

Scrapie found at Ont. home farm of missing sheep

Animals disappeared from farm under CFIA quarantine

Apr 29, 2012 5:46 AM - 0 comments

TEXT SIZE  

By: *Staff*
[Livestock](#)

One of the sheep remaining at a quarantined southeastern Ontario farm where 31 sheep disappeared earlier this month has been confirmed positive for scrapie.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency, in a release late Friday, confirmed the fatal nerve disease in a sheep that had "recently died" on the farm operated by Linda Montana Jones near Hastings, Ont., about 35 km east of Peterborough.

The farm was placed under quarantine after another sheep in Alberta that originated from the Jones farm tested positive for scrapie, CFIA said.

The finding further complicates Jones' well-publicized efforts to prevent her flock from being destroyed and tested -- as CFIA officials had reportedly planned to do on April 2, the day 31 of the farm's 41 animals were found to be missing.

According to an earlier statement from Jones, an unknown party identifying itself as the "Farmers Peace Corp" left a note claiming responsibility for the sheep-napping. Ontario Provincial Police are still investigating.

Karen Selick, a Belleville, Ont. lawyer for the Calgary-based Canadian Constitution Foundation, representing Jones, has previously alleged all of the condemned animals on the quarantined farm have tested negative for scrapie in live biopsies and none of the flock showed clinical symptoms of scrapie in the 12 years Jones has raised sheep.

Now, the CFIA said Friday, "the missing sheep pose a serious risk for scrapie and could spread the disease to other sheep and goats."

Furthermore, the agency said Friday, quarantine breaches such as this one "put the livestock industry and the economy at risk."

Any premises that receive the missing sheep will be subject to "a quarantine and further regulatory action" which could include criminal prosecution under the *Health of Animals Act*.

Scrapie is a federally reportable livestock ailment from the transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) family of neurodegenerative diseases, such as BSE in cattle and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in people. Always fatal in infected animals, scrapie has a long incubation period and there is no known 100 per cent effective live test. Infected animals can spread the disease in flocks and herds without showing signs of illness.

"Hardship"

A single sheep Jones sold to an Alberta farm in 2007 was later found to have scrapie, the foundation said previously, also alleging scientists can't accurately determine when or where the Alberta case acquired the illness.

Jones' farm, the foundation said, has "nevertheless been under quarantine" since January 2009, causing "great financial hardship."

Selick on April 19 filed an application with the Federal Court of Canada, seeking a judicial review to overturn the CFIA's destruction order for Jones' 41 sheep and alleging the agency and its staff "acted with improper intentions or for ulterior purposes."

In a separate release Monday (April 24) from the foundation, Selick further alleged the testing of a slaughtered sheep's brain tissue for scrapie "may not be significantly more accurate than the live-animal rectal biopsy."

Jones, in the same release, suggested the CFIA offer amnesty to the "Farmers Peace Corp" and promise to spare the sheep if they would be returned.

Jones described her sheep as Shropshires, an "endangered breed," noting "they're due to have lambs soon so I'm expecting 30 to 40 new babies."

Shropshire breeding animals are classified with livestock conservation group Rare Breeds Canada (RBC) and the Rare Breeds Trust of Australia as being in "critical" low numbers. The U.K.-based Rare Breeds Survival Trust designates Shropshires as a "minority."

Rare Breeds Canada, on its website, has urged that the sheep be saved. A number of industry groups, however, support a CFIA cull of the Jones farm's sheep.

"Scrapie investigations truly are regrettable, emotionally charged scenarios that impact both the producer and the industry," Andrew Gordanier, chairman of the Canadian Sheep Federation, said in an April 3 release.

"However, sheep disappearing in the middle of the night is making an already difficult situation even worse" said Gordanier, a producer at Shelburne, Ont.

"Mockery"

"Moving potentially diseased animals during their greatest period of infectivity risks spreading the disease to an even larger number of animals," the chief executives of five livestock groups, including the CSF, Canadian Livestock Genetics Association, Canadian Sheep Breeders Association, Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency and Ontario Goat said in a joint letter on April 5.

"What was initially a destruction order for 41 animals could quickly turn into the required destruction of hundreds of potentially infected sheep and goats."

Any situation where a positive case of scrapie is identified "certainly speaks volumes to the need for moving towards scrapie eradication in our country, so these devastating situations cease to exist," the groups' executives said.

Furthermore, they warned, "Canada's ability to control the spread of scrapie dictates our ability to trade and interfering with that process jeopardizes the strides made towards domestic and international confidence in our animal health programs.

"As devastating as the loss of these 41 animals will be to the producer, it does not justify the impact this recent series of events has had on the survivability of the industry," they wrote. "Moreover, this action makes a mockery of the sacrifices that other producers have made over the years in the shared commitment to rid Canada of this disease scrapie."