

ONTARIO SHEEP FARMERS

Position Statement

Predation in the Ontario Sheep Industry

Policy Position:

Problem predators are an increasing challenge and cost for Ontario sheep producers requiring considerable effort and resources on the part of Ontario producers and their service industry organization, the Ontario Sheep Farmers (OSF). In fact, it is the reason many farmers are leaving or not entering into sheep farming.

OSF's position on problem predation is based on the following points:

1. The focus of control efforts should be on problem predators, which cannot always be readily identified given the effect of factors such as weather, season of the year and availability of food sources.
2. Current provincial and federal grants, tools and resources currently available to assist producers in establishing prevention practices are inadequate.
3. All government ministries and levels of government need to join with the livestock sector to collectively find solutions to the problem predator issues.
4. Producer compensation for predation losses does not reflect the actual values of animals on an Ontario sheep farm. Ontario Sheep Farmers recommends an annual survey of sheep breeders reporting actual values of commercial and purebred breeding stock sold. The survey can also help identify the added value for specific breeds utilized for their quality wool or their dairy milk production. The actual value of these animals is significantly more than the cull meat price. The survey should also determine a value for livestock guardian dogs when they are also lost to predation.
5. We recommend the province administer the program equitably to all producers by introducing an online wildlife damage reporting form. We understand a form may already exist and be in use for farmers in unorganized townships. Producers can submit their own photos and investigators can be engaged only when the province requires additional information. We believe this reduction of red tape will save the province and municipalities thousands of dollars in administration time and the cost of investigators for every claim.
6. OSF is working with other industry and government groups to find solutions. These groups include: Beef Farmers of Ontario, OFA Predation Task Force, OMAFA /MNR Agricultural Wildlife Conflict Working Group; Growing Forward Supported by OSCIA; and service delivery groups such as hunters, trappers, fur managers, and municipalities.

Background:

In 2024, OSF members reported the amount of time between reporting livestock damage and a producer receiving compensation was over six months and, in some cases, almost a year. Additionally, inspectors in some municipalities were not responding in a reasonable time to producer reports of damage and livestock kills were having to be documented by producers rather than inspectors to capture the required proof of wildlife damage.

Over many years, there has been broad inconsistency in program delivery between municipalities that has led to inequity between farmers across the province. Some municipalities send inspectors right away and pay claims immediately. While others rarely send inspectors and hold money even when it is transferred by the province until council approves the transfer, causing significant delays.

Additionally, Ontario Sheep Farmers has received multiple resolutions to our board and calls from producers, related to the valuation of commercial breeding stock lost to predation. Presently, commercial breeding stock is only compensated at the cull animal meat price. The cull animal value does not truly reflect any breeding stock value. There is no compensation value given for the many years and thousands of dollars of investment in a commercial breeding program and the future flock genetic improvement these animals represent. Commercial or non-purebred genetics does not mean they are of lower quality than purebred genetics. In many purchases, the commercial ewe genetics have a value premium due to hybrid vigor resulting from the genetic selection for specific traits inherent in other breeds. represent. Commercial or non-purebred genetics does not mean they are of lower quality than purebred genetics. In many purchases, the commercial ewe genetics have a value premium due to hybrid vigor resulting from the genetic selection for specific traits inherent in other breeds.

Additionally:

1. More resources must be allocated by the Ontario and federal government to study and put in place effective legislation, regulations and funding to deal with predators that are a problem for agriculture.
2. The Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) should be directed to:
 - Document recent changes in the number of predators (livestock and non-livestock) in Ontario.
 - Produce an Ontario government position on the desired numbers of each species in Ontario.
 - Work with industry stakeholders and OMAFA to immediately address expanding the number of tools available to producers, hunters, trappers, etc. to capture and/or remove problem predators.
 - Employ and mandate predator removal specialists and allocate sufficient resources for them to carry out their mandate; and,
 - Issue definitive statements on the legality of bounties, controlled culls and hunting competitions for the removal of predators.
3. The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAFA) needs to work with all stakeholder groups to collectively find solutions to the problem predator issues including:
 - Jointly with the federal government, financially assist producers under Growing Forward 2 to put in place predator prevention techniques; that have been shown to be effective under Growing Forward 1.
 - Recognize the full cost of predation to producers beyond the value of animals lost and consider ways to compensate producers for those costs, e.g. drop in production, abortions, veterinary costs for injuries versus deaths, etc.