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## **Doing the right things. Doing things right.**

By Jenn MacTavish, General Manager, Ontario Sheep Farmers

Ontario Sheep Farmers (OSF) is in the middle of a major overhaul. We're reviewing our governance model. We're looking at policies and procedures. We're initiating a code of conduct. And with a focus on input from our farmers through surveys, townhalls and one-on-one conversations, we're developing a new five-year strategic plan to lead us forward.

It's an ambitious and exciting undertaking for our organization because it means we are thriving, growing, diversifying and changing. I am proud – and yes, a lot biased – about the work OFS is doing and I think it's important to share that pride.

Ontario's sheep industry has invested heavily over the years into the care and welfare of its livestock. From the development of the Code of Practice to emergency management and planning. From programs like Maedi Visna to investing in research on genetic resistance to parasites. Building flock resiliency and diversity has, in a lot of ways, been the cornerstone of the work of OSF.

I have been thinking a lot about a recent conversation I had with a trucker. We were talking about the feed, water and rest stations for sheep in Canada, which he is largely happy with. But after a pause he said, "you know the one thing that is a problem is that there is a lack of places to park your truck. We are running out of places to park and get something to eat and if you run out of hours in a day, you have nowhere to go."

Could it be that in our collective quest to care for the health and welfare of our animals, we have lost sight of the importance of taking care of the people?

We've done some good work in recent years to demonstrate how, as an organization, OSF cares for people. We were the first commodity organization to support the farmer mental wellness research at the University of Guelph in Ontario. And we developed a code of conduct, which might seem novel in the ag sector but it's standard practice in every other industry. It's about doing the right thing. And being accountable for your actions.



[OntarioSheep.org](https://OntarioSheep.org)

Recently, the OSF board passed a Diversity and Inclusion policy. Diversity is something OSF has embraced as part of “doing different.” And it began with the diversity of sheep operations represented around the board table, and the number of women on the OSF board. Our Diversity and Inclusion policy has gone further and also speaks to the organization’s commitment to continuous improvement on how it cares for people.

The expansion of our commitment to diversity is also part of our commitment to care for people who make up the sheep industry in Ontario. It’s not just a recognition of our diverse group of farmers, but also a recognition of the diversity along the supply chain, including our customers.

We know it’s not enough to just talk about diversity and inclusion. We need to put action to these words and invest in the creation of a culture that fosters and builds diversity and inclusion. That’s why some OSF staff and board members took part in the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion training with Beef Farmers of Ontario.

As the world begins to slowly open up and the COVID pandemic lessens, it’s a good time to reflect on how we all are doing. We know that mental health has taken a big hit. We are stressed. We are uncertain. We are frustrated. Maybe patience has long run out. I can assure you that OSF is looking forward and committed to continuous improvement – for our people, our farms, our animals and our industry partners.

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