



Setting the Organization's Path Forward

When we launched the Crossroads Challenge back in November, I did not anticipate the kind of engagement we have seen from the industry. So far, over 200 producers have participated in the Challenge to date. This is exceptional.

Setting an organization's path forward for the next five years is no easy task. To do this while maintaining a commitment to ensure it is built from the grassroots up, during a pandemic makes our progress to-date even more exceptional.

On behalf of the Ontario Sheep Farmers board of directors, I want to thank you for your willingness to engage in meaningful and respectful dialogue through surveys, townhall meetings, individual and/or small group calls and by emailing your thoughts in.

The goal of this first phase of the Crossroads Challenge was to understand your goals and aspirations and the perceived barriers to success.

What have we learned?

As an industry you are engaged and cautiously optimistic about the future. There is a general bias to growth, restrained by some critical barriers that include:

- Access to processing capacity.
- Capital cost (land and buildings).
- Instability in market prices.

Mixed into the conversation is a theme best summarized by the question "what are we as an industry?"

The sheep industry in Ontario is both relatively small and vast. The spectrum of sheep production includes a large range of genetics, market access (direct to consumer, direct to processor, livestock auction), intended consumer, end product (milk, meat, wool) and more.

It is a vast network of activity with some common and some divergent priorities and concerns.

In some ways the complexities of planning for an organization intended to support the full spectrum of activities, intentions and concerns are greater than those experienced in other livestock sectors that principally define individual production in terms of size and scope. Which it to say that we are different – with a hopeful and growing future; but some real challenges ahead.

So, where to from here?

Now that we have some understanding of the aspirations and barriers - as well as the inherent complexity of the "industry" - the task now is to identify and define how OSF needs to be strategically oriented in order to support the success of the "industry" and identify the essential long term choices for OSF in its efforts on behalf of you, the producers.

Before signing off, I do want to address one of the identified barriers to growth, instability in market prices. I have been spending a great deal of time these days trying to understand our markets. As stated earlier, the instability in market prices is a concern for you, as it is for me. For some time, I have believed that there is an imminent, significant market correction looming, and for some time I have been wrong. Given that we do not understand what is driving this (prolonged) strong market, and our inability to predict where prices are going, I share the concern expressed by Ontario sheep farmers about where market prices may head. One thing I know for sure though, is that the unpredictability of our markets makes the work that OSF does on the provincial Risk Management Program (RMP) and the federal Business Risk Management (BRM) suite of programs even more important.

Thank you once again, for your continued passion and commitment to our collective success. **OSN**

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