



# N'ewesletter

Phone: 403-948-8533  
Email: [info@ablamb.ca](mailto:info@ablamb.ca)  
Websites: [www.ablamb.ca](http://www.ablamb.ca) and  
[www.albertalamb.ca](http://www.albertalamb.ca)

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## Message from the Chair

*Phil Kolodychuk*

*Alberta Lamb Producers Chair and Zone 7 Director  
780-835-2112 philk@abnorth.com*



Happy New Year to everyone. Hope you all had a great Christmas.

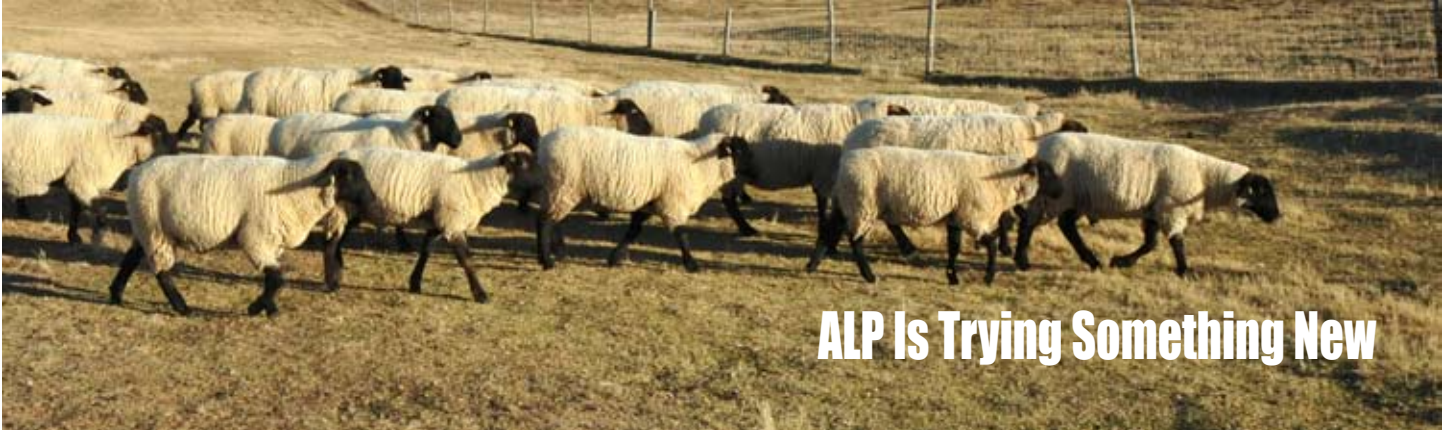
We at the Alberta Lamb Producers continue to advocate for sheep producers with the Alberta government. This lobbying activity includes:

- A RFID tag incentive program to help producers make the transition from the pink metal Ketchum tags to the RFID tags, Allflex or Shearwell, which will be mandatory in 2012. The switch to RFID tags and having a Premises Identification are the only mandatory changes for all producers at this time; see page 7 for the transition timeline.
- A program to assist with the purchase of RFID supplementary equipment that will give producers better tools for managing their flocks. I have been on the lamb traceability pilot for the last year and have seen how much easier it is to keep records and manage my flock with this technology. See page 7.
- A request to the Alberta Minister of Agriculture for assistance to producers in the Peace district who have had their third straight year of drought.

Our next ALP board meeting will be held at the Executive Royal Inn in Leduc on February 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>. We have planned to have a speaker on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> at 1 p.m. We hope you will attend to meet the board of directors of Alberta Lamb Producers and to hear Dr. Ileana Wenger talk on *Keeping Your Lambs Alive*. Look for more information on page 15, and on *N'ewesline* when we confirm the speaker. Remember, we are always looking to hear from you for feedback on what we are doing or what you think we should be doing, so feel free to call or email either me or your zone director.

I hope your winter is mild and your spring has lots of lambs in it.





## Engagement Invitation

ALP represents all sheep producers and we encourage input on any industry issues or topics. Your board and staff are available for calls and e-mails or just to say “Hi,” and let your director know you are a producer in their zone. Annual meetings take place in the fall in each zone. We introduced a new format last year which we will be improving even more this year. We are also trying something else to help put the faces to the names.

**The presentation from the annual meetings is available at [www.ablamb.ca/about/annualreport.html](http://www.ablamb.ca/about/annualreport.html)**

The next board meeting will be on February 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> in Leduc. The board will meet all day Friday, and on Saturday morning. We invite you to come at 1 p.m. on Saturday to meet the board and chat about industry issues and activities. Then, from 2 to 4 p.m. Dr Ileana Wenger will speak on *Keeping Your Lambs Alive*. We know that lamb mortality is a big problem for some producers and can be a significant barrier to good profitability. This is an informal opportunity to learn more about

what you can do to manage your newborns.

This is a trial; we really hope that many producers will take this opportunity to come. For the rest of the year, we plan to move the meetings around the province and offer something similar. Current plans are for Lethbridge in May, and Stettler in August, but we need you to let us know that this is something you want, or if you have topics you would like to hear about. If there isn't any interest in this format, we will try something else – let us know what would work well for you. The dates are in the calendar on page 27, also on our website.

Let us know if you have a public event coming up that you would like to advertise to the rest of the industry. We can include these on our website, in our newsletter calendar, and we can also send out a *N'ewesline*.

***N'ewesline*** is a free e-mail service for news in between newsletters. We don't send you jokes or SPAM and we keep your address totally confidential. To sign up, e-mail [admin@ablamb.ca](mailto:admin@ablamb.ca). You will hear it first on *N'ewesline*!

***N'ewesletter*** on line – each ALP newsletter is available on [www.ablamb.ca/news/newsletter](http://www.ablamb.ca/news/newsletter), in colour! If you would rather not receive a hard copy of the newsletter mailed to you, we can send you an e-mail advising you when a new issue is available on the website.

This offer is available to anyone interested in the sheep industry; just e-mail [admin@ablamb.ca](mailto:admin@ablamb.ca).

**Watch for news soon on advertising opportunities with ALP; the board will be making the decisions at the end of February.**

## Foreign Labour

### Shepherds and Shearers?

Do you have trouble finding help for lambing or shearing? How about finding someone who understands a bit about sheep to cut your workload in the other busy seasons?

A large barrier to the expansion of the Canadian flock is labour availability. One person can handle a lot of sheep most of the year, but if there were a way to find some help during the toughest times of the year that same shepherd might have the resources to add a significant number of animals.

Canadians often aren't interested in this type of employment. The wages and temporary nature of these jobs don't appeal to the type of person we need at times such as lambing. There are many well trained workers in other countries who would be willing and able to do these jobs if we could only get access to them. There are special programs now in place for the horticultural and garden industry. My hope is to add *Shepherds and Shearers* to that program.

In late November, there was a forum held in London, Ontario sponsored by the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC).

Recent surveys conducted by this branch of the Ministry of Human Resources and Skills Development, they identified a need for 50,000 workers or more to work directly on Canadian farms. The number of jobs that are unfilled for various reasons exceeds 45 percent of that number! As well, a high percentage of the respondents reported that even when workers were found they rarely returned for another season.

A large motivator for me to run as an ALP director was to get a chance to work on this important problem. I believe that finding a solution would help many flocks expand, increasing the number of Canadian lambs for sale.

As a director, I was able to obtain a resolution at the Canadian Sheep Federation AGM to take with me to this meeting in London. The resolution will also eventually find its way to the politicians and bureaucrats who need to get something going. The official resolution is on the Canadian Sheep Federation website for anyone who would like to read it.

If anyone has any comments, please contact me at any-time. The more people involved, the more the politicians will listen.

Bill Gibson, Zone 4 Director  
403 788 2883  
gibsonb@netkaster.ca

### Zone 5 Director

Judy Cabay

780 826 5455

[ejcabay@mcsnet.ca](mailto:ejcabay@mcsnet.ca)



## Grazing Conference Vermilion

December 1-2, 2010

I was fortunate to participate as an ALP director at the Western Canadian Grazing Conference held in Vermilion this last December. This is an annual conference with speakers delivering talks on both research, and practical applications of technology related to grazing.

It was a terrific opportunity to promote shepherding to a mostly cowboy crowd. I wasn't the only sheepman in the room however, with both commercial and purebred operators represented. We have a higher profile now. We are finally getting a "little respect"!

Many shepherds overlook the enormous potential of their grazing opportunities for lowering feed and operating costs. The right sheep can be very profitable when managed to use forage directly. Even during the winter, when we traditionally have higher feed costs, there is a big opportunity. The speakers showed how they were reducing both labour as well as cost by thinking out of the box.

More information can be obtained from [www.alberta-forages.ca](http://www.alberta-forages.ca) or I am always happy to talk with you about sheep and related topics.

Bill Gibson, Zone 4 Director

*Many shepherds overlook the enormous potential of their grazing opportunities for lowering feed and operating costs.*

## Opportunity for Involvement

- Advisory panels
  - Vision
  - Why get involved?
  - What's involved
  - Please call the office if you are interested in helping shape and support your industry



Presented by Alberta Lamb Producers  
October 2010

## Vision:

A group of producer volunteers who provide ideas, input and direction to directors, and therefore the board. They will also be conduits of information back to other producers in the region.

### Benefits to the producer for being involved:

- Positively impact your industry
- Understand more of what's going on – be in the loop
- Have access to the board without the big commitment involved with being on the board
- Network with other producers
- Learn and share industry best practices
- Leave a legacy of support
- Gain insight and information about possible service on the board

**What's Involved:** Email your group / hold meetings – the route to be taken will to be determined by each advisory group and director

Contact your zone director if you are interested in participating in an advisory panel.

**ALBERTA LAMB PRODUCERS** is a producer directed and funded organization that represents the interests of Alberta sheep and wool producers to help build a sustainable, thriving sheep industry for all stakeholders. **ALP provides every member with the opportunity to have a positive influence on the industry as a whole.** ALP is responsible for a variety of programs all aimed at supporting producers and ensuring the continued growth and profitability of the industry.

### WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES ALP MAKE?

The world is changing. With new livestock legislation in development, a lot of the work being done right now by ALP staff and directors is focused on developing a framework for the environment sheep producers will have to operate in. **ALP is producers. Your representatives are producers.** We know that systems have to be practical, affordable, and sustainable while meeting the needs of legislation.

When you sell breeding stock to a new producer, please ask them to get in touch with Alberta Lamb Producers, so we can make sure they are aware of the services and information available, and we can add them to the newsletter and N'ewesline lists.

## Alberta Lamb Producers Report to Members

### Communications

*N'ewesletters* will continue to be published six times each year—three full issues and three smaller issues. We were fortunate to secure funding for the last two years of newsletters; this expires in February 2011, **but the newsletters will continue, thanks to your check-off dollars.** You may choose to receive electronic notification when a *N'ewesletter* is posted on the website rather than receive a mailed copy.

*N'ewesline* is available to anyone who wants to send us their e-mail address; we currently have subscribers in all provinces and a few from other livestock sectors. People from other provinces or sectors are encouraged to access our newsletter on [www.ablamb.ca](http://www.ablamb.ca) – on request we will send them an e-mail message when a new issue is posted.

[www.ablamb.ca](http://www.ablamb.ca) website provides open access to all its management resources, notably the *Sheep and Goat Management* modules on nutrition, reproduction and health.

*N'ewesline*, *N'ewesletter* and website services are available at no charge to promote any industry group, events or activities that are open to all producers – this will not change.

### Sheepbytes

This is a sheep ration-balancing computer program – you enter your feed analysis data and the program creates a balanced ration for a particular group of animals. It is currently a DOS-based program, not compatible with Vista or Windows 7, but it can still be used on other operating systems. Thanks to *Growing Forward* funding, *Sheepbytes* is being re-written, with updated *National Research Council* (NRC) tables, as a web-based program to assist sheep producers in providing optimum rations for their animals at minimum costs. **The new *Sheepbytes* program will be available in summer 2011** and a series of workshops will take place next fall to provide instruction in *Sheepbytes* and general nutrition education. Again, please provide specific questions if you need more information.

### Industry Expansion

Expansion has been a focus of Alberta Lamb Producers for the last year. Canada supplies around 40 percent of the country's current demand for lamb; that demand is increasing year by year. Prices are good and there is opportunity for profitable expansion of current flocks,

#### Key Messages:

1. **Read *N'ewesletter* and *N'ewesline*; communicate your views and ideas to Alberta Lamb Producers.**
2. **Share your questions or concerns with Alberta Lamb Producers; get the facts from the source.**
3. **Get involved in your industry; participate in the solutions and the progress.**

and new entrants. A small increase in productivity would mean more lambs to market and better returns to producers without their needing to keep more ewes. Growth is necessary to maintain infrastructure for the people already in the industry. The import of US lambs is supplementing local supply to a minimal level of operation for some parts of the supply chain. We hear complaints about the distance to processors and auction markets; more sheep equals more infrastructure and more services for all producers. There's plenty of market. **Alberta is seeing industry expansion.** Despite efforts by all provinces, only two are seeing an increase in numbers, Alberta and Prince Edward Island. Statistics indicate 2.3% more breeding ewes in Alberta from 12 months ago, and a 13.2% ewe lamb retention rate, giving a total increase of 2 percent. The shortage of purchasable breeding ewes is holding back overall growth, but there is expansion which will benefit all.

### Producer Workshops

As you read in the last newsletter, a key strategy for Alberta Lamb Producers is to provide the information and education producers need to improve the productivity and profitability of their operations. A funding application is currently being prepared, we hope to secure three dollar (\$3) funding for each one dollar (\$1) check-off committed to the project. We will be contracting expert assistance to provide curriculum and delivery of workshops, incorporating some very useful information being generated by the *Alberta Lamb Traceability Pilot* project. There is strong expertise in the Alberta sheep industry and a willingness to share with other producers, but to get maximum benefits from limited resources we need to have collaboration between all those interested in improving the industry. It is always good to hear that groups are planning to hold workshops and events for



members and, as always, we will provide as much support and promotion of your events as we can. We would also like the opportunity to incorporate your events in the overall strategy. Producer needs and experience are varied; new producers learn from talking to more experienced producers, and need to be encouraged to ask questions. The only stupid questions are those that remain unasked. It is amazing what discussion and learning ensues from basic questions and answers.

Alberta Lamb Producers belongs to producers and needs input, direction and participation. Together we can offer more benefit to producers and the industry—to do this we need to hear from you. It is a two-way street; we need to listen to each other and then move forward in the best interests of the industry. If we had unlimited budget, it would be much easier, but the Alberta Lamb Producers board is dedicated to maximising the resources Alberta Lamb Producers has, and can access, in meeting producer needs.

**You too can make a difference.**

**Please take an active role in your industry.**

**Take part in your regional meeting.**

**Speak to your zone director.**

ALP is your organisation representing you. The zone directors are all producers who have accepted the challenge of giving direction to their industry – your industry. It is easy to be supportive or negative at the auction market, in the coffee shop or in your kitchen – share your thoughts with your organisation and other industry members. Take the time to attend a regional meeting, meet the Board (see details on page 27) and offer your ideas for advancing the industry.



## Government of Canada Strengthening Traceability in Sheep and Goat Industry

### News Release

Ottawa, Ontario, January 31, 2011 - The Government of Canada is once again demonstrating its commitment to enhance traceability in Canadian agriculture. Parliamentary Secretary Pierre Lemieux announced today an investment of more than \$487,000 to the Canadian Sheep Federation (CSF) and the Canadian National Goat Federation (CNGF).

"Our farmers are known for producing safe products," said Mr. Lemieux. "Traceability will give our sheep and goat farmers and exporters another tool to demonstrate the high quality of their products and help them compete in the international marketplace and continue to strengthen the Canadian economy."

This investment will go towards finalizing the development of a national animal identification and traceability plan, creating various communications products and educating the industry on the benefits of traceability. The project will help ensure all farmers have access to and are educated on traceability equipment, which will help create an efficient way of tracking both sheep and goats. This initiative is another step forward towards the full implementation of a National Agricultural and Food Traceability System.

"In recent years there has been a continual increase in the demand for sheep and lamb products, which represents significant opportunity for growth and long-term stability of the industry if capitalized upon within the next few years," said Andrew Gordanier, Chairman, CSF Board of Directors. "A critical success factor for capitalizing upon this opportunity is the industry's ability to address the increasing demand for traceability - providing feedback and information to the consumer about where their food and other products are coming from. We are pleased to be working with the Government of Canada to provide the tools and resources necessary for the Canadian sheep producer to address traceability."

Under the Canadian Industry Traceability Infrastructure component of Canadian Integrated Food Safety Initiative, the Government of Canada supports national organizations in the development and implementation of traceability processes and systems. To find out more about this initiative, please visit [www.agr.gc.ca/cifsi](http://www.agr.gc.ca/cifsi).

Funding is subject to the signing of a contribution agreement for the project.

## Traceability

**The federal government is creating legislation for Canada's livestock industry to mandate traceability by the end of 2011 for the purposes of disease control.**

The only way this can be achieved in the sheep industry is through the use of radio-frequency identification tags. This does not require big investments in computers and equipment.

### Basic

**From January 01, 2012, all producers must use an RFID CSIP tag (current minimum cost \$1.80) and the appropriate applicator (current minimum cost \$10).**

### Optional

RFID systems to provide management benefits: recommended Psion handheld computer with RFID reader and *Farmworks* management software.

Please review [www.sheepcentral.ca](http://www.sheepcentral.ca) for more information on equipment. See below for more information on the *Alberta Lamb Traceability Pilot* project.

**Alberta Lamb Producers has requested government funding programs for both tags and equipment.** Everyone with e-mail is invited to sign up for *N'ewesline* to receive updates as soon as they are available.

There are still many questions and a number of issues to be resolved, so call your director or the office to chat. Once again, here is the national timetable; we have time to address the issues which have been identified.

- **July 1, 2011:** Ketchum Kurl lock (pink metal) and Allflex dangle tags will no longer be available for sale to sheep producers as Canadian Sheep Identification Program (CSIP) tags. Please note that you will have only six months to use up your stocks.
- **January 1, 2012:** All animals born or tagged after this date must be tagged with CSIP RFID tags, the Allflex RF ID tag or the Shearwell RF ID tag (both pictured above.)
- **After December 31, 2012:** The Ketchum Kurl lock and Allflex dangle tags will no longer be accepted at sales or abattoirs, or by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) for shipping, transfer or sale of sheep in Canada.

At this time, the Kurl Lock #3 and the Allflex Panel tag will be officially removed from the list of approved tags for the CSIP.

The Alberta sheep industry is in the third year of the Lamb Traceability Pilot project investigating the available RFID technology and systems and also finding the real costs and benefits of these systems to producers. There are now 43 producer-co-operators on this pilot project – their experience and data from their operations are guiding a traceability system for the industry as well as identifying management benefits created by this technology.

Regular updates are provided in the Alberta Lamb Producers newsletter or can be obtained by contacting the office. There are project co-operators in all areas who can answer your questions about the pilot project and their involvement with it. Two field days were held in July 2010 and more information is on the way.

At the recent Alberta Lamb Producers Fall round up, information was provided in all seven zones on traceability and co-operators shared their knowledge and experiences. If you have specific questions, please come forward and participate in the solution. **A timeline for the transition has been laid out; we know there will be some issues and some changes needed – we have time to sort those out with your assistance – so, be part of the solution.**

Producers in Alberta are well-positioned to adopt RFID and to take advantage of the benefits it can provide. Again, the basic requirement is for RFID tags and an applicator; purchase of RFID systems for management is optional, and we are lobbying for financial support. The following two articles are results of the Alberta Traceability Pilot project, funded by Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency, and Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development; Alberta Lamb Producers is a stakeholder.

*Photo: Allflex RF ID tag left, Shearwell RF ID tag right*



## Sheep Profits – Fact and Fiction

### Precision Flock Management

*Susan Hosford and Tony Stolz*

*Alberta Lamb Traceability Pilot Project*

*January 2011*



Flock managers are looking to minimize the cost and hassle of raising sheep.

A key objective of the Lamb Traceability Pilot project is to find new tools and technology sheep producers can use to improve flock management and, ultimately, profitability.

There are different ways to improve profitability.

On the market side: higher market prices, higher value consumer markets, specialized or branded products, or products with added value. Flock managers have little control over or impact on the marketplace. The project focuses on areas where flock managers have the most impact: financial management in areas such as expenditures, and production management such as ewe productivity.

Making money with sheep, livestock or farming, business depends on efficient use of every resource needed to operate.

In Australia, a shift in business mind-set has been termed 'precision management'. In the UK the 'easy care' sheep production systems focus high levels of management on developing and maintaining low input systems – but that does not mean 'no care sheep' nor less management. Other businesses in Canada are implementing 'lean' production to improve margins. For a sheep flock, 'lean production' can include something as minor as looking at how to reduce the steps and time it takes to carry a bucket of grain from a bin across the yard, over a fence and through the sheep to a feed trough.

Project co-operators are looking at electronic data management systems as tools that may help improve flock operations and margins.

The sheep industry has often looked into how much it costs to feed sheep, how to run a sheep operation and how much income can be generated by a flock. Most often the information has come from 'good memories' rather than financial records. A good memory is a wonderful thing, but when it comes to managing a business, to planning, to setting goals and production targets - 'guesstimates' aren't good enough.

The first data collected from co-operator farms in Alberta and in the National RFID pilot is still to somewhat based on 'guesstimates'. Each year as producers improve their records and see the results, the data gets better. Benchmark data from 45 co-operators does help show where financial and production management sits today. By comparing changes in data it is possible to determine if incorporating new technology and management change will impact flock profits.

Without accurate production data and the ability to analyze records, "guesstimates" have given rise to some production myths. Early data from FarmWorks production records will help co-operators make some key management decisions on ewe productivity. Some myths it has already exposed:

- **Most of the ewes in breeding groups lamb.** No, in fact there are an alarming number of ewes who keep 'slipping through the cracks' in lambing records and who are living a life of leisure with few or no lambs going to market.
- **Sheep average twins, many flocks marketing 180-200%.** No, in fact most co-operators comment on their lower than usual lambing percentages now that they are using lambing reports in the flock management soft-

ware. The reports suggest estimated lambing percentages have mostly been wishful thinking. Tie lambing rates to the number of lambs marketed and the numbers show a lot of room for improvement.

- **Lamb death loss from birth to weaning is less than 10 percent.** No, in fact lambing death loss is significantly higher than expected. Neonatal death loss has long been a challenge. Accurate reports on lamb deaths and lost income provide a business case for improving veterinary care, setting up flock health programs and following better nutritional management.
- **Predators account for a lot of lamb losses.** In most flocks, we don't know that for sure. The losses to predation are not being clearly identified, collected or recorded.
- **Lambs gain a pound a day.** No, in fact there are lambs who take up permanent residence in feed yards. Records of birth date to shipping or slaughter date show that some lambs are in pastures or feed yards for more than a year.
- **\$25 a year will keep a ewe.** No, feed costs have always been and continue to be one of the highest costs to manage. There is a need for improved nutritional management, rations that meet and not exceed the needs of the animal being fed, information on using alternative feeds and feeding systems, improved grazing management and extended season grazing.

### Key points focusing on flock profits:

- **Flock managers across Canada need to improve financial record-keeping.** They need to be able to quickly analyze records so they can decide if the new tractor or feed wagon will pay in their operation. Financial software programs for agriculture, like Farm Credit Corporation's AgExpert in use in a pilot project in Ontario, have been much improved for ease of use and for generating useful management reports.
- **Existing production records aren't giving flock managers the information they need.** More than one co-operator has said all the years of keeping lambing records were a waste of time because the information couldn't be found when needed, and when it was found, it was simply too hard to analyse and to figure out what to do. Flock management software like SDL FarmWorks provides key management reports. Additionally FarmWorks was built as a fully operational component in complete electronic data management system. The system includes RFID tags, tag reader and data logger, electronic scale, sorting crate and FarmWorks software.
- **As in sheep industries in other parts of the world, there is a low level of investment in using research, new information and new technology on Canadian sheep farms.** Developing a 'business case' – where to spend money that will make money - for any new investment needs accurate, timely data. Flock managers in general have not had good enough information to base decisions on flock expansion, investments in facilities, equipment or land. In New Zealand 'Monitor Farms' are core groups of producers in one region who work together to improve their businesses and to solve local problems. Pilot cooperators have commented that one of the key benefits of the project has been working in a group of producers focused on improving their businesses.

### Accurate, up-to-date Information is a powerful tool.

Traditional shepherding and flock monitoring have relied on memory, or for enterprising souls, a pencil and paper. Good flock management software, good financial software can transform a whole bunch of information into knowledge flock managers can act on. Cutting costs is not cutting corners. Low input cost does not mean less management; easy care sheep doesn't mean no care; cost control means knowing costs and planning expenditures.

### What do 'Top Performing' flocks have in common?

More information is coming as the pilot project evolves and as producers in Alberta and Canada start to use electronic data management systems as tools to improve flock management efficiency. Watch for information and discussions with flock managers.

## Making More than \$25.00 an Hour on a Sheep Enterprise?

### Precision Flock Management

*Tony Stolz and Susan Hosford*

*Alberta Lamb Traceability Pilot Project*

*January 2011*



Over the past year the Alberta Lamb Traceability Pilot project has collected and analyzed financial information from co-operating farms on the Alberta and from National RFID Pilot Project co-operating farms. A combination of financial and flock performance data provides a "Flock Snapshot." A "Flock Snapshot" is a picture of the financial status, or financial health, of a sheep operation.

From the "Flock Snapshot" baseline averages are developed for different sizes of flocks. The first flock models include:

- Medium size flocks (150 ewes)
- Large flocks (400 ewes)
- Very large flocks (1000 ewes)

In each flock model the top, the average and the bottom performing groups of flocks were identified. Not surprisingly, like in any other business, you can't afford to be average. Average flock returns are low. Top performing flock models, like any top business, showed good returns with flock managers earning as much as \$25.00/hr or more with their flock.

### What do top performing flock managers do differently?

Some key findings:

#### **Flocks of all sizes can be profitable.**

- That said, size matters – very large flocks have better economies of scale compared to medium size flocks, and show net higher returns.

#### **Flocks that are growing in flock numbers, land base, equipment or facilities, have higher costs.**

- Expansion phases are rarely profitable and must be carefully planned for.

#### **Both extensive and intensive flock management systems can be profitable.**

- Intensive operations, in this case, means more animals per acre.
- In Alberta there are very few traditionally-defined extensive operations – operations that have a large land base, usually rangeland, and run sheep on grass for nearly all the year. Most Alberta operations have a limited land base and much of the nutrient requirements of the flock are met with harvested feeds.

#### **Flock feed costs below \$90/lamb marketed and total flock costs below \$200/lamb marketed are correlated with profitability.**

- Costs and returns are calculated on a per lamb to market (slaughter or breeding) basis.

#### **High weaning rates are correlated with profitability.**

- Weaning rates above 180% were correlated with profitability.
- Weaning rates above 150% were correlated with profitability where high enough average income/lamb marketed was generated (i.e., selling breeding stock).

#### **Investment in buildings and infrastructure below \$230 per lamb marketed is correlated with profitability.**

- As a baseline target, if you market 100 lambs/year investment in equipment or buildings should be no more than \$23,000, excluding investment in sheep (i.e., breeding animals).

**Maximizing income is correlated with profitability.**

- Top performing flocks had incomes of \$20/lamb marketed higher than low performing flocks. (i.e., total sheep enterprise income / number of lambs marketed = income/lamb marketed).
- Selling breeding stock appeared to be more important for medium (150 ewes) size operations than for very large operations.

**Labour, or the time spent per lamb marketed, of three or fewer hours is correlated with profitability for most operations.**

- Higher weaning rates correlated with lower labour/lamb marketed.

**LTPP Benchmark Data – Who has sheep and how many do they have?****The starting point:**

- Micro flocks = 7 ewes / 10 lambs
- Small flocks = 43 ewes / 60 lambs
- Medium flocks = 140 ewes / 195 lambs
- Large flocks = 353 ewes / 494 lambs
- Very large flocks = 813 ewes / 1139 lambs

**And that means:**

- 60 percent of producers market fewer than 100 lambs, or 10 percent of lambs marketed. There are a lot of small/micro flocks.
- Medium-sized flocks market from 200 to 1,000 lambs per year, or 48 percent of lambs marketed.
- Large and very large flocks make up 2 percent of the Alberta industry and market 20 percent of the lambs in a year.

**FarmWorks or Farm Works?**

As you know, the Alberta Lamb Traceability Pilot has tested a variety of equipment and software for RFID systems. The equipment chosen by the LTP for co-operators is based on three years of trial and error. The basics of an RFID system include ear tags, a handheld tag reader and a compatible software program for flock management.

The software program selected by the Alberta pilot is **FarmWorks by Shearwell Data**. The FarmWorks by Shearwell Data, Flock management Software, the Psion Workabout Pro and the Shearwell Set-Tags are being imported by the **Canadian Co-operative Woolgrowers**: tel: 1 800 567 3693. This equipment and other Shearwell data products are also available from **Shearwell Canada Support and Sales**: tel: 780 674 9564.

There is another software program called Farm Works on the market. It is from the US but has a Canadian distributor in Ontario. "Farm Works, a division of Trimble, offers a complete range of solutions for the field and farm office."

**Please make sure that you don't confuse these two programs – the pilot-approved software for use with RFID systems is FarmWorks by Shearwell Data.**

For more information on the Alberta pilot-selected equipment, please go to:

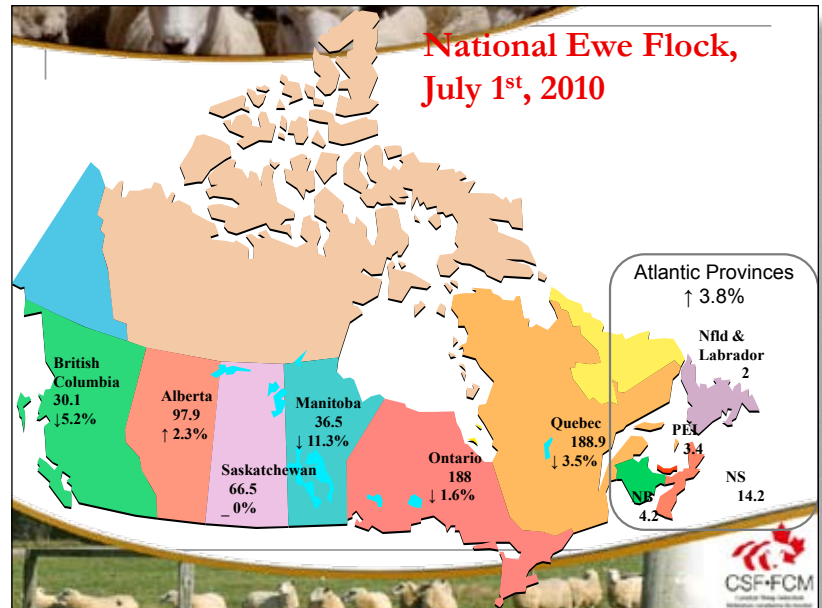
[www.sheepcentral.ca/index.php/alberta-pilot/alberta-equipment-packages](http://www.sheepcentral.ca/index.php/alberta-pilot/alberta-equipment-packages).

## Small Improvements Add Up!

Both in Alberta and nationally, the market wants more lambs and is prepared to pay for them. Demand is increasing, prices are good. How can we produce more? Increased production will not only increase market share, it will also ensure that we retain and even expand the industry's infrastructure. These slides are taken from Anita O'Brien's presentation at the Canadian Sheep Federation (CSF) AGM symposium. Anita used these and other slides to demonstrate the reducing domestic market share for Canadian lamb and some options for reversing that trend.

For the period from 1995 to 2009, the domestic portion of net lamb and mutton marketed peaked in 2004 at 49.5 percent - right after the border closed to exports due to BSE. Domestic supply has gradually declined since then to 42 percent in 2009.

Alberta Lamb Producers' campaign over the last couple of years has been to increase the quantity and quality of lamb produced in Alberta. The campaign focussed on both expansion and increased productivity of existing flocks and also attracting new entrants to the industry. Only Alberta and the Maritimes saw an increase in ewe numbers in the last year, Alberta's ewe flock increasing by 2.3 percent; Saskatchewan remained constant and all other provinces experienced a decrease.



### So, what will it take ?

To increase the number of lambs marketed by 10% through flock expansion?

- Current number marketed = 536.6 thousand hd
- Current mature ewe flock = 538.7 thousand hd
- Current number marketed / mature ewe = 0.996
- 10 % extra marketed = 54 thousand head
- Current replacement rate = 17.3 %
- Need to increase replacement rate to 28.5 % if extra lambs come through ewe flock expansion

A number of producers are increasing the number of ewes on their farms while accepting that this will also increase costs, requirements for infrastructure, labour and management for longer term gain. Breeding stock is currently at a premium and it is hard to find quantities of sound animals with the genetic make up you desire.

Not all producers have facilities for increased numbers, but everyone can take measures to increase the productivity of their current flock.

### So, what will it take ?

To increase the number of lambs marketed by 10% through more lambs produced?

- Current number marketed / mature ewe = 0.996
- 54 / 536.6 thousand marketed = 0.100
- Projected marketed = 1.096 head / mature ewe  
*OR 10 lambs / 100 ewes*



### Small Improvements Add up!

	Current Level	Target
Lamb Mortality pre - weaning	12 %	10 %
11 more lambs /100 ewes will add an additional 59.3 thousand lambs		
Conception Rate (in season)	95 %	97 %
Prolificacy	185 %	188 %
Ewe Replacement Rate	18 %	18 %
Lambs Born /100 ewes	176	182
Lambs Weaned / 100 ewes	155	164
Marketable Lambs /100 ewes	132	143



This final slide shows how some attention to management could increase the number of lambs marketed from the same number of ewes. Everyone can benefit from increased productivity, whether you stay at the same breeding flock size or whether you are expanding. More lambs marketed means more returns. It will involve some homework, some management decisions and maybe some increased costs in order to gain those increased returns.

Before you can make improvements, you need to know where you are now. Are your records good enough to tell you if that ewe produced twins for the last three years? Do you know if all six made it through to market and what the returns were for the number of days' feed it took to get them there?

As the industry moves to electronic tags and traceability, not everyone will choose to use RFID systems for management, but flock management software can certainly help you to maintain records and generate reports to help with management decisions. The availability of accurate information and the labour savings to be made can certainly make that investment worthwhile. As we go to press, the Growing Forward OFFS program is still open. The Psion reader and FarmWorks software are considered eligible items to assist you to implement your OFFS program, so 70 percent funding may be available. Refer to <http://www.growingforward.alberta.ca/> for OFFS program details.

## Sheep and Sharps: A Refresher

With lambing season just around the corner, the Alberta Farm Safety Program would like to remind sheep and lamb producers to handle sharps safely. “Sharps” is the universal term used for items like needles, scalpel blades or broken glass from medicine bottles. In 2009, hypodermic needles with syringes accounted for 32 percent of the farm tool injuries reported in Alberta. Needles surpassed knives (23 percent), grinders (16 percent), cutting torches (4 percent), pitch forks (4 percent) and chainsaws (2 percent), making them the most common hand tool causing injury.

While the pin-prick alone might not be all that scary, what’s on the ‘sharp’ may be more cause for concern. Bodily fluids, blood and residual pharmaceuticals are often present on these items which could easily introduce infection, toxins or disease into your body. Even if the substance on the needle doesn’t directly harm you, the puncture in your skin could leave you susceptible to pathogens from other sources. For example, the same organisms that may cause a ewe to abort a lamb may also induce abortion in a pregnant woman handling fetuses and placental fluids.

The Alberta Farm Safety Program recently published information on handling agricultural sharps called *What’s the Point*. The booklet contains easy ideas to begin a sharps safety program on your own farm. Here are some examples:

### 1. Establish a management system for your sharps

- Post the Poison Centre’s phone number in obvious locations. It is 1-800-332-1414.
- Use thick, rigid containers for sharps disposal and use them each time - milk jugs are too thin.

### 2. Train handlers to practise safe sharps handling skills

- Pick the correct needle gauge for the job – needles do bend and break with pressure.
- Only recap the needle if you are not going to use it right away or plan to transport it to another location. We suggest you use the one-handed scoop method or a re-capping device.

### 3. Store sharps and medicines neatly and out of reach of children

- Proper labelling and storage is essential in improving efficiency and safety.

The Alberta Farm Safety Program also has warning labels, available free of charge, to help you clearly mark your storage area. Upon request, Farm Safety Coordinators



*Sharps Caution decal*

can mail out the *What’s the Point* informational booklet and labels. Working with agricultural sharps can be a dangerous job! Implementing a sharps management system and practising safe sharps handling skills can help you have a safe, poke-free, lambing season. For more information, visit the Alberta Farm Safety Program’s web-site at [www.agriculture.alberta.ca/farmsafety](http://www.agriculture.alberta.ca/farmsafety).

**Footvax** is a vaccine (preventative) for foot rot, which is currently unavailable in Canada. However, veterinarians have been able to obtain Footvax for a specific producer, by requesting importation of the product through the CFIA. Veterinarians are not able to hold stock of this vaccine; each request is considered independently.

Currently, the suppliers do not have access to any Footvax and it is not clear when or if this product will be available again. Based upon the current situation, they will not be able to place further orders for the product.

If and when there is further information on this product’s availability, we will let you know.

## Keepin' Them Alive ...

The first limiting factor in how many lambs make it to market is how many are born, followed closely by how many survive. The fertility of a flock or how many ewes are successful in getting pregnant is different from the prolificacy of a flock, which is how many fetuses are conceived per ewe exposed to the rams. Ensuring that the newborn lambs have the best chance of survival, and that they continue to thrive, is first determined by the nutrition of the ewe. Not meeting the ewe's nutritional requirements during late gestation will have a negative effect on the quality of the placenta that she develops, lamb birth weight, lamb brown fat stores, and colostrum quality and quantity. Lambs that are born from nutritionally challenged ewes will have a higher mortality rate. By meeting a ewe's nutritional demands, you ensure that the lambs are also born with the best chance of survival. Not meeting the ewe's nutritional demands during lactation will have a negative effect on her milk production. The majority of lamb losses in the birth to seven days of age time interval can be controlled by critically looking at your management. To be able to manage the flock from a nutritional perspective you need to know both the requirements of the ewe and the quality of your feeds. "Eyeballing" feeds to determine their quality is simply not good enough.

A healthy gestating ewe is your best candidate for healthy lambs. You can ensure this by:

- Controlling abortion diseases.
- Preventing ewe diseases such as pregnancy toxemia, mastitis, and vaginal prolapse.
- Optimizing colostrum production by managing nutrition and transfer to the lambs by selecting for good udder structure
- Shearing one month before lambing to increase dry matter consumption and improve udder and escutcheon cleanliness
- Improving colostrum quality by vaccinating ewes with a clostridial vaccine, two to three weeks before the first lamb is born.
- Keeping records of the ewes' lambing histories, selecting for those that are successful and culling those that failed.

During the first week of life improve lamb survival by:

- Ensuring the development of the maternal bond.
- Protecting lambs from adverse weather.
- Minimizing their exposure to disease.
- Protecting them from predators.
- Managing disease risk. To manage disease risk you need to understand what disease happens when, and what the best strategy is to control that risk. Limit lamb mortality by knowing what the risk is and when it is most likely to occur. An investment in improving management skills will go further to improve your flock's profitability than any amount of pharmaceuticals.

The above was prepared by reviewing the presentation made by Dr. Paula Menzies at the CSF AGM held in Calgary last fall.

Dr. Kathy Parker  
Zone 3 Director

**Note:** The next board meeting will be on February 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> in Leduc. The board will meet all day Friday, and on Saturday morning. We invite you to come at 1 p.m. on Saturday to meet the board and chat about industry issues and activities. Then, from 2 to 4 p.m. Dr Ileana Wenger will speak on *Keeping Your Lambs Alive*. We know that lamb mortality is a big problem for some producers and can be a significant barrier to good profitability. This is an informal opportunity to learn more about what you can do to manage your newborns.

## How to Get Two or Three for the Price of One

To get the most from their vaccination dollar, producers must understand why they are vaccinating and that they plan to give vaccinations to their animals when the timing is most beneficial. Protecting your new lambs from clostridial disease is effectively accomplished by vaccinating the ewes two to three weeks before lambing is to start, so that the ewes' immunity is highest when they are making colostrum. The colostrum will then supply antibodies to the lambs and if the lambs consume a sufficient quantity of colostrum, they will receive passive immunity from their moms. This kind of immunity is called "passive" because the animal that is now protected did not itself actually make the antibodies. The good news is that by vaccinating the ewe at a strategic time with an "8-way" that includes tetanus (not all of them do), protection of the lambs is accomplished when the lambs

consume colostrum. Remember that the golden rule with colostrum is "As much as possible, as soon as possible." In the first 45 days of life, the lambs are just starting to eat creep feed but the risk of tetanus is high because of castration and tail docking. This is why I prefer to use a 8-way that includes tetanus. When vaccine companies manufacture clostridial vaccines they cannot include all of them in any one product, so when tetanus is included another clostridial organism is not included. My general rule is to have coverage for as many clostridial diseases as possible at a time when the lambs are at the most risk. This would be the reason why I give the pre-partum ewes a vaccine that includes tetanus. The bad news is that this protection in the lamb does not last much longer than about 45 to 50 days, which coincides with the time when the lambs are most at risk to any one of the clostridial diseases, so it is now critical that the lambs get vaccinated individually with an 8-way that does not include tetanus,

*Continued on next page*

Animal to Be Vaccinated	When to Vaccinate	Which Product to Use	Why
Pregnant ewes	2-3 weeks before lambing is to start. This counts as their annual vaccination if they have been properly programmed with two vaccinations as lambs. For purchased ewes with unknown vaccination history, their first vaccination needs to be 3-4 weeks before this one, so start vaccinating 5-7 weeks before lambing is to start.	Either Covexin 8 or Tasvax 8. Both include tetanus and are approved for sheep. Covexin Plus includes tetanus but is not approved for sheep so its use requires a prescription.	To protect the ewes against clostridial disease during a high risk time for tissue injury, and the newborn lambs for up to 45-50 days of age from clostridial disease, including tetanus.
Pre-weaned lambs-primary vaccination	After the colostrum immunity is gone, at about 45-55 days of age.	Vision 8, approved for sheep, 21 day withdrawal time.	To protect the lambs from Clostridial perfringens and Cl. Sordelli, which all cause enterotoxaemia.
Pre-weaned lambs / weaned lambs – booster vaccination	3-4 weeks following the primary vaccination.	Vision 8 For early slaughter lambs this vaccination may not be possible because of the 21 day withdrawal time.	To ensure that the lambs will have immunity for longer than 30 days following their first vaccination.
Rams	Annual vaccination for herd sires.	Vision 8	It is easy to forget the herd sires, so I schedule them for vaccination in the spring.

*Suggested 8-way vaccination scheduling for sheep. Dr. Kathy Parker, January 2011*

because the risk from that disease has past, but does include all of the other clostridial diseases. Some producers think that because they lamb on pasture and do not feed their lambs grain, clostridial disease is not something that they have to worry about. But what is important to realize is that the clostridia organisms live in soil and feces, so all sheep are vulnerable, all year round. By planning your vaccination schedule so that the sheep are best protected against the disease that they are the most at risk for at that time, you will get the greatest return for your investment in time and money.

*Dr. Kathy Parker*  
Zone 3 Director

## SHEARING SCHOOL

**March 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

**Place:** Leslieville, Alberta  
(40 minutes west of Red Deer on Rod and Jacquie Turuk's farm)

**Date:** March 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011

**Time:** 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**Cost:** \$225.00 + GST

**Instructor:** Laurence Reed

Please phone Jacquie to register at 403-729-3067 or email at [rturuk540@gmail.com](mailto:rturuk540@gmail.com).

Please register early as a limited number of students will be taken for the course.

Thanks to Jacquie and Laurie for arranging this course. Please call Jacquie directly if you have questions or concerns.



## Bison and Sheep, Two Species that Should Not Share Things

Malignant Catarrhal Fever (MCF) is a disease that has received a lot of coverage in recent months in the farm press. What is important for sheep producers to understand is that this is a very bad disease in bison, one without vaccination or treatment options, and one that is caused by a virus that is carried by virtually all sheep. Subsequently, bison producers get very concerned about having sheep producers for neighbours. Bison and sheep operations can exist in the same area but we all need to be informed about the risks:

- If you can see sheep from the pasture, then they **may** be too close.
- Lambs, five to nine months of age, and in high numbers, present the greatest risk for transmission.
- **Almost all sheep are carriers of OvHV-2, but are otherwise healthy.**
- The Ovine herpes virus type 2 (OvHV-2) is **fragile in the environment, surviving for only a few days** depending on the humidity and temperature, so sheep and bison can graze the same pasture but over separate seasons.
- Transporters should ensure that trucks used for transporting sheep are cleaned and disinfected before transporting bison.
- MCF does not affect people.
- Not all bison exposed to OvHV-2 will become infected, but of those that do become infected the mortality can be very high.

ALP has been collaborating on an information brochure with the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association and the Bison Producers of Alberta, which is soon to be produced. (The above points have been taken from this brochure.) The project has been made possible by the generous support of the Government of Canada, the Government of Alberta and Growing Forward funding.

*Dr. Kathy Parker*  
Zone 3 Director

## **CFIA Testing for Scrapie**

*The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is urging sheep and goat producers to submit suspicious cases for scrapie testing as the number of confirmed cases in Canada is up to a level not seen since 2003.*

Eleven sheep flocks were confirmed to have seen cases of the reportable disease as of November 30, up from six in all of 2009.

Of the 11, six were in flocks in Quebec, two in Alberta, two in Ontario and one in Saskatchewan. Of those, the Saskatchewan case and one in Ontario were found to be "atypical" scrapie.

CFIA said it would like to test any mature animals (12 months and older) that die on the farm or show unexplained weight loss, problems standing or walking, or changes in behaviour.

Producers can call the CFIA at 800-442-2342 to arrange to have a sample taken for testing. Note that the agency covers the costs of testing samples under the program, and that producers could also be eligible for compensation for animals ordered destroyed due to a scrapie diagnosis.

## **Scrapie Canada Update December 2010**

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has announced that requirements concerning the importation of sheep and goats into Canada from the USA are set to change in 2011.

### **Changes to Import Regulations- Female Sheep and Goats**

As of January 2011, female sheep or goats for breeding, domestic or captive purposes can only be imported from a property enrolled in the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Scrapie Flock Certification Program (SFCP) and determined to be from a "negligible risk premises." This is not a change from the current rules in place.

What will be changing are the rules governing how long Canadian producers must be enrolled on the Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program (VSFCP) prior to importing female sheep or goats from the USA.

The new rules state that Canadian producers (with sheep and goats already on the property) wanting to import females from the USA may do so as long as they have been enrolled on the VSFCP for at least 24 consecutive months and have completed two annual inventories. The same applies for the exporting American producer.

**18 February 2011**

This is an increase from the 12 month waiting period that was implemented in June 2010.

A grandfathering clause has been put in place for producers who enrolled on the VSFCP during the years 2009 and 2010.

These producers will be permitted to import female sheep and goats from the USA as long as they have been enrolled on the VSFCP for at least 12 consecutive months and have completed at least one annual inventory.

The clause also states that Canadian producers who enrolled on the VSFCP during the years 2009 and 2010 will still be required to import from American producers who have been enrolled on the USA program for at least 24 months and have completed two annual inventories.

The grandfathering clause will only be valid until January 1, 2013.

The CFIA, at this time, does not anticipate further increasing Canadian producers' wait time prior to importing females. This means Canadian producers' wait time will not be extended beyond two years.

Enrollment time for American exporters, however, will continue to increase as Canada ramps up its scrapie eradication protocols.

### **Changes to Import Regulations- Male Sheep and Goats**

Changes concerning the importation of males will also be introduced but not right away. The CFIA has announced that some internal discussion on the matter has taken place but nothing concrete has been proposed.

Moving forward, the CFIA will review current literature on the topic and then set up discussions with the USDA. An internal consultation phase within Canada will then follow. This is when industry will be given the opportunity to comment.

Once the consultation phase is complete, new policy will be developed and moved through the approval process.

No specific timeline has been set in place; however, the CFIA has indicated that the industry will be given sufficient time to comment and will be made aware of all changes prior to their implementation. The CFIA estimates that changes will not be made until the summer of 2011 at the earliest.

### **Why the Import Rules are Changing**

The CFIA first announced these changes in early 2009 as part of the industry's move towards scrapie eradication. In order to achieve total eradication, Canada must tighten up its import protocols to reduce the risk of bringing scrapie into the country.

Tightening import protocols is important for a number of reasons. Prior enrolment in the country's flock certification program is a key biosecurity and risk mitigation component, especially as risk tolerance for scrapie is decreasing.

Ramping up is also important for Canada to achieve scrapie eradication and receive the status of "scrapie free" from the World Organization for Animal Health, more commonly referred to as the OIE. One way of accomplishing this is to establish import conditions that are in line with the policies laid out by the OIE.

Current and potential trading partners such as the US, Mexico and South America take into account whether Canada follows OIE regulations when considering trade agreements. In fact, in past negotiations, these countries have questioned Canada's OIE compliance.

The U.S. has made it very clear that they are following OIE scrapie criteria. The U.S. has publicly stated that they are working towards eradication and want to be recognized as "scrapie free" in accordance with the OIE by 2017. They have told Canada that if a trading relationship between the two countries is to continue, Canada must follow a similar path towards scrapie eradication.

*Funding for the Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program 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.*

Please contact Courtney Denard on 1 866 534 1302 with any questions you have on scrapie or the program.

### 4-H PROVINCIAL BREEDING STOCK SHOW



- 4-H in Alberta has an exciting new addition to its Provincial Livestock Shows. This July, there will be a Provincial Sheep Show in the province.
- The Provincial Sheep Show will occur July 13th to 15th, 2011 in Olds, Alberta. It will be run in conjunction with the Provincial Beef Heifer Show, and the Provincial Dairy Show. There will also be several provincial Junior Beef Breed Associations showing cattle as well. These events all make up the livestock event known as "Summer Synergy" which is held at the Olds Fair Grounds and is hosted by the Olds Agricultural Society. This event is also strongly supported by the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede.
- This Provincial Sheep Show will emphasize the breeding stock projects raised by 4-H Sheep Club members. There will also be showmanship classes, multi-judging classes and sheep trimming classes.
- The members will also participate in a marketing competition, as it relates to marketing of sheep and other livestock.
- There are numerous opportunities for entrants of all ages to win Summer Synergy scholarships at this event.
- There will also be opportunities to learn more about the sheep industry, and to meet other 4-Her's from all over the province.
- This looks to be the "can't miss" sheep event of the summer. For more information on this show, please call Andy Pittman @403-757-2395, or e-mail at [pdorsets@telus.net](mailto:pdorsets@telus.net).

## Thinking about Seeding Forages This Year?



There is snow on the ground and spring might seem far away, but it is never too early to start thinking about your seeding plans for the upcoming season. For those of you contemplating putting in perennial forages for pasture, there are a few things you might want to consider when deciding which species to seed.

First things first: not all forage species work in all locations. Each species has certain characteristics that make them better adapted to grow in some areas than in others. Pay attention not only to which grasses and legumes are suited to your soil zone and climate, but also to the conditions in individual fields. Are there low spots that tend to be waterlogged? Do you have salinity, acidity or alkalinity issues? Forage species can differ greatly in their ability to handle different field conditions. I recommend checking out forage species adaptation tables to help make your decision. They can be found online (on Ropin' the Web at [www.agriculture.alberta.ca](http://www.agriculture.alberta.ca)), in the new Alberta Forage Manual (available from Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development), and in most forage seed company seed guides.

You need to consider if the forage species is more suited to hay or pasture (or both in some cases), and what your specific management goals for the field are. Is it going to be grazed, or would you like the option to hay it? Will you be grazing it early in the spring, summer, or fall? Do you plan on stockpiling for dormant season grazing? Once you have decided how the field will be managed, it will be easier to narrow down which species to consider as they vary in peak production, maturity, grazing tolerance, and regrowth rate.

Let's compare smooth brome and meadow brome. They are two of the most commonly seeded grasses in the province. Which would you use for pasture? Or does it even matter?



*Smooth brome (above) and meadow brome (below). Notice how smooth brome has leaves all along the stem whereas the leaves of meadow brome are basal and remain at the bottom of the plant.*

Smooth brome is a “long shoot” grass. The leaves of smooth brome are attached to the central stem and stand tall, making it easy to cut and bale. On the other hand, the leaves of meadow brome are basal (are found at the base of the plant), making it a “short shoot” grass. Smooth brome has slower regrowth and requires longer rest periods than meadow brome. If you wanted to use that field solely for pasture, meadow brome would be best because of its quick regrowth. If you were after hay, then smooth brome is for you. A hybrid of these two, called hybrid brome grass, is also available. It may be an option for producers looking to hay the first cut and graze the regrowth.

If you will be intensively managing and grazing the field, make sure you select species that require shorter rest periods and have fast regrowth. Orchardgrass, meadow brome, tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass, and creeping red fescue can handle shorter rest periods and grow rapidly after defoliation (leaves have been removed). Legumes, such as alfalfa, white clover, sainfoin, and alsike clover, have moderately fast regrowth and require a bit longer rest. And those grasses best suited to hay, such as several of the wheatgrasses, timothy, and smooth brome, have slow regrowth and require long rest periods between grazings. They might not be the right choice for seeding in fields that will be grazed.

It is always a good idea to include a legume in your pasture mixture. Not only do they increase overall forage quality, but they also contribute nitrogen to the soil. Having around 30% legume in the stand can decrease the need for nitrogen fertilizer (other nutrients such as potassium, sulphur, and phosphorus may still be required so don't forget to soil test).

One issue with the inclusion of legumes in a pasture is the risk of bloat. The more legume in a stand, the higher that risk will be. There are management techniques you can implement to help reduce the risk of bloat so be sure to research them if you are considering including alfalfa, white clover, red clover, or alsike clover (which can all cause bloat). You may want to look at cicer milkvetch, sainfoin, or birdsfoot trefoil instead. They are non-bloating legumes and have had success in pastures in certain parts of the province. They tend to take much longer to become well-established, but might be worth a try in one pasture to see how they perform (as long as you are in one of their areas of adaptation).

In general, it is recommended to seed a pasture with at least two species, especially if your field has variations in topography, soil type, salinity, alkalinity, and acidity. You want to make sure, though, that the species you select are compatible in terms of growth periods, maturity,



*Alsike clover above. There are management techniques you can implement to help reduce the risk of bloat so be sure to research them if you are considering including alfalfa, white clover, red clover, or alsike clover (which can all cause bloat).*

and palatability. A good mix should make management easier.

Remember to consider:

- Your soil zone and climate
- Individual field characteristics
- Forage species characteristics
- Your management goals for that field

Set yourself up for success by taking a closer look at that forage mix you were thinking of seeding. Ask yourself if it's right for your situation. Use all the resources available at hand to help in your decision; contact forage seed companies, look up species information on-line, think back to what worked or didn't work on your farm over the years, and make an informed decision when it comes to selecting what to seed this year.

*For more information, contact Stephanie Kosinski at the Ag-Info Centre at 310-FARM (3276).*

## Reporting on CSF Value Chain Round Table

CSF hosted its third Value Chain Round Table (VCRT) meeting on November 2nd in Calgary, Alberta. Strategically held the day before the Annual General Meeting, a number of stakeholders from across the industry participated in the day-long session that included presentations and discussion. Throughout the proceedings, speakers and presenters shared strategies and ideas on how the Canadian sheep industry could meet the challenges it faces and take advantage of increasing consumer demand.

### Increasing Extension Resources Will Promote Industry Growth

The Canadian sheep industry's need for extension information and skill-building tools was made evident at this year's Value Chain Round Table discussion. Throughout the day, producers and industry representatives repeatedly cited the importance of these resources, especially when it comes to strengthening the industry and growing the national flock.

Barb Caswell, Interim Executive Director of the CSF started the conversation with her presentation on the Canadian sheep industry. She said the industry has spent the last couple of years developing skill-building tools and while some are complete, others are not.

For example, the CSF recently developed a cost of production (COP) template and posted it online for producers to fill out. The goal was to gain detailed information on how much it costs to run a sheep operation, use the information to develop a business model, and then apply the model to recruit new producers.

Unfortunately, producer uptake of the online template has been extremely low. "We're having a hard time developing a strong business case with no COP information to

*"We need to support the sharing of knowledge and information throughout the industry between new producers and existing producers."*

support it. So, at this point, the business plan is yet to be finalized," Caswell said.

Caswell also emphasized the importance of extension services.

*"... farming information is not being passed down from one generation to the next so producers need time with extension staff to get answers."*

Bev Greenwell, President of the British Columbia Sheep Federation, agreed. "There is a lot of potential in BC right now, but with all of the new regulations and changes happening in the industry, producers are faced with a lot of challenges. Extension services would be very helpful," Greenwell said.

Extension would also be valuable when it comes to increasing flock numbers. There are many questions concerning the right and wrong way to grow a flock and the industry needs guidance.

Lucien Lesage, Chair of the Manitoba Sheep Association, questioned how fast the national flock could grow on an annual basis. Gord Schroeder, General Manager of the Saskatchewan Sheep Development Board, replied. He said Saskatchewan challenged its producers to increase their flocks by 10%.

"I am not saying that's the right number, but that's the number Saskatchewan came up with and it seems achievable," Schroeder said.

Caswell encouraged the industry to find a balance between keeping replacements and expanding the market. She concluded her presentation by once again stressing the need for strong extension services.

"We need to support the sharing of knowledge and information throughout the industry between new producers and existing producers," said Caswell. "The more accurate and precise the information we can share, the better the industry will be."



## Canadian Sheep Federation

### Best Practices Needed for Producers and Expanding Operations

Sheep producers and stakeholders participating in this year's Value Chain Round Table discussion believe strong extension services are needed to strengthen the national sheep flock and increase numbers.

Tony Stolz, Project Coordinator on the Radio Frequency Identification Pilot Project, started the conversation by referencing his experiences with the project. Stolz said that in all of his farm visits and research, he always found one major component missing – sheep production models.

"I was looking for information on how to design a good management system or build an efficient feeding system, but always came up empty handed," he said.

Stolz encouraged the industry to develop a best practices manual for new producers wanting to get into the industry and established producers wanting to expand.

Andrew Gordanier, newly appointed Chair of the Canadian Sheep Federation, spoke of the Ontario sheep industry's extension services.

"We lack extension in Ontario and the programs that do exist like Growing Your Farm Profits are not very well promoted," he said, adding that there are many holes in finding out where the information is.

Susan Hosford, Alberta Agriculture, added to the conversation.

"Experience is expensive so it makes sense to build on someone else's."

Gord Schroeder highlighted the main issues he's been seeing as the Executive Director of the Saskatchewan Sheep Development Board.

"The top three items I've been hearing over and over again are problems with lenders, the lack of breeding stock and the need to run the farm as a business," Schroeder said.

*"Get the experts together and tell the industry how to build a really good 200-head sheep farm or a really good 1,000-head operation."*

*"Producers are looking for people with experience and knowledge to sort through existing information and then help them assess it."*

### Alberta Lamb Producers Expanding Flock

The Alberta Lamb Producers (ALP) has spent the last two years building on an industry they're proud of and the hard work is paying off. According to Statistics Canada, Alberta was one of only two Canadian provinces to expand its ewe flock between 2009 and 2010.

Margaret Cook, Executive Director of ALP, shared the organization's impressive story at the Value Chain Round Table this year. She said it began in 2008 when the Alberta sheep industry drafted a new business plan focusing on expansion. ALP saw the need for more supply in an expanding market, plus it wanted to preserve and grow the industry's infrastructure.

The ALP received funding from the Alberta Meat and Livestock Agency to develop their strategy. They entitled it "Producing an Industry we're Proud of" and the theme was opportunity, pride and quality.

"We wanted producers to see their industry as an industry to be proud of and not to be always overshadowed by Alberta's cattle industry," said Cook.

Media releases were created promoting Alberta's sheep industry, as was an advertising campaign. A promotional DVD was professionally developed and launched in October 2009. All of the above featured local producers, their comments and views.

Cook said the feedback from the industry and media has been positive and some expansion has already taken place in Alberta. Statistics Canada showed a 2.3% increase in breeding ewes over the last year, as well as an increase in ewe lamb retention.

ALP has been encouraging new entrants to start small and learn production on a few sheep before jumping into large numbers.

*Middle sized flocks are expanding and Alberta has seen a number of new producers enter the industry.*

According to Cook, the whole experience has brought many valuable lessons. She says the key element in strengthening an industry is providing the proper

*Our goals were to increase productivity and encourage expansion in existing flocks, as well as encourage new entrants to join the industry.*



### Canadian Sheep Federation

tools either for new producers wanting to enter or existing producers wanting to expand.

Collaborating with other industry stakeholders is vital in order to share the limited resources that are out there.

"Working together takes commitment but it's very worthwhile," Cook said. "Together we can achieve greater industry benefits from the use of provincial and federal funding and expertise."

Alberta producers pay a mandatory check-off which supports ALP's operations and industry initiatives. Although Alberta's flock is stable and has seen an increase, Cook says that's just the beginning.

"We're extremely proud of how far we've come but there's still a long way to go," she said. "The sheep industry has a bright future with a growing market and good prices. ALP will continue to encourage Alberta producers to take advantage of that."

According to Schroeder, producers have been spending a lot of time developing strong business plans and presenting them to financial institutions only to be turned down. Schroeder said this needs to change.

*"We have to get outside people looking at the sheep industry and investing in it if we want to continue to grow," said Schroeder.*

### Health Status and Funding Key to Genetic Exports

*When it comes to genetics, the Canadian sheep industry needs to focus on two important tasks: developing a recognizable flock health status and seeking out new funding to support genetic exports.*

*This was the message Dr. Lynn Tait, a member of the Canadian Livestock Genetics Association (CLGA), delivered at this year's Value Chain Round Table.*

Tait explained that most of the world does not see Canada as a leader in sheep genetics, but the CLGA is working on changing that. Tait has spent the past seven years travelling the world promoting Canadian sheep genetics on an international level.

She said many lessons have been learned throughout her international exchanges, but most importantly is that the

Canadian sheep industry needs to have a better recognizable health standard.

"We deal with countries that are completely Maedi Visna free," said Tait.

Eric Bjergso, General Manager of the Canadian Cooperative Wool Growers and a round table participant, was interested in knowing more about exporting Canadian genetics to China.

Tait said the possibilities are there but so are the hurdles. China would be open to semen and embryos but they will not come to the table until scrapie is dealt with. Even though China is not scrapie free, they are insisting that Canada is before any trade agreements are made.

China is also looking for live animals in very big numbers, about 15,000-20,000 at a time. Tait warned the Canadian industry to proceed with caution.

"Be ready for the flood gates if that door opens and be careful, you could decimate your industry within a year shipping those kinds of numbers," she said.

Murray Hunt, General Manager of the Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency, questioned Tait about funding for genetics export.

Tait replied by that the CLGA accesses funding solely for export market development and does not support domestic activities. She encouraged the industry to look into obtaining more funds from the federal government for genetic research, promotion and sale.

"I think there is money there for the taking but the biggest thing you should do is organize together as a country and submit a unified proposal."

In closing, Tait emphasized that Canada does not need a huge population of sheep to strengthen its genetics industry.

She said the Canadian Holstein industry makes up only four percent of the world Holstein numbers, but produces 47 percent of Holstein genetics. So even with lower sheep numbers, Canada can and should have a vested interest in genetics.

*"Canada needs national programs for Maedi Visna, Johnes and Caprine Arthritis- Encephalitis (CAE) if the rest of the world is going to take us seriously."*



## Alberta Sheep Breeders Association News

Happy New Year from the Alberta Sheep Breeders Association! I hope everyone had a great Christmas holiday and is looking forward to a new lamb crop. 2011 will be a busy year for the ASBA as we prepare production of a new Alberta road map, giving all Alberta purebred sheep producers the opportunity to advertise their farms and breeds of sheep on a map, which will be distributed to all sheep producers in the province. This map is hugely popular with out-of-province visitors and international guests as well. Please note that this year's map will be the traditional grid map that everyone is familiar with and will show the ALP zone boundaries as well. The ASBA map is very cost effective advertising for your farm and is in effect for three years. We will be sending the advertising applications out to all purebred breeders in Alberta soon, so watch for that. The ASBA website will have a new look by the end of January. Chris Griffen of CG Strategies has been contracted to develop a totally new website for ASBA, and the intention is to offer a one page site to our members to advertise their breeding stock and farms. Breeders will be able submit information to update their pages on a quarterly basis. We hope to offer this service at a cost that will be very attractive to those breeders that traditionally use print advertising to market their breeding stock. There will also be current and up to date information regarding ASBA activities, along with contact information for all directors and members. This update has been long overdue.

The planning for the 2011 symposium is well underway and will be held October 21 to 23 at the Royal Executive Inn in Leduc. The confirmed speaker to date is Woody Lane, who will address nutrition and pasture management, and has been a very popular speaker at past symposiums. ALP will also have a session to update attendees on their activities throughout the year.

ASBA will be collaborating with the Calgary Stampede Sheep Committee and ALP to host the Stampede Sheep Showcase again this year. Last year, this event proved to be a crowd favourite, and gave us a chance to display different breeds of sheep to the public. The ALP display in Agtivity in the City was always busy and really provided an indication of the amount of interest and demand for Alberta lamb. Alan Breakey is heading this committee through Stampede so if any breeders want to have the opportunity to display their sheep at the Showcase, give Alan a call at 403-949-2964.

I and Bob Anderson, ASBA secretary, were able to attend the ALP hospitality evening at the CSF AGM in Calgary in November and had the chance to meet the CSF directors, several CFIA representatives and other government officials. This was a great evening and a chance to meet and collaborate with national sheep directors across the country.

One more coming event to watch for, June 25<sup>th</sup> at the Olds Agricultural Grounds, THE ASBA BARN BURNER!! More details coming!

*Glen Parker, President*  
403 443 7220  
gkparker@xplornet.com



**OLDS COLLEGE**

*School of Animal Science*

## OLDS COLLEGE SHEEP COURSES

### Lambing Fundamentals (101) \$120 + GST

One day course, Friday March 4<sup>th</sup>, 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

- Lambing: normal births and dystocia births, plus supplies needed will be discussed.
- Lambs: demonstration and hands-on work (using live or dead lambs), performing procedures such as: stomach tubing lambs, intra peritoneal dextrose injections, weighing lambs, banding tails, castration with rings, injections and ear tagging. (There will be a possibility of adding a second session should enrolments warrant it.)

### Introduction To Sheep Nutrition \$120 + GST

One day course, Saturday March 15<sup>th</sup>, 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

This course provides an introduction to nutrition principles and their application to sheep. We will discuss feed sampling techniques, reading feed analysis sheets and the role of energy, protein, minerals, vitamins and water in sheep diets.

Go to [www.oldscollege.ca/ce](http://www.oldscollege.ca/ce) and follow the animal science links

Register on-line or call Olds College at 1-800-661-6537 ext. 4677.

*To avoid disappointment, and before making your travel arrangements, please contact us to ensure the minimum class enrollment requirement has been met.*

### CSBA Hires New General Manager



The Canadian Sheep Breeders' Association is happy to announce the hiring of Stacey White as their new general manager. With the resignation of Cathy Gallivan from the position of secretary-treasurer in March of 2010, the CSBA board felt that the time was ripe to expand the position

to a half-time one with additional responsibilities, in an effort to help the board and the association carry out the objectives of its recently-developed business plan.

Stacey grew up on a farm in Saskatchewan and had a small flock of sheep. He used the sheep to raise money for his education at the University of Saskatchewan, where he obtained a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (with Great Distinction) in 1997.

Since then he has worked in veterinary practices in Alberta and Toronto, but has always wanted to get back to being directly involved in the sheep industry and helping it to prosper.


In addition to his veterinary training, Stacey holds a Master's degree in Leadership and Training (2003), and a certificate in Executive Coaching (2010), both from Royal Roads University in Victoria, British Columbia.

Stacey began his new job on December 6, 2010. He can be contacted at the CSBA's regular – toll-free number (1-866-956-1116) and email address ([office@sheepbreeders.ca](mailto:office@sheepbreeders.ca)).

The new mailing address of the CSBA will be 333 Ontario St., Toronto, ON M5A 2V8.

Sign up for **N'ewesline** by e-mailing [admin@ab-lamb.ca](mailto:admin@ab-lamb.ca) No junk, SPAM or jokes, **just timely industry information.**





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*See website for details.*

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### Fibre Week

Olds College, June 24 to July 1, 2011

Fibre Week offers some great opportunities for wool producers including:

- The fleece show
- Master Spinners programs
- Master Weavers programs
- Fibre Arts classes



Alberta Lamb Producers is a gold sponsor of Fibre Week.



## Sheep Calendar

What	Where	When Plus Other Information
ALP Board Meeting	Leduc	February 25 to 26
Meet the Board and Guest Speaker	Executive Royal Inn, Leduc/Nisku	Saturday February 26 at 1 p.m. <i>Keeping Your Lambs Alive</i> . See page 15.
Lambing Fundamentals 101	Olds College, Olds	March 4 at 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Call 1-800-661-6537, ext. 4677 for more details.
Shearing School	Leslieville	March 4 to 5 at 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. See page 6. Please phone Jacquie to register at 403-729-3067 or email at <a href="mailto:rturuk540@gmail.com">rturuk540@gmail.com</a>
Introduction to Sheep Nutrition	Olds College, Olds	March 12 at 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Call 1-800-661-6537, ext. 4677 for more details.
AEPA 3rd Annual AgForum	Executive Royal Inn, Leduc/Nisku	March 15
AFAC Conf/AGM	Red Deer Lodge, Red Deer	April 6 to 7. For more details/registration go to <a href="http://www.afac.ab.ca">www.afac.ab.ca</a>
ALP Board Meeting	Lethbridge	May 6 to 7
Meet the Board and Guest Speaker	Lethbridge	Saturday May 7 at 1 p.m. Watch or call for details.
ASBA Barn Burner	Olds Agriculture Grounds	Saturday, June 25. Details coming soon, go to <a href="http://www.albertasheep.ca">www.albertasheep.ca</a>
Fibre Week	Olds College, Olds	July 1, go to <a href="http://www.oldscollege.ca/programs/ContinuingEducation/fibreweek">www.oldscollege.ca/programs/ContinuingEducation/fibreweek</a>
ALP Board Meeting	Stettler	August 26 to 27
Meet the Board and Guest Speaker	Stettler	Saturday August 27 at 1 p.m. Watch for details.
2011 Alberta Sheep Symposium	Leduc	October 21 to 23
ALP Board Meeting	To be decided	October/November
Meet the Board and Guest Speaker	To be decided	October/November

## Alberta Lamb Producers 2010/2011

### **Zone 1 – Norine Moore** (Nanton, Pincher Creek, Cardston, Fort Macleod)

Address: Box 203, Stavely, Alberta T0L 1Z0

Cell: 403 625 6119

Phone: 403 549 2464

Fax: 403 549 2465

Email: [wnsheep@xplornet.com](mailto:wnsheep@xplornet.com)

### **Zone 2 – Vacant** (Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Manyberries, Milk River)

**Director appointment is pending marketing council approval.**

### **Zone 3 – Kathleen Parker** (Olds, Calgary, Vulcan, Brooks, Drumheller)

Address: Box 338, Three Hills, AB T0M 2A0

Phone: 403 443 7220

Fax: 403 443 2153

Email: [parkerstockfarm@xplornet.com](mailto:parkerstockfarm@xplornet.com)

### **Zone 4 – Bill Gibson** (Wetaskiwin, Red Deer, Coronation, Rocky Mountain House)

Address: RR # 1, Tees, AB T0C 2N0

Cell: 403 382 0393

Phone : 403 788 2883

E-mail: [gibsonb@netkaster.ca](mailto:gibsonb@netkaster.ca)

### **Zone 5 – Judy Cabay** (Wainwright, Vegreville, St. Paul, Lloyminster)

Address: Box 7043, Bonnyville, AB T9N 2H4

Phone: 780 826 5455

Email: [ejcabay@mcsnet.ca](mailto:ejcabay@mcsnet.ca)

### **Zone 6 – Ronald den Broeder** (Thorhild, Edmonton, Drayton Valley, Whitecourt)

Address: RR # 3, Barrhead, AB T7N 1N4

Phone/Fax: 780 674 4050

Email: [broeder@eronafarms.ca](mailto:broeder@eronafarms.ca)

### **Zone 7 – Phil Kolodychuk** (High Level, Grande Prairie, Valleyview, High Prairie)

Address: Box 197, Bluesky, Alberta T0H 0J0

Phone: 780 835 2112

Fax: 780) 835 2181

Email: [philk@abnorth.com](mailto:philk@abnorth.com)

### **ALP Office**

**Margaret Cook**, Executive Director (Rite) 403 948 8533

[info@ablamb.ca](mailto:info@ablamb.ca)

**Jill McInnis**, Administration

403 948 1522

[admin@ablamb.ca](mailto:admin@ablamb.ca)

Address: Agriculture Centre, 97 East Lake Ramp NE, Airdrie, AB T4A 0C3

Fax: 403 912- 1455

[www.ablamb.ca](http://www.ablamb.ca)

[www.albertalamb.ca](http://www.albertalamb.ca)



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