

AI & ET Feasibility Study

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Executive Summary

This is a summary of the findings of the Artificial Insemination (AI) and Embryo Transfer (ET) program feasibility study, initiated by OSMA and supported by the Agricultural Adaptation Council and CanAdvance Program to determine if there is small ruminant producer need and support for an AI and ET program for the sheep and goat industries.

This project was identified as an initial step with the objectives focused on understanding the level of interest and needs of the sheep and goat producers with regards to utilizing genetic technologies as a means to enhance and advance the genetics of the provincial sheep and goat industries.

The project was consultative in process involving producers, producer association representatives, industry, academia and government. The information gathered from the survey and producer meeting consultations identified that sheep and goat producers are interested in an AI and ET program for assisting them with genetic improvement, and ultimately increased profitability, for their flocks/herds.

Key aspects of the feedback concluded:

- Make the program available to all producers and be producer led to ensure the program suits their needs.
- Show financial benefit to producers to gain and maintain support.
- Producers identified specific traits for ram/buck semen donors, quality breeding and slaughter animals to help identify important indicators for the development of benchmarks.
- Increased access to imported semen was a priority and recognized that genetic improvement could increase the value of Ontario genetics for export markets.
- New program should allow for a better understanding of current info surrounding genetics technology and existing programs (i.e. SFIP) and studies to allow producers to access a central source of info.
- Possible website to access information, a catalogue to profile animal genetics and updates to producers to keep them informed. Also reference person to be hired to help organize info and assist producers.

From these results, these strategies have been suggested for possible next phase:

- Provide a one-stop information service providing products such as genetic benchmarking, information management and operational services all in a producer friendly manner.
- Introduce learning components allowing producers to become more profitable. Suggestions include interactive website, lectures, catalogue circulating genetic info, electronic or mailed updates on genetics technology advancements, training and cost benefit analysis. This new business model should include a resource person.

The implementation strategy moving forward identifies short, medium and long-term direction. Initially, it is suggested that a Small Ruminant Industry Committee should be developed to oversee this program development as well as to identify and prioritize other programs that would benefit both the sheep and goat industries. An AI and ET Program Steering Team can then be formed composed of producer representatives (including commercial seed stock producers and breeders), government and industry association stakeholders to spearhead the development of the AI and ET program.

Once established, the AI and ET Program Steering Team can implement the business plan to develop the program structure and financial requirements. Consultation with government will play an important role to outline the tangible and non tangible program support that is available to base a go forward decision to initiate the AI and ET program for the sheep and goat industries.