

July 20, 2009

Proposed Animal Health Legislation for Ontario
Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
Food Safety and Environmental Policy Branch
1 Stone Rd West, 2nd Floor
Guelph, ON N1G 4Y2
E-mail: animalhealth@ontario.ca

RE: EBR Posting 010-6896 Proposed Animal Health Legislation for the Province of Ontario

The Ontario Cattlemen's Association (OCA) is a grassroots organization that represents the 19,000 beef producers in the province of Ontario. OCA advocates on behalf of its members in the areas of government lobbying, policy planning, industry development programs, promoting beef and developing domestic and export markets.

OCA was pleased on June 18th to hear that the Ontario government plans to move forward on farm animal health and traceability initiatives. We support the proposed legislation as a necessary tool for government and industry to manage disease outbreaks that threaten the integrity of the food supply, as well as animal and human health.

The Ontario Livestock and Poultry Council (OLPC), and the Ontario Farm Animal Council (OFAC) have also submitted a response to this proposed legislation. OCA belongs to both of these organizations and while OCA supports their respective responses, we feel it is necessary to submit detailed comments that are specific to the Ontario beef industry. Below are a number of areas that are of concern to OCA that we feel need to be considered in the development of the proposed legislation:

1. Traceability

OCA appreciates that traceability is a valuable component of a strong animal health system. The Canadian cattle industry has mandatory animal identification through the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency (CCIA) and is capable of capturing Premise ID data. CCIA is an industry led organization that is an essential part of Canada's national traceability initiative. OCA would not oppose mandatory Premise ID, however, we request that registration be captured in the already existing CCIA database, and not through another new registry. We insist that the system be designed in an efficient and cost effective manner. The scope of traceability for beef cattle should be developed to ensure that:

- i. It does not impede or delay commerce
- ii. Costs of the system must not result in the industry becoming non-competitive
- iii. The technology must be capable of reading identification at a rate which accommodates normal commerce
- iv. Tolerance ranges for readability must be acceptable to the industry standards
- v. Producer information must remain confidential

Ontario cattle producers should not be placed at a competitive disadvantage to other Canadian cattle producers. While we acknowledge that Quebec has a mandatory traceability system, Ontario needs to be competitive with the Western provinces as our supply-chain is integrated with the West. We request that no additional costs be placed on Ontario beef producers.

The federal government administered a national RFID Reader Program in 2007 which ended in 2008. OCA launched a similar program to top up the federal program and extended it into 2009. These programs helped pay for the installation and capital cost of RFID readers in auction markets, packers, dealers, truckers, community pastures, export service providers, calf clubs, and large feedlots and cow/calf operations. While these programs were offered to all partners along the supply chain, not everyone participated and RFID readers did not reach every point of movement in the system. Without this infrastructure, it is not possible to track animal movement. This is one example of a significant obstacle that must be overcome before a verifiable, efficient, cost effective program for traceability is mandated and successfully implemented.

2. Recognition of the Office of the Chief Veterinarian for Ontario

We believe it is essential that the Office of the Chief Veterinarian for Ontario (OCVO) is recognized as an equal component of Ontario's emergency management authority, and that the OCVO is given the resources necessary to effectively implement Ontario animal health legislation. The role of the OCVO is currently missing from the proposed legislation.

3. Mandatory Reporting

We support the outlined purpose and scope of the mandatory reporting component in relation to designated animal diseases. However, the list of reportable diseases for the province must be compiled only after open consultation and agreement by industry stakeholders. Additionally, if there is mandatory reporting of risks other than animal diseases, we insist that industry is extensively consulted on the specifics, including indemnification and implementation protocols.

4. Disease Prevention, Control and Monitoring

OCA, OVA, OSMA and the Ontario Dairy Goat Co-Operative have recently embarked upon a project to identify the biosecurity gaps along the supply-chain of each commodity, from farm to retail. Only once these gaps are identified, will these industries be able to move forward with implementation. We request that any biosecurity standards are determined by the commodity groups in conjunction with government and other industry stakeholders. The standards should be science-based and consider the economic impact on the industry, and must not result in the industry becoming non-competitive when compared with other jurisdictions.

OCA also believes that the legislation needs to facilitate access to farm veterinary services in under-served areas of the province, including financial support where necessary, to ensure that all areas of the province have an adequate veterinary disease surveillance network and so that producers have access to pharmaceuticals for animal health. OCA initiated a meeting of stakeholders in February 2009 to discuss the regional large animal veterinary shortage, with financial support from OMAFRA. OCA has a staff representative on the sub-committee that arose from this meeting. We would expect that this sub-committee would be involved in regulatory discussions regarding this issue.

5. Animal Health Promotion

OCA believes that animal welfare practices should not be included in the proposed legislation. The provincial OSPCA Act was recently updated, which, in our view, has ample authority to deal with animal welfare issues. The beef industry also has a code of practice for the care and handling of beef cattle, a joint effort between industry and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. We feel these policy tools provide adequate care and handling standards during normal business. Should the legislation focus specifically on the care and handling of animals during a declared emergency, we request these standards be science-based, and correspond to already existing protocols. The Ontario Farm Animal Council should be consulted regarding animal welfare and animal health promotion.

We expect and support the development of both emergency humane slaughter and/or disposal policies for livestock and the development of a comprehensive mass carcass disposal contingency plan as part of this legislation.

6. Livestock Medicines

OCA was in support of making the Livestock Medicines Education Program mandatory as proposed to be regulated in 2003. OCA would be pleased to enter into discussions around this issue again.

7. Compensation and Indemnification Policies

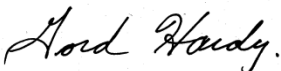
We request the development of a regulation relating to fair compensation or indemnification policies for direct and specified indirect losses for any producers whose animals have been ordered destroyed by government, or whose income has suffered as a result of a disease outbreak. This could include losses from quarantine, extra-feeding costs, lost market value due to weight or age discounts, testing costs and disposal costs. Adequate compensation for producers who experience on-going prevention and detection costs that cannot be recovered from the marketplace as well as for quick response costs are essential to keeping the Ontario cattle industry competitive.

8. Consultation

We request that consultation with industry is on-going in the development of this proposal as well as in the development of the regulations under the legislation. These consultations must be timely and all-inclusive.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed animal health legislation for Ontario.

Sincerely,



Gord Hardy
President