Decommissioning of Non-Radio Frequency Identification Animal Tags
Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why are we moving to mandatory Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) tags for sheep and lambs?

To meet the requirements set out for a national traceability system, the Canadian Sheep Federation (CSF) has investigated a number of tracking options that would best suit the unique size and structure of our industry, with RFID systems and electronic RFID ear tags emerging as the best option of those currently available.

There is increasing demand by major Canadian processors for traceability. These processors have a significant investment in Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP), and they have identified risk in the industry's lack of traceability. They have indicated that they will not be willing to buy Canadian lamb in the future without the tracking and tracing ability an RFID system provides.

2. What tag choices do I have?

The Allflex RFID button tag or the Shearwell Data SET tags are approved for use as official Canadian Sheep Identification Program (CSIP) tags.

3. I have already purchased enough CSIP Ketchum Kurl-lock or Allflex dangle tags to last until 2014. Will I be allowed to use up this inventory?

Producers have only until the end of 2012 to use non-RFID tags. Animals bearing non-RFID tags will be accepted by abattoirs or the CFIA as official tags until December 31, 2012. After this time, all sheep and lambs must bear one of the two official CSIP RFID tags – the Allflex button or Shearwell Data SET tag.

4. Can I return unused tags to the point of purchase?

No, they cannot be returned.

5. CSF says that producers will benefit from adopting RFID systems. The cattle industry has been using RFID tags since 2006 yet it has been nothing but a cost. How will it be any different for the sheep industry?

The sheep industry must adapt to the changing requirements of an evolving food production system to sustain current markets, remain viable and realize its immense potential. RFID tags are a tool that will allow for tracking the movement of sheep and lambs from the farm of origin through to conversion into food.

RFID tags will facilitate the collection of performance information following slaughter or death; a function that was far too labour intensive and prone to error using the previous visual tags. Without adding significant labour, RFID tags will also allow the CSIP to meet traceability requirements mandated by the federal and provincial governments, which have indicated that full traceability would be a legislated requirement by December 31, 2011.

For some producers, the introduction of mandatory RFID tags will be an increased production cost. But for the industry as a whole it will help ensure producers are able to maintain markets. Lamb buyers, abattoirs and retailers are all part of the sheep industry's traceability system and have indicated that RFID tags will assist them in meeting their own traceability requirements. If traceability demands are not met, customers will look elsewhere for products and that means major market loses for processors and sheep producers.

Producers who are using RFID tags in conjunction with RFID system equipment may be able to realize management benefits associated with the implementation of these systems. CSF continues to evaluate RFID systems, but we think information currently available presents a compelling case for adopting the technology. Preliminary research in the RFID pilot projects indicates that implementing RFID could deliver benefits including: decreased labour, increased flock productivity and reduced costs.

Additionally, RFID tags will allow commercial transporters, sales agents and abattoirs to move lambs through the chain more efficiently which can lead to an increased ability to accept more lambs without incurring more cost.

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6. We don't need RFID tags for a traceability system. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is already able to trace animals with the current system.

The current system allows the sheep industry to trace back animals to the farm of origin, however, it does not allow the industry to know where the animals have been between the farm of origin and slaughter. Knowing where animals have been and what other animals they have comingled with ensures there is timely and accurate information to minimize the economic impact and duration of an emergency (e.g. ice storm, foreign animal disease).

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7. RFID tags just add another cost that producers can't recoup in the market place.

For some producers RFID tags will be an increased cost, but for others the tags will be incorporated into their business model.

The industry as a whole will benefit from an increase in the capacity to trace sheep and lambs through the market chain and facilitate the collection of better data on characteristics such as carcass quality, superior rams and increases in productivity. Viewing RFID tags as an investment in tools and not strictly a cost is a key to success.

While a direct increase in dollars per pound at sale is unlikely, producers will have the opportunity to recoup costs of RFID from other areas. RFID systems can facilitate savings in labour costs by making various management chores more efficient. Improvements in flock health and productivity are made possible by applying RFID systems and flock management software. This, in turn, provides the ability to analyse production information gathered and stored electronically from individual animals bearing an RFID tag. Using non-electronic tags with these management techniques and software is not feasible as it creates a very labour and time-intensive operation.

8. Why are producers being asked to bear the cost of traceability? Others along the value chain will pass the costs back down to producers. Traceability is "public good" demand therefore public (tax) dollars should pay for it.

While it is true that producers will bear the costs of traceability in terms of the costs of the tags and on-farm equipment, the government has also demonstrated a willingness to invest in traceability. The cost of traceability, however, extends beyond the costs of the tags and on-farm equipment – it also covers the costs of ensuring compliance, audits, pilot projects, research and development.

From October 2009 to present, the federal government has invested more than $1.2 million into the Canadian sheep industry animal identification and traceability program. This does not account for the provincial funding made available for producers to purchase equipment or for provincial traceability projects.

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9. The US has backed off on a national identification system. Why is Canada not doing the same?

The United States has not backed off on traceability. They have simply moved the responsibility for the development of the program and the program requirements from the federal to the state level.

The American sheep industry has a Traceability Regulation Working Group in place to compile performance standards by which the individual states will measure success within the animal identification and traceability programs. This approach focuses on animals moving interstate; it builds upon basic animal identification methods, while providing each state the flexibility to implement processes that meet the needs of their local industries.

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10. Will I be required to have an RFID reader when RFID tags become mandatory?

No. The purchase of a reader and other equipment including computers and software is an individual producer decision, based on what works for their operation and management goals.

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11. Are there other changes that I should know about?

The CSF continues to work to ensure that RFID is the best system for the entire industry – one that's practical and easy, and ensures traceability on-farm and throughout the value chain.

The Canadian sheep industry's traceability program will continue to evolve. The federal government traceability mandate will relate to FULL traceability which includes both Premises Registration – a provincial responsibility – and Animal Movement Tracking. Changes the industry will see in the near future are related to animal movements and reporting requirements. The industry has started the negotiation process with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) and CFIA in relation to what exactly these changes will be, and when they will be implemented.

12. Will I be required to keep more information under mandatory traceability regulations?

Under the current ID program, producers are required to keep a paper record of all sheep 18 months of age and older that leave or enter their property for any purpose. These records must be kept for five years. With the introduction of mandatory traceability regulations, RFID technology will facilitate the collection of movement information for sheep and lambs. This information will be recorded in a central database. It should be noted that movement records are a requirement of FULL traceability and therefore, in the future, will be a requirement of CSIP.

Producers who receive sheep and lambs in a feedlot situation, boarding facilities or purchasing breeding stock, will be required to record and report that they have brought sheep and lambs into their facilities. While this will mean more record keeping, the use of electronic RFID systems will allow these records to be collected quickly and efficiently with less paperwork and hands-on labour.

13. Will I have to pay licence fees (check-off) on RFID tags at the time of purchase?

The collection of licence fees on the production of lambs and sheep is a matter under the jurisdiction of the provincial sheep organizations. Sheep organizations in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Nova Scotia have chosen to apply the licence fees at the point of tag purchase. Other provinces have chosen to apply the licence fee at the point of sale of the sheep and lambs. The current practice in your province is likely to continue.

14. Where can I get more information on the proposed Canadian traceability system?

The CSF will provide the information producers need in order to understand and institute RFID systems. This information will be distributed primarily through its monthly newsletters *From the Flock* (FTF) and *Points of View* (POV). As these changes are finalised, they will also be posted on the Canadian Sheep Identification page of the CSF website (www.cansheep.ca).

If you wish to join the distribution list for FTF and POV please email info@cansheep.ca

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