

FACTSHEET

Veterinary Services

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service

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Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program

History

Since 1952, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the sheep industry have made numerous attempts to eradicate scrapie through various programs. The purpose of all previous USDA programs was to identify scrapie and eradicate it. That approach changed with the implementation of the Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program on October 1, 1992.

This program is a voluntary, cooperative effort among producers, allied industry representatives, accredited veterinarians, State animal health officials, and USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). The program provides participating producers with the opportunity to protect their sheep from scrapie and to enhance the marketability of their animals through certifying their origin in scrapie-free flocks. In addition, APHIS regulations restrict the interstate movement of sheep from scrapie-infected and source flocks.

The program was modified in October 1997 to make it more practical for producers. This factsheet describes the new Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program.

Program Purpose and Benefits

The intent of the program is to monitor flocks over a period of 5 years or more to identify flocks that are free of scrapie. Because there is no validated live-animal test for this disease and scrapie has a long incubation period, a flock is considered free of the disease if no sheep have been diagnosed with scrapie and there is no clinical evidence of it over a period of time. The longer a flock is enrolled and following the requirements of the program, the more likely the sheep in the flock are free of scrapie.

The economic value of animals in enrolled flocks increases the longer they are in the program, especially once the flock is certified. Animals from certified flocks are a valuable source for replacement of breeding animals in other flocks.

The program receives producer input at the national and State levels through the National Oversight Committee and the State Certification Board. These groups include producers, accredited veterinarians, allied industry representatives, State animal health officials, and APHIS officials.

Sign Up!

All flock owners may apply to enter the Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program by contacting the APHIS Veterinary Services office for their area. The State Certification Board reviews applications and approves or disapproves admission to the program.

The application package includes

- A list of animals in the flock, including breed, gender, and official program identification (tattoo, microchip, or APHIS-approved, tamper-resistant ear tag);
- A statement by the flock's accredited veterinarian declaring the flock free of scrapie; and
- An inspection report authorized by a State or Federal regulatory official verifying official identification and other application information.

Program Requirements

When participating in the program, flock owners must:

- Agree to immediately report scrapie-suspect animals to the proper animal health official.
- Officially identify all animals within a flock that are 1 year of age or older. Animals less than 1 year old must be identified whenever a change of ownership occurs, except for those in slaughter channels.
- Maintain required records as specified by the program. Owners must account for all acquisitions, departures, births, and deaths. Records must be retained for a minimum of 5 years after an animal dies or is removed from the flock.

- Allow breed associations and registries, livestock markets, and packers to disclose records to APHIS and/or State animal health officials and State Scrapie Certification Board members.
- Provide necessary facilities and personnel to assist in inspections, including:
 - checking animals for official identification and signs of scrapie, and
 - checking records for completeness and accuracy.
- Submit to an official laboratory tissues from scrapie-suspect animals and from animals suspected of having other neurologic or chronic, debilitating illnesses.
- Report to the State Certification Board acquisitions of sheep from flocks with lower status or from flocks not participating in the program.

Program Categories

Complete Monitored Category

This category means that a flock is approved to participate in the program. Flocks in this category have either enrolled or certified status.

Complete Monitored Enrolled Flock—When a flock enters the program, it is assigned enrolled status, becoming a “complete monitored enrolled flock.” These flocks are assigned an enrollment date (the date the State Certification Board approves admission to the program) and a status date. The status date is the best risk indicator for scrapie in an enrolled flock. Initially, the status date is the same as the enrollment date and will be maintained if a flock continues to meet program requirements. However, if a flock acquires animals or commingles with animals that do not meet the program standards, the status date changes to reflect the date of this occurrence. The older the date, the longer the flock has been meeting program standards.

Rams may be acquired from any flock (other than source or infected flocks), including those not enrolled in the program. Presently, there is no scientific evidence that supports rams as a risk for spreading scrapie. However, producers increase the risk that scrapie will be diagnosed in their flock when purchasing rams from nonenrolled flocks.

Ewes have been found to spread the disease. Therefore, to maintain scrapie-free status, flock owners may obtain ewes only from other enrolled flocks with an equal or older status date. Owners acquiring ewes from flocks not participating in the program or from flocks of lower scrapie status will have their flock’s status date adjusted to reflect the addition of the lowest category animal.

Complete Monitored Certified Flock—When an enrolled flock has met program standards for 5 consecutive years, it advances to certified status. Sheep from these flocks are unlikely to be infected with scrapie. Flocks in this status may be augmented with rams from other certified flocks or enrolled flocks. However, APHIS recommends that producers consider the risk of scrapie infection when purchasing rams from lesser status flocks. Ewes may be purchased only from other certified flocks.

Both enrolled and certified flocks are inspected annually by State or Federal regulatory personnel. Flocks of both statuses also may loan out rams for breeding without jeopardizing their status date. The ram must reside in the program flock other than for breeding purposes and cannot be with ewes 30 days prior to and 60 days following lambing.

Selective Monitored Category

Selective Monitored Category is open to any flock and was designed for slaughter lamb producers to allow for scrapie surveillance in large production flocks. Only male animals over 1 year of age must be officially identified. Producers agree to submit for scrapie diagnosis animals that are culled from the flock or that die. (The number of animals to submit per year depends on the flock size.) Additionally, an accredited veterinarian must inspect all cull ewes for clinical signs of scrapie prior to slaughter. Selective status is maintained indefinitely, as long as the flock meets the category requirements.

Epidemiologic Investigations

If scrapie is diagnosed in a flock in any program category, animal health officials will conduct an epidemiologic investigation. The investigation will identify and trace back the source of the disease and identify exposed animals. These officials will work with the flock owner to develop and implement a flock plan. The flock plan will include depopulation of high-risk animals, reduction of risk associated with spread of infection, and facility cleanup and disinfection.

Exhibition and Transportation Guidelines

The program standards also give guidelines for reducing the risk of scrapie exposure when sheep are at shows or are being transported. Guidelines include separating enrolled sheep from nonenrolled sheep by a vacant pen, barn alley, or solid barrier

sufficient to prevent physical contact. Limited contact in show rings minimizes the risk of disease transmission. Enrolled sheep should not commingle with lambing ewes at exhibits or sales.

Additional Information

For more information about the Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program, contact
USDA, APHIS, Veterinary Services
National Animal Health Programs
4700 River Road, Unit 43
Riverdale, MD 20737-1231
Telephone (301) 734-6954
Fax (301) 734-7964

Current information on enrolled, certified, source, and infected flocks is also available 24 a day hours every day through a toll-free automated telephone voice response service at (800) 545-USDA (8732). To reach APHIS' scrapie information on the World Wide Web, point your Web browser to <http://www.aphis.usda.gov> and type the word "scrapie" (minus the quotation marks) in the search engine.

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