



NEWS RELEASE

Ontario Rabbit

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ONTARIO RABBIT TO LEAVE ALLIANCE PARTNERSHIP

(GUELPH, ON – October 1, 2014) – Effective October 1st, 2014 Ontario Rabbit (OR) will no longer be a member in the successful partnership of the Ontario Livestock Alliance.

“This is not by choice but out of necessity” indicated Ontario Rabbit President Michelle Sanders. “Without the financial means to support our organization or contribute towards the Alliance, we are left with no other choice at this time”.

At the organization’s Annual General Meeting (AGM) this past spring, rabbit producers voted overwhelmingly to support the organization with a voluntary check-off of 20 cents per rabbit. However, collecting the check-off from producers proved to be very challenging for the organization.

“We asked rabbit producers to submit their voluntary check-off in order to financially support the priorities of their organization” stated Sanders. “Unfortunately, and for whatever reason, we have not had a good response to this request and ultimately, the producers have spoken” she added.

Sanders acknowledged that it is disappointing given the direction at the AGM expressed by producers and the support received from industry over the years. “Our partnership in the Alliance opened doors for the rabbit sector that were previously closed” suggested Sanders. Over the past few years, the organization has engaged in several well received projects including the development of biosecurity measures for rabbitries, cost of production workshops, the development of a Best Management Practices manual, development of an artificial insemination pilot study and resource materials.

However, once the initial funding had wrapped up, the sector was called upon to support itself. Rabbit producers supported the submission of a proposal to the Farm Products Marketing Commission asking for marketing board powers to establish a representative commodity organization. By the narrowest of margins, the producer expression of opinion vote, held in 2012, failed and the rabbit sector has had a tough time bouncing back. “Losing by only four votes really took the wind out of our sails” explained Sanders.

“When we built the Ontario Livestock Alliance partnership, it was never intended to take it apart like this and so of course, we are disappointed to see rabbits leave” stated Ontario Veal President Judy Dirksen. “However, over the course of the past several years of this partnership there has been excellent value to the rabbit sector in being a member of our Alliance” she added. Dirksen indicated that the door could remain open should the rabbit sector find itself in a position to return to the Alliance.

As a result, OR will no longer have access to the necessary organizational infrastructure provided by the Alliance partnership. “We are going to have to go back to doing things on our own as volunteers the best

we can. It is a total step backwards for the Ontario rabbit industry” she stated. The OR board will now take some time to review its mandate before charting a course for their next steps.

While specific details are now being finalized, Jennifer Haley, Executive Director with the remaining Alliance partners Ontario Veal and Ontario Goat indicated that “we will be fulfilling our commitments to the rabbit sector by wrapping up projects but we will not be in a position to start anything new moving forward”.

“It is a sad day for the Ontario rabbit sector” added Sanders. “My hope is that we will be able to bounce back re-focused and ready to harness the opportunities in the sector but a lot of that depends on the will of the rabbit producers”.

Ontario Rabbit is a non-profit organization representing Ontario’s commercial meat rabbit producers.

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