Saving the bacon

Gib Drury
QFA Past-President

Swine flu, mad cow disease, avian influenza. Beware sheep producers—it is your turn next to get slammed with an animal disease name that decimates your industry, but has no relevance to the safety and eating qualities of the meat you produce. If "lamb basted" is waiting in the wings, the federal government will have to play "fireman to the rescue" once again, as they have just done for Canada's beleaguered pork producers.

The federal pork program has three components: a buyout, a loan guarantee and a promotion fund.

The federal announcement of a $75-million-dollar exit strategy for pork producers is a step in the right direction, although it falls woefully short of the $800-million-dollar request made by the Canadian Pork Council. Canada's producers were encouraged through the 90s to expand their output to conquer world export markets. Unfortunately, no one foresaw how fickle and subject to political whims these markets could be despite the World Trade Organization (WTO) rules. The result is that when these markets closed, the meat backed up in Canada and flooded the domestic market, seriously depressing prices. The irony of this buy-out is that it is the only cure for the oversupply of meat in Canada.

The feds got it right in the second component of their bail out of the pork industry. They earmarked a $17 million dollar fund to promote Canadian pork in our export markets and have established a long overdue Agro-food Market Access Secretariat to regain and expand our export markets.

The real kicker in the new program is the "loan guarantee" component, which does not have a dollar amount attached. As in all good Catch-22 programs, it is only available to producers who can demonstrate to the banks that they have a sound business plan that can see them through the current crisis characterized by below cost of production prices. If producers could survive on their own merits, they would not need the feds to guarantee the loan. Also, the first money borrowed must be used to repay Ottawa for any loans made under their Advance Payment Program. Just whose bacon are we saving here anyway?

So, the federal government got the buyout right and the promotion program right, but they blew the loan guarantee. Two out of three is a 60 per cent passing grade. Not great by any standards, but much better than the big goose egg the pork producers had before the announcement.

$92 million to restructure pork industry

Andrew McClelland
Advocate Staff Reporter

What Canadian pork producers have been demanding for months has finally come—but not quite in the way they would have liked.

The Conservative government announced on August 15 that it would allocate $92 million to deliver "a comprehensive restructuring plan for pork producers." For years, the industry has been on the rocks due to a whirlwind of changes and crises. Low prices for hogs, an increase in input prices, country of origin labelling and the current economic recession have resulted in pork producers being unable to pay their bills.

To add fuel to the fire, industry representatives say that the H1N1 scare has turned reactionary consumers off pork and shaken an already troubled market.

"We know Canadian hog producers can become profitable again, but we have to face tough realities to make our pork industry lean and competitive," said federal Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz, speaking at a research farm in Manitoba.

However, the bad news for many of Canada's pork producers is that one of those "tough realities" means helping small-time pork producers out of the industry altogether.

"Some operations simply aren't viable any more and we are going to help them transition out of the industry and reduce production," said Ritz. "Some operations need access to credit to weather the current economic storm and we are providing government-backed loans to help them restructure."

For that reason, $75 million of the $92 million announced will go to a "Hog Farm Transition Program" to allow producers to tender bids for the amount of funding they need to transition out of the hog industry and cease hog production for at least three years.

That means each hog producer who decides to use the escape hatch will have to bid from the total available buy-out money. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada says that the amount each operation receives will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

"We have to face the reality that some producers will leave the industry and we need to reduce our current over-supply," Ritz said.

Welcome news?

Both the Canadian Pork Council (CPC) and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) said that they were pleased with the federal government's announcement. However, both groups cautiously reminded onlookers that the new government initiatives aren't a catch-all solution for the pork industry.

“Is it what we wanted? Of course, straight cash is always nicer without any strings attached, but the reality is that wasn’t going to happen,” said Jurgen Preugschas, president of the CPC.

CFA President Laurent Pellerin’s reaction was similarly mixed.

“The programs announced today are good news for hog farmers,” said Pellerin, speaking at an August 15 press conference attended by both Ritz and Preugschas. “While these programs will go a long way in providing much need immediate assistance for many struggling hog producers, we need to keep in mind that the pork industry is unfortunately not out of the woods yet.”

Along with the $75 million intended to help producers make the transition from pork to other types of production, $17 million has been set aside for an international pork marketing fund for market research, promotion and access initiatives to find new customers for Canadian pork products.

However, many producers are saying that while efforts made to expand the markets for Canadian pork are needed in the long-term, such initiatives will accomplish little for farmers who are already in debt.

Loans

The new package also offers some pork operations long-term loans that will help them restructure their businesses. “These long-term loans will be provided at market rates,” says Agriculture Canada. “Producers with sound business plans will be able to access short-term credit for operating costs such as feed and payroll.”

Liberal Agriculture Critic Wayne Easter had harsh words for the loan component of the $92-million package.

“For months, this industry has suffered while the Harper government did nothing,” Easter said in an official statement. “Months into the crisis what has this federal government come back with? Loans which only the most viable operations will consider. What about the hundreds of producers in financial difficulty? How will more debt help them in the long run?”

Application forms for the funds are not yet available, but are expected to be announced in the coming weeks.

CUMOs lend farmers a helping hand

April Stewart
Special to the Advocate

Few people would argue that farmers aren't some of the hardest working people in the world. Some days it seems that even despite today's technology to ease the workload there's still not enough of you to go around. On top of that, there is a shortage of adequately trained agricultural workers—not to mention that many young farmers are finding it difficult to buy or take over their parents' farms. This younger generation is finding work away from home leaving an aging population with all the work.

CUMOs (*Coopérative d'utilisation de la main d'oeuvre agricole* – Agricultural Labour Force Cooperative) have been designed to ease this burden. A twin program to the CUMAs (*Coopérative d'utilisation de matériel agricole* – Agricultural Machinery and Equipment Cooperative) established in the early 1990s, CUMOs are a collection of trained and qualified agricultural workers at the disposal of cooperative members.

Members are collectively responsible for employees, however the CUMO is actually the sole employer. A CUMO must consist of 30 members of which ten per cent must be enterprises owned by young farmers. Set up to follow the statutes and regulations of a cooperative business model, they offer CSST benefits and hold a commercial insurance policy.

CUMOs are advantageous to aspiring young farmers as it helps them enjoy the same work conditions as those in the secondary and tertiary sectors: full-time and permanent work contracts, increased job security, and reasonable remuneration. It also allows them a better quality of life once they are the principal farm owner, as finding a qualified employee to do chores for a night off or to attend an important information session is at their fingertips.

Furthermore, many smaller farms cannot justify hiring a full-time employee so being a CUMO member allows them to "hire" one at their busiest times. For agricultural workers the opportunity to have full-time permanent positions alleviates the seasonal work cycle.

Financial aid is available to CUMO members through the MAPAQ (*Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et d'Alimentation*). They will cover up to 50 per cent of admissible costs for a maximum annual amount of $2,000 for a period of three years.

Presently, several producers of the Haut St. Laurent Valley (along with the Local Development Centre's Agri-Food and Rural Development consultant) have been working towards establishing a CUMO. If you are interested in becoming a member or for more information, please contact the *CLD du Haut St. Laurent* at 450-264-5252 or e-mail them at info@cldhsl.ca.

New traceability technology for sheep producers

Jean-Sébastien Rioux - Automation Coordinator, ATQ **and**
Marie-Ève Tremblay - Director General, FPAMQ

For several months, the *Fédération des producteurs d'agneaux et moutons du Québec* (FPAMQ) has been developing a new on-site traceability tool for sheep producers. Tentatively dubbed a "traceability PDA," this tool will allow producers to do away with the traceability paperwork that currently comes with declarations of birth or livestock movements.

What is it?

The traceability PDA is a portable, hand-held computer small enough to fit in your pocket. The digital capture tool may be used with an RFID reader to scan sheep's transponders (*see article below*), or without a reader, in which case the data is entered directly into the PDA through the virtual onscreen keyboard. The PDA comes with FPAMQ-developed software that allows easy tracking of lamb births or herd movements (movements on and off the holding, deaths, etc).

The goal of the traceability PDA is to reduce the time producers spend gathering traceability data. Producers will also be able to use the files created to transfer data directly to the FPAMQ's marketing agency and to Genovis, if they so choose.

How does it work?

The pocket computer is used on-site to gather information such as animals' date of birth or sex. Using the PDA, either with or without an RFID reader, saves time and avoids data errors. When using the device without a reader, producers can use the portable computer's touch-screen—no need for a mouse or a keyboard!

Back at their main computer, producers can then transfer the data directly to *Agri-Traçabilité Québec* (ATQ) online, regardless of the time of day or connection speed.

What's the next step?

The traceability PDA is currently being used in four sheep barns. In partnership with the FPAMQ, ATQ will set up and train approximately 30 producers to use the PDA in order to obtain feedback and fine-tune the software. Technical support for the project is being provided by the *Centre d'expertise en production ovine du Québec* (CEPOQ).

Once these trials have been completed, the traceability PDA kits will be available to all interested lamb and sheep producers. Producers may recall the presentation on the device during the 2009 *Ovine Symposium*, held in Granby in September.

For more information…

To find out more on the traceability PDA or on the ATQ trials, please contact Marie-Ève Tremblay (FPAMQ) at 450-679-0540, extension 8435, or Jean-Sébastien Rioux (ATQ) at 1-866-270-4319, extension 5121.

Sheep producers: how well do you know RFID tag readers?

Jean-Sébastien Rioux
Automation Coordinator, ATQ

Tag readers are wand- or scanner-type electronic devices that automatically read a lamb, sheep or ram's tag number. The scanned tag numbers are stored in the device's memory, and can then be downloaded onto a computer.

How does it work?

RFID readers, also called RFID interrogators, range from one foot to a foot and a half in length and are well-adapted to on-site use, whether inside the pen or near a scale. The readers have one knob or button, to activate the reader before bringing it within a few inches of the desired tag. The reader emits a noise and a slight vibration indicating that the animal's number has been read and saved in the device's memory. At the end of the day, all that remains to be done is to plug the reader into a computer to download the scanned numbers.

What's it for?

RFID technology is a time-saver. The readers are extremely practical to run inventories, manage herds and file traceability reports. With a storage capacity of several hundred numbers, the readers can to compile substantial inventories very quickly.

The RFID tags can also be connected to electronic scales to calculate weight gains between weighings, and can be used to file *Agri-Traçabilité Québec* birth declarations or movements in and out of herds.

ATQ's RFID reader loan program

Lamb and sheep producers may borrow a RFID reader from ATQ free of charge for 30 days (ATQ charges $30 for shipping).

During this trial period, ATQ offers producers assistance in familiarizing themselves with the device, and tips on its use. *Agri-Traçabilité Québec* is also planning to hold RFID reader information and demonstration sessions in various regions throughout Quebec. Anyone interesting in attending may contact ATQ.

RFID readers may also be purchased by calling Agri-Traçabilité Québec's customer service at 1.866.270.4319, business days from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Smart producers should try before they buy, however, to make sure the RFID reader is right for them.

ATQ distributes three different RFID reader models: the Syscan Livetrack, the Allflex Stick Reader and the Gallagher SmartReader HR3. All technical specifications are available on www.agri-tracabilite.qc.ca/lecteurs-rfid.html.

Happy traceability!

Beef Herd Management

Results from Abitibi-Témiscamingue

Nathalie Côté
Environment and Quality Control Officer, FPBQ

The following are the results of a study of several promising cow-calf herd management scenarios, conducted between 2001 and 2007 in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region. In this article, we will compare the time required for various operations, as well as the annual costs associated with each scenario studied.

Time requirements

Forage Delivery

The project showed that the forage delivery systems in low-density pens using "window feeders" were more efficient time-wise than other systems in the study. This higher efficiency is due to the fact that it is possible to distribute a larger quantity of feed, which lasts a longer period of time (for a week or more), thus decreasing the per-day time required for forage delivery.

Distribution of bedding

Generally speaking, the distribution time for sawdust and wood shavings is less than for straw. Since sawdust and shavings are bulk materials that are easy to spread, they require less labour time than bales of straw or old hay, which must be untied and decompressed before spreading.

Also, the quantity of bedding spread in the low-density pens was less than that spread in the high-density pens, which explains why the time required for bedding distribution is less in low-density pens. Generally, the bedding used in low-density pens consists mainly of the losses at the feeder and spreading the remains of hay bales.

Scraping and management of manure

Very few farms used the technique of scraping the feeding area, except those with a concrete feed alley, which required more frequent scraping in order to give livestock more healthy and comfortable conditions.

Manure management, of course, begins by gathering it into a pile, which for low-density pens took between six to 10 hours ("machine time"). For high-density pens, gathering took about four to five hours. The time difference can be explained by the fact that a farm tractor was used to do the job, because of the shorter time livestock tend to remain in high-density pens (thus producing less manure) and finally, the smaller size of the high-density pens.

Using a bulldozer could be advantageous for large areas where manure is thin. But a hydraulic shovel is better in cases where manure is more compacted in the pens, where there is a thicker accumulation or to remove thin layers of the “ice pack” (mixture of manure and bedding). For manure in a cold barn, it is not necessary to pile up the manure before transporting it.

Snow removal and site maintenance

Significant time variations were noted when it came to snow removal and general up-keep. In the case of site 7 (see table), the greater time required can be explained by the type of fence used to surround the pen, the freezing of the waterers, as well as a malfunctioning water pipe, which made it necessary for the producer to transport water to the pen. Operation times were also greater for enterprises that distributed feed to the herd daily, since this requires removing snow more often to get access to the site.

Annual costs

For two similar sites (sites 7 and 2), the cost of feed delivery varied significantly. That can be explained mainly by the frequency of feed distribution, one doing it on a daily basis and the other on a weekly basis. The cost of feed delivery was also higher in the enclosed barn, since the feed had to be chopped up first and then distributed twice a day.

When it came to determining the annual cost of spreading bedding, the outside pen scenario was the least expensive. This can be explained mainly by the small quantity of bedding spread in the low-density pen. The highest cost was the mixed scenario, which was caused by a greater quantity of bedding used (2.41 Kg/day), with a daily distribution. Finally, the enclosed barn scenario proved to be less expensive for this operation, in spite of a greater quantity of bedding being spread (4.4 Kg/day), because the frequency of distribution was less regular.

When looking at manure handling, the mixed solution was the most expensive, since the manure in the pen first had to be scraped into a pile and then transported to another manure pile, as in the outside pen scenario. Also, the farmer had to empty his run-off holding pit and spread the liquid manure.

Overall, the annual operating costs varied between \$0.65/AU/day and \$2.05/AU/day. The outside pen remained the most economical solution, both in terms of fixed costs as well as for it recurring costs, while the enclosed barn scenario proved to be the most expensive. Therefore, unless the enterprise has a below average debt level or a particularly low construction cost (less than \$70/m^2), it is practically impossible to make the construction of an enclosed barn profitable.

Conclusions

This project shows that the low-density outside pen scenario, combined with a high-density pen is more economical than the enclosed barn scenario, in spite of the variable or recurring expenses. In addition, with the use of late pasture, combined with a low-density pen, the animal wintering costs can be reduced even more.

This article was prepared based on the final report of the project "Étude comparative de scénarios prometteurs sur la gestion des fumiers de bovins de boucherie." This project was made possible through the financial support of CDAQ, MAPAQ and UPA Abitibi-Témiscamingue.

Are you a non-point source polluter?

François Biron, agronome
Agri-environmental and innovations advisor
MAPAQ—Outaouais sector

I hope the title of this article has prompted you to read on. If it did, perhaps you are feeling guilty—and in that case, it would be wise to get some advice.

Again this year, MAPAQ has its *Prime-Vert* program, which is designed to help farmers by providing financial support to help them comply with the environmental regulations—and particularly, those regarding non-point source pollution. In other words, this is the perfect time to complete the necessary work on your farm, while also obtaining knowledgeable advice from MAPAQ advisors and a subsidy that can cover up to 90 per cent of the eligible costs, to a maximum of $50,000. Registration for the program must be done before March 2011.

With regard to non-point source pollution (other than the removal of livestock from watercourses), financial support is available for:

- general and specialized assessments of a farm's agri-environmental situation;
- measures to control erosion by installing soil conservation structures in riparian and non-riparian zones;
- the planting of permanent grass buffer strips along waterways, that exceed the requirements set out by the *Protection Policy for lakeshores, riverbanks, littoral zones and floodplains.*
- the planting of buffer strips at least five metres wide, composed of trees or shrubs, if this is recommended in the specialized assessment;
- the planting of natural shelterbelts;
- the decommissioning (filling) of unused wells;
- the planting of winter cover crops;
- the permanent elimination of annual crops in high risk zones, as identified in the specialized assessment;
- the introduction of soil and water conservation practices;
- the management of the riparian (streambank, riverbank, lakeshore, etc.) zones.

Two of these measures are of particular interest for farmers in the Outaouais region, notably: the planting of winter cover crops and the introduction of soil and water conservation practices.

Planting cover crops

Planted after harvesting the principal crop, winter cover crops use up some of the soil's residual nitrogen, thus reducing seepage losses, in addition to protecting the field from surface run-off erosion and wind erosion. You may obtain a financial compensation of $65/ha if you are using this practice for the first time on a minimum of five hectares and up to maximum of 50 hectares, if the selected cover crop produces at least one to two tons of dry matter/hectare in the fall and if you commit to not harvest the winter cover crop nor destroy it in the spring. This subsidy is payable only once to an agricultural operation.

Soil and water conservation practices

This measure is for farmers who wish to switch to reduced-tillage, direct seeding or ridge tilling. You could receive a compensation of $65.00 per hectare if you have an Agri-environmental Support Plan (PAA), if a minimum of 30 per cent of the crop residue remains the following spring, if you have been using this practice for less than two years on less than 10 hectares, if you use an appropriate seeder and if the project covers a minimum of 10 hectares and a maximum of 50 hectares.

Remember that these measures are a golden opportunity to receive technical and financial assistance for agricultural practices that are respectful of the environment. Contact your local Agricultural Service Centre in order to fill out your subsidy application and to obtain further information about the program.

You may review the complete text of the *Prime-Vert* program online at:
http://www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/Fr/Productions/md/Programmes/primevert.htm.

Removal of livestock from watercourses

The new Prime-Vert program announces the end of this subsidy in 2013

Marc F. Clément
Field crops and agri-environmental advisor
MAPAQ–Outaouais sector

If you are among those who have not yet completed all the work required to keep your livestock out of watercourses, here are two bits of good news.

First, the new **2009-2013 *Prime-Vert* program** can provide you with financial support for up to 90 per cent of the eligible costs established by MAPAQ. For **this component of the program**, the maximum subsidy is **$36,000** per farm enterprise over the duration of the program. However, your application for the removal of livestock from watercourses must be **submitted before March 31, 2011** and the work must **be completed before March 31, 2013**. Therefore, you have less than two years to act, by registering for the program.

The second bit of good news is that any previous financial support received before March 31, 2009 for Component 10 of the program is not considered in calculating the maximum allowable subsidy. Many farms had already received the maximum amount for work completed before 2009. However, some of them still had work to be done in order to comply with certain aspects of the Regulation (REA) regarding the removal of livestock from watercourses, but with no additional financial aid. Now, they may register with the new program and complete their work.

However, not all farms are eligible. Besides new enterprises (young farmers), only those farm operations where the livestock had access to the watercourse before April 1, 2005 may receive the subsidy, since the objective of this program is to correct an "existing" problem.

Water is a collective resource. All sectors of society must do their part to protect that resource. But change must happen on an individual basis. Join in! Together we can protect our water!

Note: This article is the first in a series that will be published regarding the *Prime-Vert* program.

Growing forward,
a federal-provincial-territorial initiative

Agriculture, Pêcheries et Alimentation Québec

Agriculture et Agroalimentaire Canada | Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

Canada

No deal without the agreement of farmers!

Christian Lacasse
UPA President

Experience has taught us that we must be very careful regarding the negotiations on the Agreement for Internal Trade (AIT). You will probably recall that in July 2008, the federal and provincial Ministers of Agriculture came within a hair of accepting a chapter that would have seriously compromised supply management and collective marketing.

The UPA and its partners publicly exposed the situation and also demonstrated that the provincial power and authority to regulate the composition and labelling of food products was threatened as well. It was a close call!

Following this, the government promised to not negotiate anything further without first consulting with farmers and consumers. However, this proved to be a farce, since on August 7, the Council of the Federation, which includes all of the country's Premiers and Prime Minister, announced that a new AIT chapter on agriculture had been agreed upon. So much for prior consultation!

Furthermore, rumours circulated that led us to believe the discussions had been based on the text written in 2008—not too reassuring for farmers who had been severely burned last summer regarding the same question. Moreover, this time it included a broken promise.

It is all well and good for the Council to state that the agreement will not apply "to the supply management systems administered by the federal and provincial governments or by provincial marketing boards," but we have received no text on this—not even an unofficial one. Furthermore, the announcement says nothing about the rules involving labelling and the composition of foods. The same worrisome silence reigns with regard to the system of ministerial exemptions, which is necessary to maintain order in the marketing of many horticultural crops at harvest time.

However, the final die has not yet been cast. Jean Charest's press secretary has assured us that the consensus reached by the Premiers still must be transformed into a final text. Therefore, there is still time to make some adjustments. In this regard, the UPA has been quick to make representations to Minister Béchard, who has promised that his government will not sign any agreement that does not protect supply management and collective marketing and he promises to show us the text as soon as he receives a copy. He also agrees that it is essential for Quebec to conserve its prerogative to regulate the labelling and composition of foods, as well as to maintain the system of ministerial exemptions. Now, it will be up to him to keep his promise.

He does have one additional ace up his sleeve this time—the Agreement-in-principal regarding the Quebec-Ontario Partnership Agreement on Trade and the Economy, in which the UPA was a collaborator. This agreement establishes as fundamentally legitimate, the preservation and strengthening of supply management and collective marketing. It also stipulates that provisions concerning the naming, labelling and composition of an agricultural or food product are just as legitimate. Therefore, in the pan-Canadian agreement, it would necessarily follow that it should not be any less legitimate to recognize provisions made under the law regarding ministerial exemptions.

What these two provinces (representing over 60 per cent of the country's total agricultural revenue, 70 per cent of which is under supply management) have agreed upon can certainly be extended the rest of the country. Therefore, Quebec does have a solid reference point on which to defend its position—and we expect it to do so. The stakes are high for the future of agriculture in Quebec—and, as in the case of the Quebec-Ontario Partnership Agreement on Trade and the Economy, it should not be written haphazardly. Nor should it be done without the agreement of those most affected: the farmers of Quebec.

LTCN 2009-08-27

One fluid milk formula to be used across Canada

The farm-gate price of fluid milk will be established using a single indexation formula right across Canada over the next two years. This is the first time such harmonization has taken place between the Eastern and Western provinces. However, this approach will not immediately eliminate the price difference that exists for fluid milk between the Eastern and Western Milk Pools.

The P-5 member provinces (Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince-Edward-Island) had agreed on an indexation formula for the price of fluid milk three years ago. Producers and milk processors in these provinces decided to extend the agreement for two more years. The National Fluid Milk Pricing Committee, on which the West is also represented, passed a resolution on July 14 to extend the formula to all of Canada. Their formula is based on indices that take into consideration production costs (40 per cent), disposable income (30 per cent) and the consumer prices (30 per cent). The committee also decided that price adjustments to Class 1 milk will be made on February 1 across Canada, with another possible adjustment in August, if required.

"Such a harmonization is normal and necessary within the framework of Canada's collective milk marketing system," declared the president of the *Fédération des producteurs de lait du Québec*, Marcel Groleau. "We have arrived at this stage voluntarily, in harmony and transparency, while respecting the time required for all parties to come on board."

Recalling the experience of the P-5 members, Groleau explained that the provinces agreed to the synchronized price adjustment and to have a target price, to avoid differences that might adversely affect the best interests of dairy producers. He believes that the dairy crisis, which is still raging in Europe, has shown how excessive price differences between regions can make negotiations difficult with milk processors, who are always looking for the lowest price. That being said, the July 14th agreement does not propose an immediate pan-Canadian target price. During the 2008-2009 dairy year, a difference of slightly over $3/hl existed between British Columbia ($85.67) and Quebec ($88.84) for fluid milk (Class 1a), according to statistics from the Canadian Dairy Information Centre. “We will eventually reach the same price, as specified in the agreement to reduce price differences that was signed about five years ago by both the Western (P-4) and Eastern (P-5) milk pools,” explained Groleau.

Harmonization

The price adjustment between provinces constitutes a fundamental trend that began several years ago, noted Chantal Paul, spokesperson for the Canadian Dairy Commission. This harmonization resulted from producers wanting to optimize returns from their production and to be better prepared to face consolidation at the processing level. But it also stems from a willingness of the processors, many of them doing business at the national level, to simplify their operating conditions, as well as from pressures exerted by other agreements, such as the Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT). Moreover, the P-5 member provinces have also recently agreed to harmonize their dairy quota policies, after pooling their markets and the income from all milk classes and integrating transportation. For several months now, Quebec and Ontario have been discussing their criteria for supplying dairies, a process which is also on-going in the Maritime Provinces. The Western provinces are evaluating the integration of milk transportation.

Jean-Charles Gagné
LTCN 2009-09-03

Table egg producers could get rid of young farmer support

Quebec’s table egg producers want to make some significant changes to their Young Farmer Support Program, which in their opinion, has some major defects. However, the *Régie des marchés agricoles et alimentaires du Québec* (RMAAQ) has refused to suspend the program for one year, as requested by the federation in order to give them time to do this job.

In the meantime, no quota will be added to the reserve used to cover this program, which has been in effect since December 2008. Any future young farmer support program, if there is one, could be adopted by the general assembly in the spring of 2010.

The Young Farmer Support Program gives eligible producers the right to a quota for 1,000 laying hens. To date, there have been no applications. Also, it should not be confused with the New Producer Start-up Program, which will grant two lifetime loans of quota for 5,000 hens in 2010. This latter program, plus easier access to quota, thanks to a centralized quota sales system, form two new measures designed to help young farmers.

“Administrators quickly realized that the Young Farmer Support Program had significant defects,” the federation wrote in its written submission to the *Régie*. In particular, it does not respect the specific objective of supporting the family farm and helping to maintain the number of producers in the regions. In fact, it does not include any criteria on the size of eligible farms or on the regions that should receive help. In addition, producers who have no succession prospects for their farms question the fairness of the program. Thus, its elimination is a definite possibility.

Motives

The RMAAQ rejected the federation’s request on August 18, 2009, quoting that “the high value of quota does not justify the suspension of this support program for one year.” The *Régie*’s directors explained that the high cost of quota, which hampers the respect of one of the program’s criteria, was known at the time the program was adoption in 2006. This criterion requires that the applicant must own at least 20 per cent of the farm’s assets, with a minimum of 5,000 laying hens. In addition, they added that the federation did not demonstrate that maintaining the program would prevent them from working on any improvements to it. The *Régie* invited the federation to use the authority that it possesses as an administrator of the joint plan to make the appropriate modifications to the Regulations.

The federation’s president, Serge Lefebvre, expressed his “disappointment” regarding the *Régie*’s refusal. “We would have preferred that the *Régie* accept our request for a suspension, which would have given us more leeway and freedom to continue our reflections regarding this support program,” he declared to the newspaper *La Terre de chez nous*.

Jean-Charles Gagné
LTCN 2009-09-03

Potential of maple syrup production should be recognized

The future strategy for the sustainable management of forests in the next Forestry Regime should take into account maple syrup production. For the *Fédération des producteurs acéricoles du Québec* (FPAQ), the potential for the development of maple production is enormous. In fact, the number of taps could be tripled—120 million additional taps, more than half of which are in the public forest, remain unexploited. In the opinion of the UPA, maple and forestry producers must be included in any future decision-making.

In a written submission recently sent to the Quebec government, the FPAQ questioned the representation status of the maple production sector. The new Bill proposes that *Commissions régionales des resources naturelles et du territoire* [regional natural resources and territorial commissions] will have the authority to create *Tables de gestion integrées* [integrated management round tables]. Therefore, the federation believes it is important for the proposed law to identify which sectors of activity, such as maple production, should have an automatic presence at these tables.

Also, the *Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation du Québec* (MAPAQ), one of the principal stakeholders in the maple production value chain, should have some say in the *Integrated Regional Resource and Territorial Development Plans*. The federation also recommends that the government specifically include maple production in its strategy for the sustainable development of forests. This recognition could take the form of mapping and reserving parts of the public forest having a high maple production potential; that is, more than 180 taps per hectare.

Furthermore, the federation believes that the forest management units should be composed not only of areas destined for fibre and non-fibre production, but also clearly identified areas where maple production should be considered the priority. In order to preserve consistency, it also suggests that the Quebec government oblige sugar bush permit holders in the public forest to obtain production quotas.

With regard to marketing, the federation is calling on Quebec to align Bill 57 with the present collective organization that oversees maple production and marketing. In its opinion, it is important to exclude maple products from the control of the future *Bureau de mise en marché du bois*.

Development

For its part, the *Union des producteurs agricoles* (UPA) emphasized the enormous potential of maple production. It pointed out to Quebec that the American government has just announced its intention to increase the development of maple production within its territory and thus benefit from the new markets "opened by…Quebec!"

Regarding sylviculture, the UPA commented on the existence of the unexploited potential of the private forest. Considering the increasing distances to public forest harvesting areas and the resulting high transportation costs, the UPA recommends the creation and maintenance of intensive sylviculture zones in the private forest. Intensive maple production zones in the public forest could also be introduced.

Concerning marketing, the UPA underlined the long-time experience of maple producers and foresters. It also called attention to the "heavy competition" faced by private woodlot producers because of the cutting rights policy in the public forest. While the "residuality principle" is retained in the Bill, there is no effective mechanism to ensure its actual application, according to the UPA. It is therefore demanding that an administrative mechanism be added to ensure that this principle is respected on an annual basis.

Finally, the UPA is calling on Quebec to give more consideration to maple and forestry producers in its future Forestry Regime, by respecting their joint plans. In other words, the future *Bureau de la mise en marché du bois* must be kept out of the marketing of their products, whether from public or private lands.

Pierre-Yvon Bégin

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A tough season for beekeepers

Disastrous, mediocre—those are the words used by beekeepers to describe their 2009 season. Winter loses were enormous for some producers. The rainy weather that followed significantly affected the first extraction of honey, with losses exceeding 50 per cent. They are now counting on the second extraction presently underway to salvage the season somewhat.

According to data from the *Ministère de l' Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation du Québec* (MAPAQ), the average wintering losses amounted to 22 per cent. In 2008, average losses were calculated at 19 per cent. However, this time around, the situation is different. "Several large producers lost 50 per cent or even 80 per cent of their hives because of bad weather, not only this year, but also last year," explained MAPAQ's beekeeping advisor, Nicolas Tremblay.

Unfavourable weather conditions in 2008 affected both the development cycle of the bee colonies and the fertility of the queen bees. Thus, the already-weakened colonies had to face a long, cold winter, problems with Varroa mites and not to mention the bad weather again this year. "Last year, we had a bit of warm weather. This year, it rained all the time. When temperatures drop below 15OC, the bees do not go out," added Tremblay.

The first honey extraction, which was done at the end of July, proved to be very disappointing. "It is a record year in terms of mediocrity," declared Jean-François Doyon, president of the *Fédération des apiculteurs du Québec*. "Summer honey is rare. People are talking of an average of 40 pounds. In a good year, producers can obtain up to 110 pounds of summer honey—a whiter honey than fall honey, with a less-pronounced taste; a honey much appreciated by consumers. When the clover is no longer in flower, it is over. What is lost is lost," Doyon explained. A certain recovery in honey yield could be possible in the second extraction. It has been delayed by about two weeks, depending on the region, and will continue until mid-September. After that, producers will begin to winterize their hives.

Marie-Claude Poulin
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Wood producers federation hopes to come on side

Bill 57 regarding the use of forestry lands does not meet with the expectations for change expressed by the *Fédération des producteurs de bois du Québec* (FPBQ). However, the federation does recognize that this Bill, which will lead to the establishment of a new Forestry Regime, constitutes “a big step” in the right direction.

In a recent submission to the Quebec government, the federation writes that it wishes to come on side by proposing modifications that would put the private forest at the centre of the new Forestry Regime.

It recalls that, from the outset, the February 2008 Green Paper indicated the State’s willingness to give predominance to wood from private woodlots. Therefore, it believes that Bill 57 does renew the “residuality principle”, which gives priority to wood from the private forest. However, the public forest supply guarantees allocated to the mills are for a period of five years and it is only following this that the Ministry may intervene to correct any imbalances. In the current regime, the Minister may intervene twice a year. However, the federation does admit that since it is discretionary, this measure is difficult to apply.

The FPBQ maintains that the owners of private woodlots have been facing “undue competition” caused by wood from the public forest over the past several years. As a result, the income of wood producers has decreased from $300 million to $125 million between 2006 and 2009—the annual volume of wood from private forests having dropped to half its previous level, to less than three million cubic metres of wood. The data compiled by the Ministry of Natural Resources show that the consumption of wood by the mills is very variable over five years. “Even when taking into consideration the reductions in the guarantees proposed by Bill 57, mills could benefit from an advantageous marketing position in relation to the private forest and also from the future *Bureau de mise en marché du bois des forêts publiques*,” declared the federation. To ensure market access for wood from the private forest, the federation therefore proposes the implementation of a consultation process involving all stakeholders, in order to corroborate the mill’s wood consumption scenarios. In that way, the federation believes the wood producers’ joint plan managers would then have some influence in the allotment of supply guarantees, including giving their opinion on the volumes that the ministry plans to allocate.

In addition, the federation wants guarantees that all wood volumes exchanged between mills will not replace the private woodlot wood provided for in the respective contracts.

Marketing

A second important element concerns Quebec’s plan to create a Bureau de mise en marché du bois de la forêt publique, to market the 30 per cent of the public forest volume that will not be guaranteed in the supply contracts. It is the federation’s opinion that this Bureau will not be capable of generating the necessary conditions to ensure genuine competitive sales. During periods of high demand, the federation believes that dealing with the Bureau will not bring any significant benefits to producers. But even worse, during periods of average to low demand, the risk of losses will be quite evident. “The mills are definitely counting on the inclusion of wood from private woodlots in the auctions, in order to reduce the volume of public forest wood offered, thus preserving of their supply guarantees to the maximum," writes the federation. "In addition, the higher the guarantees, the more the industry will have independence and a market advantage relative to its suppliers."

Another fear—the federation believes that buyers will have an interest in minimizing the prices offered at the auctions, since the sales serve to determine the royalties that mills must pay for the remainder of the wood from the public forest. Thus, the federation concludes that the wood from the private forest must not be sold through the future Bureau. Finally, the federation is concerned about a significant risk of confusion and duplication of roles and responsibilities caused by the government's decentralization of decisional powers to the *Conférences régionales des élus and to their Commissions régionales sur les ressources naturelles* [Regional Natural Resources Commissions]. The inclusion of the private forest under the authority of these Commissions, according to the federation, could become a source of conflict with the various existing institutions. It recalled that, in 2006, the private forest stakeholders agreed that the *Agences de mise en valeur* should remain as the decision-making entity with regard to the regional governance of private forests.

The Parliamentary Commission on Labour and the Economy will hold public hearings regarding Bill 57 this week. Currently, four days of hearings are planned and the MLA's will hear from representatives from the *Conférences régionales des élus*, as well as the *Fédération des producteurs acéricoles du Québec* (maple syrup producers). The wood producers' federation (FPBQ) has not yet been included on the calendar.

Pierre-Yvon Bégin
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