



# NEWS RELEASE

## Ontario Rabbit

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## **ONTARIO RABBIT ONE STEP CLOSER TO MARKETING BOARD STATUS** *Ontario Rabbit submits proposal to Ontario Farm Products Marketing Commission*

GUELPH, Ont. - Ontario Rabbit has reached another milestone with the formal submission of its proposal for marketing board powers to the Ontario Farm Products Marketing Commission.

“Thank you to everyone for your support through this process- whether you attended a meeting, provided feedback, or signed the petition,” stated Ontario Rabbit President Steve Bowier. “By no means are we done our work but we are now that much closer to the finish line and we continue to build momentum.”

Over the past several months, Ontario Rabbit Board of Directors and staff have held extensive consultation meetings with rabbit producers, processors, depots and other industry partners across the province to determine the appropriate functions and ranges of activities of the proposed rabbit marketing board.

Over the past few years, Ontario Rabbit has worked very hard at shifting its organizational structure, securing staff resources and initiating important industry development projects. In July 2008, Ontario Rabbit entered into a partnership with Ontario Veal to share staff resources and provide organizational support. In September 2009, Ontario Goat joined this partnership to create the Ontario Livestock Alliance.

The opportunity to share office and staff resources reduces the cost to administer the organizations. “With a small budget like what we are looking at, every penny counts and having the OLA partnership means we can do more for rabbit producers than we ever thought possible” explained Haley.

“It was clear from the feedback we received that change is required in the Ontario commercial rabbit industry in order to address the long term needs of the industry,” suggested Ontario Rabbit Executive Director Jennifer Haley.

During the consultations, producers indicated that they want to achieve an improved market for quality Ontario rabbits that is under the control of producers. Producers are willing to invest in the future of the rabbit sector through the collection of a check-off fee.

Given the opportunity, producers indicated that a marketing board for rabbits will allow the industry to harness the growth opportunities for rabbit meat with increased consumer awareness; bring recognition to the rabbit sector with a financially sustainable and representative commodity organization; continue to work with government to address the needs of the rabbit sector; and to engage in important industry development and research projects.

As a result of what was heard from producers at the focus group and consultation meetings, one of the key changes that has been made to this proposal is the gradual implementation plan. The check-off fee would be phased in over three years as follows:

- Year 1 \$0.15/rabbit
- Year 2 \$0.20/rabbit

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- Year 3 \$0.25/rabbit

Ideally, Ontario Rabbit requires \$0.25 per rabbit to be able to accomplish its strategic plan, but this phased in approach takes into account the concern from industry about changes in their operational income due to the check-off deduction.

It is anticipated that check-off collection would not begin until at least January 2013 provided that there is a successful producer vote and the government regulations have been put in place in time. “We have a number of important steps to complete so it is important that producers realize this is not an overnight change and that their ongoing support is critical,” commented Bowier.

Another change is that depots will be exempt from collecting check-off should the processor remit on their behalf. The depot would still be responsible for submission of data and necessary paperwork from their clients to Ontario Rabbit. The depot must also indicate in advance to Ontario Rabbit that this is their preferred method of remitting; otherwise the depot will still be liable for the check-off remittance.

One of the challenges will be identifying who is a commercial rabbit producer, as the Farm Business Registration database does not list rabbits as a livestock production choice. Ontario Rabbit will work with the Commission, OMAFRA and industry partners to establish the list of producers who would be eligible to vote.

“We know that there are some producers who would rather remain under the radar as they want to keep their business on a cash basis,” stated Haley. “But at the same time, the needs of the collective industry have the opportunity to capitalize on the many benefits a structured organization can bring producers,” she added.

Once the Commission reviews the proposal and feels that there is enough support, a recommendation will be put forth to Ontario’s Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs Hon. Ted McMeekin to call a vote by producers on the proposal. At that time, producers will receive a package in the mail from the Ontario Farm Products Marketing Commission and OMAFRA outlining the proposal along with a voting card.

Information about the proposal, the voting process and the next steps will also be posted on Ontario Rabbit’s website. The actual vote and the determination of the mailing list will be compiled by the Commission with input from Ontario Rabbit. It is anticipated that the vote will occur Spring/Summer of 2012, pending approval of the initial proposal by OFPMC and the Minister.

Further information meetings will be held throughout the province prior to the vote. Details will be posted on the Ontario Rabbit website and communicated to industry, once they become available.

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**For More Information Contact:**

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