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SHEEP CONFINED FEEDING OPERATION DETERMINATIONS

Operational Guideline 2019-1

Agricultural Operation Practices Act
March 13, 2019

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1. Introduction

This guideline provides operators and NRCB staff with guidance for determining if a sheep operation (sheep raised for slaughter), or select facilities of a sheep operation, should be considered a confined feeding operation (CFO) and require a permit under the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act* (AOPA).

All operations that meet the definition of a CFO and exceed the AOPA thresholds are required to have an AOPA permit. Schedule 2 of the Agricultural Operations, Part 2 Matters Regulation sets the threshold for ewes/rams at 300; ewes with lambs at 200 ewes; lambs at 1,000; and feeders at 500 animals. The four categories are defined as follows:

- ewes/rams: includes ewe and ram cull animals that are no longer part of a breeding herd. Does not include pregnant ewes
- ewes with lambs: ewes that are part of a breeding herd. Also includes pregnant ewes, replacement ewes and breeding rams
- lambs: un-weaned young stock
- feeders (feeder lambs): weaned young stock

How livestock is managed will determine whether an operation meets the definition of a CFO. Sheep are typically raised and managed in a similar manner to beef and other livestock breeding herds. As a result, a sheep operation can be compared with other livestock operations to determine whether it is a CFO and requires an AOPA permit.

2. Typical sheep operations

2.1 Herd management

- The breeding herd consists of ewes, rams, un-weaned lambs, replacement ewes, and rams. The typical ratio of ewes to rams is 40 to one.
- Ewes can be bred for the first time at one year of age
- Ewes are typically bred according to their natural cycle, usually either in the late summer or early fall. Sheep have an average 147 day gestation period
- The majority of sheep operations lamb once per year. Lambing (birthing) generally takes place between January and March for early lambing or March and May for late lambing.
- The average birthrate ranges from two to four lambs per ewe depending on the breed.
- Lambs are weaned at six to eight weeks. Weaned offspring are normally fed for one to two months to a weight of 110 to 120 lbs.
- Ewe-lambs (female sheep that have never lambed) are either kept for replacement for the breeding herd or are sold.
- Ram-lambs (immature male sheep) are kept for replacement rams, sold as breeding rams, or sold for slaughter at 110 to 120 lbs.
- Withers (castrated rams) are normally sold for slaughter at 110 to 120 lbs.

2.2 Pens, pasture and forage

- Typically, sheep producers try to maximize the use of pasture within their operations.
- Sheep prefer to graze short grasses and weeds (forbs). It is not uncommon for grass to be growing in a portion of a sheep pen. Bale type feeders may also be present in these pens.
- Ewes are pastured after weaning as soon as grass is available—usually between May/June. They normally remain on pasture until October/November, when grass is no longer available.
- Replacements for the breeding herd are also generally pastured.

2.3 Summer feeding in confinement

- Animals from the breeding herd that will not return back to the herd are usually finished for slaughter. These include dry ewes, feeders, and rams (withers). They are usually confined and fed in facilities.

2.4 Overwintering

- Normally only the breeding herd and replacements are overwintered (October-January).

3. CFO determination

3.1 Facilities that are not considered part of a CFO

- Grazing operations—“classical” sheep operations managed very similarly to a “classical” cow/calf operation. The animals graze for the majority of their lives. They are only confined for short periods of time during lambing. The only major difference is that newborn lambs are weaned and sold within four to five months of birth and are not kept in confinement throughout the summer/fall months. In this case the sheep operation is considered a seasonal feeding and bedding site. (The majority of operations that lamb in spring or summer will place the weaned lambs on pasture during the summer months. They only corral the lambs at night for protection against predators.)
- Overnight pens—small facilities used for overnight penning during the summer months when the sheep breeding herd is grazing. These pens are generally intended to reduce the risk of overnight predation, but may also be used for handling and/ or treatment of sick livestock. The facility will usually have a water source, and salt and mineral feeders.
- Breeding facilities—used to exclusively confine ewes and ewe-lambs for short periods of time for breeding (typically four to five weeks).
- Overwintering facilities for early lambing—used to feed and shelter ewes in preparation for early lambing. Once lambing starts these facilities are also used to feed and shelter the ewes and lambs until weaning.
- Overwintering facilities for late lambing—also used to feed and shelter ewes in preparation for lambing. Once lambing starts these facilities are used less intensively as early lambing facilities, as the ewes and un-weaned lambs are pastured shortly after lambing.
- Lambing barns—used for short durations during lambing. Lambing barns are used to provide a “mothering up” time for new born lambs and their mothers. The ewes and new born lambs are placed in small individual pens to allow the newborn time to gain

strength before being moved outside. These barns are also used to treat and care for sick or orphaned lambs. These temporary-use barns are not considered CFO facilities as long as they are not used for confinement and feeding when pasture is available (similar to calving barns for cow-calf operations).

3.2 Facilities that are considered part of a CFO

An AOPA permit is required for facilities that meet the thresholds set out in Schedule 2 of the Agricultural Operations, Part 2 Matters Regulation, and that fall into one of the following categories:

- Facilities that are used to confine and feed sheep (feeders) beyond the grazing season (other than for overnight penning, for a short period of time for breeding, or for lambing). This includes single barn facilities that serve multiple purposes and hence do not have a rest period (i.e., the use of this facility continues into the summer months to house and raise feeders).
- Facilities/operations that solely confine feeders that are not part of a breeding herd (lamb feedlot). Typically the feeder lambs are purchased and then sold directly for slaughter.
- Facilities/operations that feed and grow cull breeding herd animals only. These are mostly ewes and rams and are not used for the production of lambs and are only grown/maintained for slaughter purposes.
- Facilities used to feed lambs from a breeding herd into the summer months when grazing is available. The lambs do not return to the herd.

Contact the Natural Resources Conservation Board at the following offices. Dial 310.0000 to be connected toll free.

Edmonton Office

4th Floor, Sterling Place
9940 - 106 Street
Edmonton AB T5K 2N2
T 780.422.1977 F 780.427.0607

Calgary Office

19th Floor, Centennial Place
250 - 5 Street SW
Calgary AB T2P 0R4
T 403.297.8269 F 403.662.3994

Lethbridge Office

Agriculture Centre
100, 5401 - 1 Avenue S
Lethbridge AB T1J 4V6
T 403.381.5166 F 403.381.5806

Morinville Office

Provincial Building
201, 10008 - 107 Street
Morinville AB T8R 1L3
T 780.939.1212 F 780.939.3194

Red Deer Office

Provincial Building
303, 4920 - 51 Street
Red Deer AB T4N 6K8
T 403.340.5241 F 403.340.5599

NRCB Response Line: 1.866.383.6722

Email: info@nrcb.ca

Web address: www.nrcb.ca

Copies of the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act* can be obtained from the Queen's Printer at www.qp.gov.ab.ca or through the NRCB website.

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