

Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency

Comments on Ontario's Climate Change

Discussion Paper 2015

The Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency (OSMA) is a producer organization representing all aspects of the sheep industry in Ontario. Established in 1985 under the Ontario Farm Products Marketing Act, OSMA's mission is to enhance producer returns and provide consumers with premium lamb and sheep products by encouraging Ontario sheep producers to provide quality, year-round product through advocacy, market development, industry capacity and organizational capacity. OSMA represents over 3,000 sheep producers who contributed over \$300 million to the Ontario economy in 2014.

OSMA supports the Ontario government's commitment to ensuring our province meets the 2020 and 2050 emissions reduction targets. We are pleased to see that by the efforts of most sectors, Ontario is already well positioned to meet the 2020 target.

Ontario's food producers are very proud of what they do and chose to make their living and raise their families in rural communities. Not only are they vital contributors to the provincial economy, but they are also stewards of the land. Since climate impacts agriculture more than any other sector, climate change represents a significant vulnerability to our food producers. Weather patterns impact every aspect of farming, from our bottom lines to ensuring that Ontario consumers have a consistent, diverse food supply.

Ontario agriculture is already playing a key role in addressing climate change and has shown its commitment to making greener choices. Producers have implemented no-till systems, are harnessing energy using wind turbines or solar panels, are adding pollution reduction mechanisms to farm equipment, and are using precision agriculture to apply inputs strategically to fields, along with crop rotation and proper pasture management. All of this is evidence that the Ontario agricultural sector is playing a vital role in implementing climate change mitigation measures.

In Ontario, the sheep industry is a pasture-based system that both depends on, and contributes to a healthy ecosystem. Carbon sequestration is the natural process of transferring carbon dioxide from the atmosphere into the soil. As sheep graze on pasture they fertilize the ground with their manure, stimulating the grasses to grow and produce more leaves which absorbs more carbon dioxide.

As we look to the future of sheep farming in Ontario and its future contributions to the provincial economy, we recognize the need for more research to be done under local conditions. In terms of adapting to change, we need the Ontario government to make a commitment to innovation in this province and in turn, the resources be made available to support extension to rural areas. With respect to actions sheep producers could take to decrease the already low greenhouse gas emissions on farm in the future, areas to contemplate are feeding strategies and improved genetics. Research in sheep nutrition and genetics, under Ontario growing conditions is one area that is sorely lacking and would have the potential to have a big impact on feeding efficiencies for one, and methane production for another.

OSMA recognizes that as the agricultural industry tackles climate change, and research outcomes provide the industry with new technologies, that knowledge and technology transfer will become increasingly important. It

is vital then that the government make investments into extension staff that can strengthen the industry's ability to tackle climate change. This includes research into climate impacts on business continuity, drought/flood preparedness and disease preparedness. It also means that it is necessary to develop policy and emergency management systems and/or protocols and assisted training programs based on research outcomes.

The ability to adapt to climate change is dependent on extension and investment in new technologies and management practices. A great example of this is the work being done by Australia's Farm 300. This group works to advise, train and support the industry to build practical knowledge and skills that can boost on-farm production and profitability by decreasing greenhouse gas emissions from livestock. Farm 300 is funded by the Australian government and managed by Meat and Livestock Australia.

Sheep producers are dependent on other sectors, such as transportation and industry, and are watching closely how the proposed changes will impact the cost of our inputs (fertilizers, machinery etc.). We caution the Ontario government to tread strategically with the transportation and industry sectors, as regulating these sectors to the point of pushing them out of the province would not have a net positive impact on the economy or the environment. We implore the government to remember that we all benefit when all of our sectors are profitable and engaged in making positive changes right here in Ontario. The government must consider the impacts that carbon pricing will have on our food security; we must cultivate a business environment that encourages food production in Ontario and ensures the viability of its food producers.

In terms of the preferred carbon pricing approach, we favour cap and trade with agricultural offsets. We caution the Ontario government to choose their carbon pricing approach wisely, using sound science-based principles in order to get the details correct. It is our beliefs that having a well thought out plan, with careful consideration to the way the changes will be implemented, will be critical for success and may be more important than the actual approach.

Ontario is to be commended for moving quickly on this issue and for recognizing the leadership role the province is well positioned to take. Sheep producers want to be included in Ontario's commitment to green innovation, and believe there is a significant role for food producers to play.

OSMA
March 2015