



2025 Provincial Election Ontario Sheep Farmers Issues Backgrounder

Predation & the Ontario Wildlife Damage Compensation Program

The OWDCP is a valuable resource to livestock producers in Ontario and we appreciate the responsiveness of government in the past when issues have been identified and addressed.

This year, our organization received feedback from our producers that the amount of time between reporting livestock damage and a producer receiving compensation was over six months and, in some cases, almost a year. Additionally, investigators in some municipalities are not responding in a reasonable time to producer reports of damage and livestock kills are having to be documented by producers rather than investigators to capture the required proof of wildlife damage.

There is broad inconsistency in program delivery through municipalities that leads to inequity between farmers across the province. Some municipalities send investigators right away and pay claims immediately. While others rarely send investigators and hold money even when it is transferred by the province until the municipal council approves the transfer, causing significant delay.

Our boards recommend the province administer the program equitably to all producers by introducing an online wildlife damage reporting form. We understand that a form may already exist and be in use for farmers in unorganized townships. Producers can submit their own photos and investigators can be engaged only when the province requires additional information.

This reduction of red tape will save the province and municipalities thousands of dollars in administration time and the cost of investigators for every claim.

Additionally, Ontario Sheep Farmers has received multiple resolutions to our board and calls from producers, related to the valuation of commercial breeding stock lost to predation. Presently, commercial breeding stock is only compensated at the cull animal meat price. The cull animal value does not truly reflect any breeding stock value. There is no compensation value given for the many years and thousands of dollars of investment in a commercial breeding program and the future flock genetic improvement these animals represent. Commercial or non-purebred genetics does not mean they are of lower quality than purebred genetics. In many purchases, the commercial ewe genetics have a value premium due to hybrid vigor resulting from the genetic crosses and selection for specific traits inherent in other breeds.

Ontario Sheep Farmers recommends an annual survey of sheep breeders reporting actual values of commercial and purebred breeding stock sold. The survey can also help identify the added value for specific breeds utilized for their quality wool or their dairy milk production. Similar to meat breeding stock,



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the actual value of these animals is significantly more than the cull meat price. The survey could also determine a value for livestock guardian dogs when they are also lost to predation.

In addition to concerns regarding wildlife predation, Ontario farmers also face losses from domestic dog attacks, yet the compensation framework for these incidents remains outdated and inconsistent with the support provided under the Ontario Wildlife Damage Compensation Program (OWDCP). While the OWDCP provides compensation to poultry and livestock producers at market value based on industry-recognized pricing, losses caused by domestic dogs fall under the Protection of Livestock and Poultry from Dogs Act, which does not follow the same valuation approach. This discrepancy results in significantly lower compensation rates for producers who experience losses due to domestic dog attacks.

The lack of regular updates to compensation rates under this separate legislative framework creates an unjust financial burden for affected producers. This disparity does not reflect the true economic loss suffered by farmers and fails to provide adequate support for their livestock protection efforts.

We recommend harmonizing the compensation structure for livestock losses caused by domestic dogs with the OWDCP model, ensuring that all producers receive fair and up-to-date compensation based on industry standards. Aligning these programs will create a more equitable system, recognizing that the source of predation – whether wildlife or domestic dogs – should not determine the financial viability of a farm business recovering from a loss.



Livestock Guarding Dogs and the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act

Livestock Guardian Dogs under the PAWS Act

At this time, LGDs are recognized in the Act through the ‘standards of care for dogs kept outdoors’. These standards allow for dogs to live outside provided they have sufficient protection from the elements and shade.

The PAWS Act does not currently recognize LGDs and other working dogs as integral to the health and safety of flocks in areas with high predator pressure. This means sheep farms are subject to municipal dog bylaws that restrict the number of dogs allowed on a premises and cost producers up to thousands of dollars annually for licenses and kennel requirements.

Since LGDs are required to ensure the health and welfare of sheep in areas with strong predation, and border collies and other working stock dogs are required to safely move sheep, **OSF is recommending that the next iteration of the PAWS Act expand their welfare regulations for dogs to include a provision to allow the number of working dogs on a farm required to keep the flock safe from predators and safely move the flock without the requirement of a kennel license and the expense of building a kennel.**

Review of the PAWS Act

Ontario farmers and agricultural organizations are committed to farm animal welfare. We firmly believe in and advocate for the human treatment of all animals, including livestock, poultry, pets, working animals, and wildlife. The health, welfare, safety, and comfort of animals remain a top priority for Ontario’s farming sector, reflecting their ongoing dedication to responsible animal stewardship.

Livestock groups are requesting a formal review of the Provincial Animal Welfare Services (PAWS) Act, 2019. Since it came into effect on January 1, 2020, this legislation has played a significant role in safeguarding animal welfare in Ontario. During the consultation phase leading to the introduction of the PAWS Act, many of our organizations recommended a formal review of the legislation after three to five years to assess its functionality, and ensure it aligns with its intended purpose. Given the elapsed time since its enactment and the practical experience gained through actual animal welfare cases, we firmly believe a review of the PAWS Act is timely and warranted.



Veterinary Access

Veterinarian's Act Regulations

Ontario Sheep Farmers was an active participant in the Veterinarians Act modernization in 2023 and continues to watch the development of the regulations with interest.

While we appreciated the focus on updating the Act, our organization would like to acknowledge that there is no indication that the changes will improve access to veterinary care in rural and remote regions of Ontario.

As we work toward developing the regulations, here are recommendations from Ontario Sheep Farmers:

- **The regulations must ensure that farmers and others identified continue to retain the ability to perform procedures, under exceptions and exemptions in future regulations (i.e. dehorning, castration, tail-docking, euthanasia, etc.)**
- **Many activities on the farm that do not require the expertise or oversight of a veterinarian and would be done very well by an experienced specialist at a manageable cost in rural and northern Ontario.**
- **Prescription medications be obtained (dispensed and sold) through means such as Livestock Medicine Outlets or pharmacies, not just by veterinarians. This ensures competitiveness, and timely access to medicines for farmers in remote or underserved regions of the province.**
- **Ability to draw blood for testing to be added to the list of activities to be performed by an RVT or a producer with the skills and training.**

Veterinarian Shortage

The availability of small ruminant animal veterinary care in Ontario has reached a crisis point in Ontario. This deficit is continuously growing as large animal veterinarians retire without replacements. Many of our members have vets further than 100 kms away from their farm and in northern Ontario it is even further. Farmers also contact OSF monthly to share the news of clinics closing or ending services for small ruminant clients. There is great concern among our members that emergency care will not be available when it is needed for livestock farmers as a result of the increasing veterinarian shortage and the wide geographic coverage area of most large animal clinics.

The government has announced the addition of 20 new veterinarians per year through a northern school that we hope will focus their career on large animals. The addition of this new school in the north and the money announced for graduates that choose to practice in rural Ontario is positive.

It is important to increase the number of veterinarians that practice in rural and northern Ontario to avoid overstretched practitioners without support. We also think it is important to increase the number of small ruminant specialists in Ontario. Our members have shared that even though they have a large animal vet, that vet predominantly serves cattle farms and does not have small ruminant expertise.



OSF recommends the provincial government increase the number of veterinary students in Ontario for those wanting to pursue large animal practices and increase incentives for small ruminant veterinarians to increase capacity across Ontario.

Access to Veterinary Drugs, Vaccines and Drenches

Sheep producers across Canada have signed on to the white paper authored by the major organizations representing Canada's farmed animal producers that was prepared for the federal government in August 2024. This document states,

“Due to various barriers detailed in this Whitepaper, Canadian farmers' and veterinarians' access to such tools is virtually at a crisis point, which is compounded by the fact that the number of currently approved and available tools is eroding at a significant rate. The result is that Canadian farmers and veterinarians are forced to rely on an increasingly limited number of tools – many of which are also important in human medicine. Not only does this have implications for animal and human health, it places Canada at a competitive disadvantage compared to other countries who do have access to such tools.”

There are a number of solutions outlined in the paper that have been presented to Health Canada. The relevant solution for the province is to address the barriers to accessing veterinary pharmaceuticals that disincentivize companies from marketing their products in Canada.

Agricultural commodities, including farmed animals, are particularly sensitive to input costs (eg. feed, fertilizer, fuel, veterinary pharmaceuticals, vaccines, and health products, etc.). When it comes to veterinary pharmaceuticals, vaccines, and other veterinary health products, the impact of rising input costs can be accentuated because Canadian farmers must compete with countries with lower animal health care costs. This creates a climate where farmers and veterinarians must continually balance costs against benefits; these realities impact how easily animal health companies can pass along their costs to farmers in Canada. Farmed animal populations define market size and sales potential for veterinary products.

Market size is thus a major determinant in the potential for ROI, and therefore, on the relative attractiveness of a market for product manufacturers. Livestock and poultry populations in other jurisdictions, such as the US and the EU, are considerably larger than those in Canada.

In recognition of the overarching societal benefits of defending antimicrobial efficacy, 'Pull Incentives' are a mechanism that would reward companies for the successful innovation, development, and commercialization of critical veterinary products. The advantage of such a model is that it provides guaranteed ROI for companies who successfully bring their products to market in Canada, assuring greater product availability, while also aligning with public health objectives.

OSF recommends that the provincial government support the work of Health Canada by contributing to a Pull Incentive model for veterinary antimicrobials which provides guaranteed ROI for companies who successfully bring their products to market in Canada and increase the competitiveness of Ontario agriculture for the benefit of the provincial economy.



Interprovincial Trade Pilot

Ontario Sheep Farmers commends the provincial and the federal governments for taking steps toward interprovincial trade for meat within Canada.

OSF supports the proposed pilots to address slaughter availability in remote and rural border regions to increase producer access to small meat plants and custom slaughter services. Our organization also supports the proposal to work with high volume provincially inspected plants ready to expand market access beyond provincial boundaries to pilot national marketing before becoming federally inspected.

For producers in rural and remote areas there has been a decline in service availability and capacity – most notably in eastern Ontario and northern Ontario as well as Quebec and within the municipal boundary of Lloydminster, AB. Many producers in these regions are seeking custom slaughter services not offered by large plants, to focus on local or direct to consumer sales where producers may obtain a premium for their products.

Currently these producers cannot bring animals to nearby cross-border plants for slaughter and return to home province for local sale, but instead may have to travel hundreds of km within the province. Improving these circumstances is expected to reduce wait times and improve costs for producers on both sides of the border and support rural economies.

The region of Ontario surrounding Ottawa, including the counties of Renfrew, Lanark, Leeds, Grenville, Stormont, Dundas, Glengarry, Prescott and Russell, represent 11% of Ontario’s sheep production. Eastern Ontario abattoirs have capacity for only half of these animals, with the rest having to travel hundreds of kilometres for processing. Eastern Ontario is a region of great opportunity for sheep farms due to the geography and cost of land, however, the sheep population has declined by 50% in the last 10 years.

The northern region of Ontario that includes Algoma, Cochrane, Sudbury, Kenora, Manitoulin, Nipissing, Rainy River, Thunder Bay and Timiskaming represent only 3% of Ontario’s sheep production but represent the greatest opportunity for sheep production in the province. Sheep production in this region has declined 44% since 2012 mainly due to the distance from processing.

OSF encourages the province to announce and roll out these pilots in 2025 for eastern and northern regions of Ontario.

OMAFRA has committed to collaborate with industry and provincial and federal partners to develop the “Ready to Grow Pilot” to allow meat plants with demonstrated demand to grow and expand sales beyond their provincial borders. The pilot will not compromise Canada’s market access abroad or its international reputation.

The objective of the pilot is to address needs for certain high-volume provincially regulated meat plants seeking to expand market access outside provincial boundaries.



OSF has supported this pilot since its inception and encourages the provincial government to launch the program in 2025.

OSF supports the “Ready to Grow Pilot,” initiative for Ontario plants to access markets beyond Ontario and supports expansion of the pilot program for plants in other provinces that meet or exceed Ontario’s processing standards.



Research Investment

The Government of Ontario, the University of Guelph, and Agricultural Research and Innovation Ontario are part of a collaboration known as the Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance that contributes nearly \$207 million to the province's growing agri-food economy, growing businesses and helping the sector thrive.

In 2023, OMAFA, University of Guelph and ARIO renewed the Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance Agreement. The agreement aims to ensure Ontarians have access to healthy, safe food and that farmers and businesses have the information needed to be competitive and sustainable.

In the first year of the agreement, \$72 million was invested by OMAFA with \$135 million in leveraged funding from the University of Guelph committed over the four years of the agreement. In the final three years, the government portion of the agreement drops to \$66 million despite their desired outcome of 'competitiveness and productivity of the agri-food sector'.

The agreement is renegotiated in 2028 and Ontario Sheep Farmers feels strongly that supporting an effective agri-food research and innovation system that 'sustains core capacity and may generate new capacity to undertake world-class research' requires a sustained government investment.

