

Quebec Farmers'

Advocate

Vol. 30, No. 1

January 2010

CLAUDE JOYAL INC.
 Represents: **Case IH** **John Deere** **Sell Culture** **Case IH**
 438-26-252 438-28-031 438-28-291 438-28-218
 100 St. Louis

PLANNING IS SAVING!

JANUARY SPECIAL FOR USED TRACTORS

COMBINES 18 months WITHOUT interest TRACTORS 3.5% 36 months!

CASE IH

Canada catches up with Quebec's traceability



Canada's livestock industry is gearing up for the mandatory traceability system that will be put in place by 2011. While Quebec and Alberta have already set up their own livestock tracking systems, some producers aren't convinced that traceability is going ahead in the right way.

What's Inside...

Townships sheep breeders... p. 6

Outaouais ag day... p. 7

Soybean plant in Chateauguay... p.12

Bale grazing in Quebec... p. 14

Opposition speaks out on SRM... p. 16

www.quebecfarmers.org

www.quebecfarmers.org

Publication Mail No. 40033773

Andrew McClelland
Advocate Staff Reporter

The year 2010 is shaping up to be one that will be full of changes for Canada's beef producers, as the livestock industry readies itself for mandatory livestock traceability. In 2009, Federal Minister of Agriculture Gerry Ritz made it no secret that his government sees greater stability for the beef industry through expanding foreign markets.

Ritz's recent trips to Japan and South Korea have been chock-full of meetings with foreign officials. Most of those meetings have revolved around discussions about what Canada must do to cater to international markets hungry for beef. Last fall, Agriculture Canada announced that it would set aside \$32 million for a "Canada Brand Initiative" that would boost advertising, store features and other promotional activities all over the world.

"Japanese families are looking for Canadian foods when

they go to the grocery store and the Canada Brand Initiative will make sure they can find the maple leaf on the great products our farmers grow," said Ritz. "This kind of initiative can turn opportunities into realities with full order sheets and premium prices going back to Canadian producers."

Asian markets

What Ritz and other officials have found throughout foreign markets is that greater traceability is in high demand. Both South Korea and Japan have restricted Canadian beef imports to animals under 21 months old. That means a large part of Canada's potential market is held back due to lingering concerns over the potential of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in cattle, particularly in those over 30 months of age.

Industry experts say that a rigorous, nationwide traceability program would dispel those fears. And Minister Ritz agrees.

"Everyone recognizes we have to go there," says Ritz. "As the U.S. pushes to the next level of BSE, we have to have something else to sell to our trading partners out there ... a trace system and age verification will take them back in and make them more market available."

In July 2009, Canada's federal and provincial agriculture ministers committed to implementing a mandatory, nationwide traceability system for livestock and poultry by 2011. As both Quebec and Alberta have their own traceability programs in place, the provinces' separate systems are supposed to work within the federal framework.

RFID Tags

"Speaking as a beef producer from Quebec, it's about time the rest of Canada got on the bandwagon," says Gib Drury, past-president of the Quebec Farmers' Association and a cow/calf producer from the Outaouais. "This is absolutely essential for obtaining market

access in more and more countries around the world—it can't be avoided if we want to export beef from this country."

The Canadian government has already funnelled \$25 million into programs set up to help the livestock industry adapt to the coming traceability changes. Some of that money has helped to purchase the radio frequency identification

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Television is an invention that permits you to be entertained in your living room by people you wouldn't have in your home.

—David Frost

Do you *really* want to meet the people who buy your food?

Andrew McClelland
Advocate Managing Editor

I saw a funny thing happen at my local farmers' market the other day.

I was browsing around the Marché Duluth in Montreal, eyeing the goat cheeses at the *Ruban Bleu Fromagerie* counter. An oh-so-cosmopolitan couple were interrogating a young dairy producer about the ingredients and processes that went into making his *chèvre* cheeses. After the couple decided what to buy, the young farmer began wrapping the soft cheese in cellophane.

The cosmopolitan husband reached over the counter and grabbed the dairy producer by the wrist.

"Please," he said. "I don't want any plastic to touch the cheese."

Flummoxed, but courteous, the young farmer replied, "Well, would you like me to give it to you like this?" He held the goat cheese between his thumb and forefinger.

"Do you have any wax paper?"

"Not really," said the *Ruban Bleu* employee. "This is the wrapping we use."

"But it's plastic!" the man pleaded.

"Yes," the cheese producer said—and here he reached over the counter and pinched the glossy material of the man's President's Choice 'cloth' bag—"but no more plastic than what this is made out of."

I stifled my laugh at this zinger, lest I ruin a sale for the folks at *Ruban Bleu*. As I strolled around the other market stalls, I thought to myself, "God help the enterprising farmer if 'niche marketing' means dealing with people like that!"

There's a whole lot of history that goes into making this little encounter between the young dairy farmer and the urban consumer possible. In 2008, for the first time in history, human beings became a predominantly urban species. Of course, Canada became a nation of city slickers long before that. Since agriculture is a rural industry, this means fewer and fewer people are aware of how what they eat is grown and raised. It's not entirely their fault—it's simply not something that's around them everyday.

This might not be a problem if most of our wealth wasn't concentrated around a few big cities and their suburbs. In a capitalist economy, where "the customer is always right," citizens vote with their dollars. That means consumers eventually get what they demand, regardless of whether or not it's reasonable, ethical, or practical for the people who make those products.

In a nutshell, this is how a group of people who know nothing about an industry can dictate how that industry is run. It's how relatively wealthy people like us in North America decide that a DVD player manufactured in China should retail at 50 bucks, and it's how urban residents influence how the world's agricultural industry should operate.

When you're a farmer in Canada, it seems every time you turn around there's a new agri-technology company or management consultant telling you, "Innovate or be left behind!" Governments repeat slogans telling producers that sticking to traditional marketing systems is no longer profitable—that 'niche marketing' through 'value-added products' and even 'agritourism' is how the farmer of the future will earn a living. It is precisely because governments have failed to protect our industry that those traditional marketing systems have become unprofitable. Yet it is agricultural producers, they tell us, who will have to adapt in order to survive.

Canada's beef industry is a prime example of this problem. Think of how many families you know who earn most of their farm income from beef production. Barring a few operations that have expanded to the bursting point, most family farms that come to mind have at least husband or wife working out to generate income. In most cases, this was true 30 or 40 years ago.

Sadly, the traditional models of agriculture don't work. It seems the few operations who earn their living through farming *are* those that set up a stall at a local market, build an on-farm boutique for tourists—who find a profitable spot somewhere on the margins of the industry. It pays to cater to those consumers who hop on the local food and organic food bandwagons. Consumers who—well-intentioned though they may be—have a romantic and idealized image of farming.

If governments and the agriculture industry listened to what consumers want, producers wouldn't be stuck with just one route to making money. There could be a variety of ways to earn your living farming. This is the unswallowable irony of today's agriculture. People like my cosmopolitan neighbour at the cheese counter may actually be changing farming for the better.

Canada catches up with Quebec's traceability

Andrew McClelland

Advocate Staff Reporter

The year 2010 is shaping up to be one that will be full of changes for Canada's beef producers, as the livestock industry readies itself for mandatory livestock traceability. In 2009, Federal Minister of Agriculture Gerry Ritz made it no secret that his government sees greater stability for the beef industry through expanding foreign markets.

Ritz's recent trips to Japan and South Korea have been chock-full of meetings with foreign officials. Most of those meetings have revolved around discussions about what Canada must do to cater to international markets hungry for beef. Last fall, Agriculture Canada announced that it

would set aside \$32 million for a “Canada Brand Initiative” that would boost advertising, store features and other promotional activities all over the world.

“Japanese families are looking for Canadian foods when they go to the grocery store and the Canada Brand Initiative will make sure they can find the maple leaf on the great products our farmers grow,” said Ritz. “This kind of initiative can turn opportunities into realities with full order sheets and premium prices going back to Canadian producers.”

What Ritz and other officials have found throughout foreign markets is that greater traceability is in high demand. Both South Korea and Japan have restricted Canadian beef imports to animals under 21 months old. That means a large part of Canada’s potential market is held back due to lingering concerns over the potential of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in cattle, particularly in those over 30 months of age.

Industry experts say that a rigorous, nationwide traceability program would dispel those fears. And Minister Ritz agrees.

“Everyone recognizes we have to go there,” says Ritz. “As the U.S. pushes to the next level of BSE, we have to have something else to sell to our trading partners out there ... a trace system and age verification will take them back in and make them more market available.”

In July 2009, Canada's federal and provincial agriculture ministers committed to implementing a mandatory, nationwide traceability system for livestock and poultry by 2011. As both Quebec and Alberta have their own traceability programs in place, the provinces’ separate systems are supposed to work within the federal framework.

“Speaking as a beef producer from Quebec, it’s about time the rest of Canada got on the bandwagon,” says Gib Drury, past-president of the Quebec Farmers’ Association and a cow/calf producer from the Outaouais. “This is absolutely essential for obtaining market access in more and more countries around the world—it can’t be avoided if we want to export beef from this country.”

The Canadian government has already funnelled \$25 million into programs set up to help the livestock industry adapt to the coming traceability changes. Some of that money has helped to purchase the radio frequency identification (RFID) tag readers that should assist in tracking cattle as they are sold in auctions across Canada.

“We’ve made a significant first step by having our cattle fitted with RFID tags,” says Drury, who serves as chairman of the board at the Canadian Beef Export Federation. “Now, all we need is the hardware to read the tags in public places—like auctions and slaughterhouses. Alberta is also starting the process in its bigger feedlots.”

Doubts

However, some producers aren’t convinced the traceability measures are being put in place correctly. Numerous producers groups argue that mandatory traceability could add to farm paperwork and make beef producers underpaid government employees.

“I think a little more common sense is needed,” says Brad Wildeman, president of the Canadian Cattlemen’s Association (CCA). “The fact is some politicians have decided that mandatory traceability should happen in 2011. They need to realize that this industry is struggling with regulation, it's struggling with a lot of costs. How much more do they think they can throw on this business before we simply collapse?”

The CCA is also sceptical about implementing a system that is not proven to work and could have a lot of technological glitches.

“This technology today isn't fool proof,” says Wildeman. “We know there are lost tags, we know there are tags that don't read. This idea that we're going to have mandatory traceability of 100 per cent of the cattle, 100 per cent of the time, simply isn't achievable with the technology we have today.”

Townships sheep breeders make champions

Claudia Villemaire

Advocate Eastern Townships Correspondent

Located on the fertile plateau that leads to “the village,” St Felix de Kingsey, Bob Mastine and Nathalie Bachand are walking tall these past months, and well they might. A dream that would bring home the grand champion ram or ewe sheep from the Royal Winter Fair in Toronto is a reality for these purebred sheep breeders, proudly displaying the Grand Champion Ram Over All Breeds in their country home.

But it was as natural as falling off a log for Bob Mastine to develop a sheep breeding program that would put him among the top breeders in Canada and beyond. Mastine is simply following his parents’ footsteps. For more years than most can remember, Blanche and Nelson Mastine have been familiar exhibitors at everything from local fairs to provincial events to the Royal itself. The lessons learned ran deep, and today it’s not unusual to see several members of this family along with their children gracing the showrings of Eastern Townships fairs.

“I never liked cows—was actually very afraid of them,” recalls Bob’s mother, Blanche. “So, in 1964, Nelson brought home some sheep and that was the beginning of our breeding business. I began with Shropshires and Dorsets, but I soon realized quality replacement animals, especially bred for use in meat production, would be my choice of flock. So I soon changed to the Oxford and Dorset breeds.”

Now, for folks who don't know much about sheep, some time spent on the ‘web,’ ‘reading up’ on these fascinating animals is time well spent. The Oxford, a mix of Hampshire, Southdown and Cotswold, originating in the British Isles, is what breeders call a terminal breed—bred specifically for the meat its chunky body provides. Fairly tall on sturdy legs, with a weight-gain

record that's hard to beat, the Oxford, still somewhat of a rarity in Canada, is gaining popularity in commercial herds where heavy lambs are produced.

“This Oxford ram, stands taller, wider and heavier, (275 lbs) than any in his class at the Royal,” says Bob. It was no surprise he earned the Grand Champion Ram in his class, making him eligible for the Over All competition. But Mastine was far from finished with just one champion rosette. His appearance in the ring with an outstanding Dorset Ram set competitors back on their heels, recognizing this was an outstanding animal, his growth and conformation making him a shoe-in for the Grand Champion Rosette in his class.

Now, if you, the reader, have been keeping track, you'll realize that Bob Mastine now had two champions to go into the elite Over All Breeds class.

“Boy that was really something. The judge, a gentleman from Mexico, called out eight candidates. These two were among that first call-out. Then, after minutes that seemed like hours, he signalled four animals to remain in the ring. Now it was really getting nerve-wracking. They only name one Supreme Grand Champion and there were four of us out there.”

When the traditional hand on the rump of the winning animal came down on Mastine's Dorset (and by the way, the Oxford was also in the final four), the smiles and hoorahs were loud and long.

“You know, my goal has never been to produce meat,” Bob reflects. “We perhaps have a bit of an advantage with my work with the CIAQ. That's the artificial insemination organization in this province and through helping producers choose herd sires in dairy and beef, sheep and lamb production, I guess I'm familiar with what the centre offers to anyone trying to produce the best possible specimens of whatever breed they choose.

“You have to remember the genetic base in several breeds of cattle and sheep is shrinking. Finding unrelated herd sires or, in my case, new bloodlines through the rams I use, is getting more and more difficult. I have travelled to several provinces and American states to find the best quality animals I can. It's very important to keep the bloodlines unrelated.”

There's a new crop of lambs growing in the Mastine stable now.

“From 15 ewes I've 11 sets of twins,” Mastine is proud to say. “That's quite unusual—such a high percentage of twins and that's good. The Dorsets can be persuaded to produce three lamb crops in two years, a rarity in sheep which traditionally only come into ‘heat’ when daylight hours shorten and temperatures cool off at night in early fall.

“With grain feed costing right around \$400 a tonne, we have to manage very carefully. We choose the best for replacement stock, keep some ewes for reproduction and usually have some heavy lambs to sell. Keeping records, tagging lambs, keeping a sharp eye on the flock's health, are all part of the daily chores,” Mastine explains, adding he has already started to shear away the woolly fleece from his ewes. The flock is normally outside and now with lambing well

started, and keeping them in the stable fully clothed in their heavy wool coats would not be advisable at all.

“It's a family tradition now,” explained Grandmother Blanche as grandchildren Trinity and Callum gather up new lambs for a hug and a pat. “Bob's brother David is also a purebred sheep producer as is his sister Marilyn. Susan and Russel Frost are also popular participants at the local fair with their petting farm which of course, includes different breeds of sheep. I guess I started something 55 years ago,” this proud grandmother adds.

As we started toward the door, another section of this centennial farmstead came into view where, lo and behold, Limousin beef cattle watched hopefully for attention.

“Oh yes, I'm breeding purebred Limousin too,” Mastine explains. Another story for another day perhaps...

Born in Sherbrooke, Claudia Villemaire has been a dedicated Townshipper all her life. After running a dairy and pork operation with her family, her career as a journalist began in 1978 when The Sherbrooke Record hired her as an agricultural reporter. A proud mother of four—and a grandmother to nine—Claudia lives in Richmond, Quebec.

The many complex factors of neonatal diarrhea

Although producers may hope for a miracle cure, neonatal diarrhea is a complex syndrome caused by various factors, both infectious and non-infectious.

André Cécyre, DMV
Veterinary Expertise Program
FPBQ

Non-infectious causes of neonatal diarrhea can be environmental (a lack of hygiene, climate, poor ventilation, etc.), or linked to underfeeding of heifers, calving complications, or a lack or late administration of colostrum.

Infectious Causes

Infectious causes of neonatal diarrhea are more subtle, and include viral causes such as rotavirus, coronavirus and BVD; bacterial causes, mainly *E. coli*; and parasitic cryptosporidiosis and coccidiosis. It is possible to deduce the cause of diarrhea based on the age of the animal. However, only a pathology laboratory test can accurately confirm which organism is causing the problem.

Newborn calves have no antibodies

Unlike other species, newborn calves have no antibodies (immunoglobulins) to protect them against infectious diseases. Only antibody-rich colostrum provides immune protection until the calf's own immune system kicks in.

Antibody absorption from colostrum drops by 50 per cent in the 12 hours following birth. A newborn calf must therefore take in 10 per cent to 15 per cent of its body weight in colostrum during the first 12 hours of its life, and preferably even in the first six. If necessary, the calf should be led to the mother's udder, rather than letting the newborn suckle everything in its path, from the mother's head to her tail, thereby ingesting a host of pathogens. Some sources indicate that 80 per cent of pathogens are taken in by newborns before their colostrum.

Prevention

The rapid administration of colostrum and the vaccination of heifers against *E. coli*, rotavirus and coronavirus have proven effective in helping producers deal with neonatal diarrhea in their herds. If problems persist despite these prevention strategies, contact your veterinarian.

Frequency of Diarrhea by Age

Type of Diarrhea	Signs	Notes
bacterial <i>E. Coli</i> diarrhea	Colibacillosis appears as early as zero to three days following birth, and rarely later than at five days of age.	The younger the animal, the more this diarrhea is acute and fatal.
viral rotavirus diarrhea	Three to 10 days following birth.	Both viral conditions affect between 50 % and 90 % of the herd, but rotavirus seems to cause fewer fatalities than coronavirus (5 % compared to 30 %).
viral coronavirus diarrhea	Between seven and 12 days of age.	
Cryptosporidiosis, most often caused by <i>Cryptosporidium parvum</i>	Calves from one to four weeks of age, with a peak at eight to 16 days.	Signs of cryptosporidiosis often appear at the same time in every calf (for instance, at exactly 11 days of age).
coccidiosis	First signs occur later (after 21 days).	Less frequent and more chronic diarrhea.

Something new for the *Rendez-vous agroalimentaire de l'Outaouais 2010*

Elisabeth Shea

Information Officer and Communications Advisor

MAPAQ – Outaouais sector

For the first time at the *Rendez-vous agroalimentaire de l'outaouais 2010*: game farming, meat goats, dairy goats and ewes, marketing, and a Friday night cocktail. These new themes will be added to our old faithfuls, like Horticulture Day, featuring small fruits this year, Beef Day, with its many relevant topics, Maple Production Day, which is always current and of course, the period dealing with field tests and research underway in the Outaouais region.

Also on the agenda is a brand new evening event on regional marketing. This block of conferences will begin at 3:30 p.m. on Friday, January 29. It will be interrupted by a cocktail and a buffet of regional products: a great opportunity to meet people and have a good time!

Again for a second year, there will be an Exhibition Salon, which will include about fifteen companies, suppliers of goods and services, who will be on site, either throughout the entire three-day event or on specific days, according to the program themes.

Regional products will be highlighted in the hot meals that will be served on site. Furthermore, as of last year, the *Rendez-vous agroalimentaire de l'Outaouais* has “gone green” – for example, washable dishes and utensils, recycling and composting of waste materials, as well as the reduction of paper and garbage are among the methods used to become more ecologically responsible.

The *Rendez-vous agroalimentaire de l'Outaouais* is organized by the MAPAQ advisors of the Outaouais region, in collaboration with the *Table de concertation agroalimentaire* (TCAO). Our funding partners, the *Conférence régionale des élus de l'Outaouais* (CRÉO) and the *Réseau agriconseils Outaouais* network, support this event, along with our 2010 sponsors, which include *Desjardins-Centre financier aux entreprises*, the *Centres locaux de développement* (CLD) de l'Outaouais and *La Financière agricole du Québec* (FADQ).

Our objective is to provide an opportunity to enrich your knowledge directly in the region, to meet with the experts and discover the available services, all within a friendly environment organized specifically for the agrifood sector. Be assured that no effort has been spared in order to offer a quality event, at a very affordable price.

The event will be held on January 29, 30 and 31, 2010 at the Tétréau Community Centre in the Hull sector of Gatineau. A program summary is printed below. Watch for the complete program, which has been mailed to all agricultural enterprises in the region by the end of December 2009 and also posted on the following website: www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/outaouais.

If you wish to attend and obtain on site hot meals, you must register beforehand at one of the three MAPAQ Agricultural Service Centres in the Outaouais region before January 20, 2010.

The future of the *UPA* is in your hands

Christian Lacasse
UPA President

We will have much on our plates, and on our minds, in 2010. Foremost among these issues, challenges and concerns is the future of the *Union des producteurs agricoles*, specifically the generation who will take the helm of our agricultural union in the coming years. Succession is as significant on the organizational side of agriculture as it is on the farm. The torch—or the hoe—will be passed on much more smoothly if the ground is well prepared in advance. This is the goal of the “*UPA du futur*” exercise: to ensure that the future of this organization is in good hands, able to meet the changes and challenges we will face in years to come.

We will face that future together, united, and stronger if we have anticipated what tomorrow will look like, what our needs will be, what we will want. Last year, the preliminary “*UPA du futur*” consultations let you voice that anticipation and those needs, which have now been reviewed and developed into strategic directions. In the coming months, you will once again have the opportunity to make your voices heard regarding these directions. I urge you to speak up, to tell us what is needed to shape the UPA to your needs and realities.

I urge you to speak your mind in regards to the organization’s main objectives. You know as well as I do that agriculture is a vocation, and an industry, that presents as many problems as possibilities. Yet we must choose our battles—how can we best focus our energy? As a new decade dawns, we must foresee and prepare for the salient issues of the future, and we must reiterate and strengthen the values of the union as we invite you, the next generation, to follow in our footsteps and furrows.

I believe you want a union that speaks for you. I believe that, when you hear the UPA speak in public, you want to feel like you are hearing your own thoughts and concerns. I believe you want the UPA to act as you yourselves would act. You want, in other words, an organization in your own image—who you are, what you do, and what you want. The upcoming consultations are the forum for you to tell us what you want. It is imperative that you be heard, that you form the UPA in a way that truly represents you, that you define a union with which you proudly identify.

This sense of belonging is vital for the UPA to remain a unifying, inclusive and mobilizing force. Times are changing, and agriculture is evolving, but I believe that agricultural unions are crucial—now more than ever. This is a big opportunity, and a rare one. The success of “*UPA du futur*” rests only on your words. We are asking what you want; tell us. Let your voices be heard. The future of the UPA is in your hands.

LTCN 2010-01-07

Superior Court rejects *Céréaliers du Québec* claim

In a judgement handed down on December 7, the Quebec Superior Court dismissed the case of the *Céréaliers du Québec* [Quebec Grain Producers] who asked to be heard by the *Régie des marchés agricoles* over the introduction of a compulsory system for grain prices. The story goes back to November 2008, when the *Céréaliers* tried to appear at a hearing of the *Régie* to oppose the implementation of a “System to Collect and Disseminate Information” (SRDI). The objective of the SRDI is to oblige grain buyers (the *Association québécoise des industries de nutrition animale*, the *Association des négociants en céréales du Québec* and the *Coop fédérée*) to immediately transmit by computer the prices of their various grain purchase transactions. Grain producers would then be able to know in real time the average price of transactions taking place in all regions of Quebec. Grain buyers would also have a good idea of current market prices, by having reliable information before making their purchases.

The *Céréaliers* are challenging the legitimacy of the application and want to be heard in order to condemn the SRDI and its associated costs. They believe that the *Fédération des producteurs de cultures commerciales du Québec* (FPCCQ) does not intend to stop with the SRDI, but rather that it is a strategy to put into place a compulsory marketing agency “one piece at the time.” FPCCQ President Christian Overbeek has already denied these allegations and declared that there are no other projects on the table other than the SRDI. The *Céréaliers* however, are of the opinion that the almost unanimous vote by producers at their annual FPCCQ meeting is not sufficient and not representative enough. In other words, other groups, like theirs, should be allowed to express themselves on the subject.

Interested parties

The Quebec Superior Court judge, the Honourable Jean-Guy Dubois, questioned whether the *Céréaliers* is, in fact, an “interested party” in the *Régie*’s arbitration regarding the SRDI. He came to the conclusion that the *Régie* had not exceeded its legal boundaries and that the FPCCQ is indeed “the negotiating agent for producers,” including members of the *Céréaliers*. Thus, they are not an interested party in the dispute, since they are already represented. “It is within their own federation, namely the FPCCQ, that the plaintiffs (the *Céréaliers*) can make their opinions known,” ruled the judge.

Thierry Larivière

LTCN 2009-12-17

Buyers in need of heavy lambs

With the current enticing prices for milk-fed and light lambs, many producers are deciding not to continue feeding their animals to the heavy lamb stage. This situation has arisen just as buyers, who were short of lamb throughout 2009, hope to significantly increase their volumes in their 2010 annual contract.

From the 1,000 lambs/week guaranteed under contract in 2009, demand has jumped to over 2,200. On the other hand, supply provided by producers has dropped to about 800. In order to encourage farmers to produce heavy lambs, potential buyers and the *Fédération des producteurs d'agneaux et de moutons du Québec* (FPAMQ) have recently agreed to increase the price of Category 2 lamb by two per cent. In addition, they have made the marketing agreement more flexible. From now on, a lot will be considered non-standard only when 50 per cent of the animals in it are downgraded—not the former 30 per cent. Also, the half-price penalty will only apply to the non-standard lambs in the lot, not to the entire lot. Furthermore, the price of Category 2 lambs will increase by two per cent.

“Heavy lamb is the best way to make an enterprise profitable. With heavy lamb, the price is set for the year,” explained Marie-Eve Tremblay, FPAMQ’s director-general. For the past two years, the heavy lamb marketing agency has been encouraging producers to switch to heavier production. In competition for raw materials, milk-fed and light lamb buyers are willing to increase their prices. Thus, many producers are choosing to sell their animals as milk-fed or light lambs, creating a shortage of heavy lambs.

“If we destabilize the heavy lamb market, the price of milk-fed and light lambs will drop again,” predicted Tremblay. The director-general is also concerned about the impact on the income stabilization insurance (ASRA) program. “In 2010, how will producers be able to maintain their kilogram (kg) levels for ASRA?” she questioned.

Indeed, for 2010, two-thirds of the stabilization insurance will be paid based on the number of kilograms of lambs sold, at a rate of \$1.28/kg.

Momentum

The advance signs of a slowdown in the production of heavy lambs are also showing up in the annual contracts.

“An annual contract is demanding,” admits the FPAMQ President Langis Croft. “Buyers are sensitive to the problem. They are in the same situation as we are. They need lambs and they are disappointed not to have Quebec lamb,” he asserted, also noting that he has seen quite a change in their message.

“Before, it was not a problem—buyers looked elsewhere. Today, they want Quebec lamb and they are sending us the message loud and clear. Producers are going to have to heed this message,” affirmed the president, recently re-elected by acclamation for a tenth term.

At the end of September, buyers and the FPAMQ came to an agreement on a price of \$7.67/kg, which includes a \$0.07/kg premium for lambs sold under the annual contract.

“For the buyers, it was important to send a signal to producers to increase their production. The market is there and we need more lambs,” confirmed Michel Viens, president of the *Coopérative de services des producteurs d’agneaux du Québec*. According to this producer/buyer, the heavy lamb marketing agency has brought stability to the industry.

“We have just come through an economic crisis, and we did not see a drop in prices. Also, we do not have to face the risks of auctions. That brings us much more stability,” concluded Viens.

Julie Mercier

LTCN 2009-12-17

Montcalm family proclaimed the Farm Family of the Year

The family of Roch Montcalm and Carona Maheu of Saint-Louis-de-Gonzague in the Montérégie region won the title of “Farm Family of the Year” at the 85th annual congress of the UPA on December 2, 2009.

The Montcalm family, which currently numbers 141 members and is spread over four generations, has always been involved with dairy production. Roch Montcalm started his farm in 1922, on the 5th Range, at the same location where he and his now-deceased wife grew up. At the outset, his career decision wasn’t quite celebrated by his family.

“My grandmother wanted so much to have a priest in the family and my father was her only son,” explained Real Montcalm, Roch’s oldest son and a former director-general of the UPA de Saint-Jean-Valleyfield, who has also worked as a cooperative aid worker in Africa. Also present was Maurice Montcalm, well-known for his role as president of his regional dairy producers’ syndicate. A large number of the family (about 80) were gathered together in Quebec City to receive the honour.

Today, the farm is owned by three of the Montcalm brothers—Maurice, Francois and Marc—and has at least 300 purebred Holstein cows, of which 150 are in lactation. The 90-hectare farm received a Bronze Medal in the *Mérite agricole* competition in 2005.

Thus, the Montcalm family succeeds last year’s “Farm Family” winners, the Hudon family, in becoming the 53rd Farm Family of the Year. The competition has been organized by the *Fondation de la famille terrienne* since 1962.

Thierry Larivière

LTCN 2009-12-17

Opposition parties side with producers on SRM

The Liberal Party, the *Bloc québécois* and the New Democratic Party are proceeding with an orchestrated attack against the Conservatives, accusing them of abandoning the beef industry, regarding their regulations on the removal of specified risk materials (SRMs).

In a letter addressed to the *Fédération des producteurs de bovins du Québec*, as well as to the Levinoff-Colbex abattoir, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the Canadian Meat Council, the Sanimax company, the Canadian Meat Salvagers Association and the Canadian Cattlemen Association, the opposition parties' agriculture critics denounced the federal government, accusing it of "doing absolutely nothing to close the gap created between the Canadian regulations and the American rules."

Wayne Easter, André Bellavance and Alex Atanamenko all supported a motion calling for government aid in order to cover the \$31.70/head cost difference with the U.S. According to the opposition parties, the motion was "blocked by the Conservatives, who used delay tactics in order to prevent a vote."

"We have recently announced the approval of a loan of up to \$10 million to the Levinoff-Colbex abattoir in Quebec" explained Patrick Girard, a spokesperson for Agriculture and Agri-food Canada. "We are aware of the difficulties that still remain, due to the strength of the dollar and the cost of removing SRMs, and we will continue to work with the industry in order to ensure that meat packers remain as a solid link in the value chain."

Julie Mercier

LTCN 2009-12-17

Fruit and vegetable producers called upon to innovate

Quebec producers of processed fruits and vegetables will be called upon next year to participate in various research projects. The *Fédération québécoise des producteurs de fruits et légumes de transformation* (FQPFLT) is working on an innovation plan to improve crop productivity. The projects were presented to growers at their annual general meeting, held on December 9 in Boucherville.

Within the framework of the plan, the federation's executive committee participated in a trip to France last summer. Producers visited fields, processing plants and a research centre to observe local practices, particularly in production management. Following this fact-finding mission, research projects were developed with field trials expected to start this year. The participation of producers will be solicited to test 20-inch spacing when planting. Seeding density will remain the same, but 20-inch spacing between the rows will be respected. This practice, which is common

in France, increases yields. Now its performance will be evaluated on a large scale in Quebec. Planting will be done using custom work, offered at an advantageous price.

Another research project will evaluate the performance of a mechanical cultivator, which increases soil aeration and improves the plants' root development.

The future of cucumbers

During the coming year, the federation also hopes to re-activate its cucumber committee, to explore new methods of production.

“There are only about fifteen cucumber producers left,” explained FQPFLT President Claude Lacoste. “Negotiations were difficult for that sector in 2009.” Indeed, the total volume under contract at the beginning of the year showed a 25 per cent decrease. Hartung, a newcomer from Ontario, destabilized the production. Loblaws turned to cucumbers from India for its no-name brand relish. Cucumber production is particularly affected by competition from emerging countries because of the manual harvesting, which requires extensive labour. Fortunately, the 2009 season progressed well and three Quebec buyers ended up purchasing more volume than expected, which resulted in only three per cent less volume being sold than in the previous year.

While speaking at the annual meeting, Lacoste also criticized the new standards out in place for labelling Canadian products. Products must now contain a minimum of 98 per cent Canadian ingredients to be marked *Product of Canada*. He believes this percentage should be lowered to 85 per cent.

“The revision of the standards was a good thing, but 98 per cent Canadian content is not possible in our sector,” he explained. “In pickles, for example, there is vinegar and dill, which alone adds up to over five per cent.”

Marie-Claude Poulin

LTCN 2009-12-17