



# Continuing to Engage Nationally

When I was elected Chair of Ontario Sheep Farmers, one of the first things I did was take the time to sit down with the Heather and John and discuss what strategic directions we wanted to prioritize this year. One of the most important ones for us, was to continue to engage nationally through our work with the National Sheep Network (NSN) and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA).

The relationships that we have built with Alberta and Quebec through the NSN, proved to be invaluable as we worked to understand the movement of lambs and market dynamics through the price fluctuations in December. We are also working together, with the CFA, on a review of the Business Risk Management suite of programs. And for Ontario, this includes discussions on our Risk Management Program and how that fits into the suite of risk management tools our farmers need.

In January I was fortunate enough to attend the American Sheep Industry (ASI) meeting, along with Pierre Lessard, Chair of the Les Eleveurs d'Ovins du Quebec. The meeting, spanning three days, offered many opportunities to network with American sheep farmers and get a better understanding of the issues and challenges they are facing.

One of the highlights was the chance to meet with the ASI's Executive Committee, where in addition to meeting the incoming President Benny Cox and Vice-President Susan Shultz, the group was able to discuss issues around lamb prices and trade. The American sheep industry is quite concerned about the amount of meat being imported from Australia. They spoke about the Australian imports working in 18-month cycles, where too much lamb comes in, depresses local prices and discourages producers. The only area of the US that is seeing growth is in the Eastern part and is being driven by the Halal market.

Representatives were able to attend sessions on animal health, genetics, production, education, research and policy. The messages heard were like what one would hear in an Ontario meeting. There is a need for better data, genetic evaluations, more specifically genomics, is becoming increasingly important, access to medications is an issue (most notably wormers). While USDA officials were unable to attend the meeting due to the government shutdown, connections were made with industry representatives and discussions will continue how the two countries might be able to work together on some files.

The NSN has also spent time over the last few months reaching out to the CSF in relation to the work being done on Animal Health Canada. Our goal is to try and open the lines of communication and to areas of agreement where we could work together. While I am confident that all parties agree that the industry needs a strong national voice, it is growing increasingly apparent that there are differences in opinion on how that voice could be structured in order to best represent the views of all Canadian producers. I remain optimistic that we will discover the environment for meaningful dialogue. **OSN**

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