cure-all for predation. Their usage has achieved some modest success for predation control, but once a predator breaches that defence line and is successful at killing a sheep or lamb, they become more adept and persistent in future attempts. Unless these problem animals are disposed of, preventative measures become considerably less effective. The cost of having those problem animals removed is borne by the producer in most provinces.

There is no disputing that sheep farmers are confronted with an expanding wildlife population that adds stressful challenges for survival. Predation is a growing economic problem for both government and the industry. The current regulatory regime dealing with predation in Canada is insufficient to meet our needs.

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<sup>1</sup> This is based on 1 guard dog per 50 ewes, who is dewormed 3 times/year