



## **Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency's Master Shepherd's Course Wins 2015 Regional Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence**

*For immediate release*

November 9, 2015 – Guelph, ON – The Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency (OSMA) has been selected for one of 50 Regional Premier's Awards for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence, in recognition of work done in the development and implementation of the Master Shepherd's Course. This was a pilot project, mimicking a similar course that was offered by the University of Guelph and supported by OSMA, almost 20 years ago from 1996-1998.

The Master Shepherd's Program is a key pillar in achieving the OSMA strategic intent of increasing local lamb supply by 20% by 2020; a goal that OSMA set in response to the Premier's Agricultural Challenge. The on-going course development supports the expansion of the Ontario sheep industry and assists producers in running financially sustainable farms which can be competitive with imports.

"OSMA is humbled and grateful to accept this award, and would like to thank all those who supported the course including participants, speakers, host farms and businesses and particularly Eadie Steele, the program developer; without her efforts it would not have been possible," says Rob Scott, Chairman of the Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency. "We would also like to thank the Premier and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs for their support of the program and for the award itself."

The Master Shepherd's Course is a fantastic tool for experienced and inexperienced shepherd's alike, providing students with a unique forum to share ideas and experiences with each other and building relationships with not only fellow producers but with many industry professionals that were brought in as guest speakers over the course of the program. In total, there were 18 full course participants and there were another 42 who signed up for only select modules. OSMA received very positive feedback about how beneficial the course was and is currently investigating ways to make it available to more Ontario shepherds in the future.

OSMA is a producer organization representing all aspects of the sheep industry in Ontario. Established in 1985 under the Ontario Farm Products Marketing Act, OSMA's mission is to enhance producer returns and provide consumers with premium lamb and sheep products by encouraging Ontario sheep producers to provide quality, year-round product through advocacy, industry capacity, research and market development.