

Livestock Guardian Dog use in Ontario

Predation is a significant cost and ongoing threat to sheep flocks in Ontario. Preventative measures are the first line of defense for producers. Livestock Guardian Dogs are one of the most effective preventative measures available because they are actively protecting the flock 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Livestock Guardian Dogs have been used in Ontario since the 1960's. Their use has increased in the past 40 years as the province's coyote population has increased and expanded throughout the entire province. Livestock Guardian Dog are now used by a great majority of sheep producers in Ontario to protect their flocks from predation by (primarily) coyotes, but also wolves, bears and other wildlife.

Livestock Guardian Dogs live with the sheep flock.

They provide protection to the flock by patrolling pastures, marking the perimeter of their territory. They also bark, run at, and try to intimidate any threats to the livestock they are protecting, which in this case is sheep.

Barking is one of the primary means by which livestock guardian dogs provide protection to the sheep flock. It is their way of communicating with other canines, and the guarding bark warns predators to avoid the area. Because dogs' sense of smell and hearing are many times more acute than that of humans, they often appear to be "barking" at nothing, when in fact, they hear, or smell something that humans are not able to.

Except perhaps for sheep flocks totally confined to barns with no access to outdoors, very few sheep flocks would survive predation attacks if it weren't for the effectiveness of livestock guardian dogs.

Ontario Sheep Farmers (OSF) considers the use of livestock guardian dogs to provide protection to livestock against predation as a normal farm practice.

The Farm and Food Production Protection Act (administered by Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs) defines normal farm practice as a farming practice which:

- is consistent with proper, acceptable customs and standards of similar operations; or
- uses innovative technology according to proper, advanced farm management practices.

The Farm and Food Production Protection Act was established to promote and protect agricultural uses and normal farm practices in agricultural areas, in a way that balances the needs of the agricultural community with provincial health, safety and environmental concerns.





On behalf of Ontario's 2700 sheep farmers, I am reaching out to begin a dialogue with your municipality on the increasing challenge livestock farmers face in dealing with problem predators, and the role that Livestock Guardian Dogs (LGD) and your municipal dog control bylaws play in helping our farmers protect their sheep.

Problem predators are an increasing challenge and cost for Ontario livestock farmers requiring considerable effort and resources on the part of farmers and the Ontario Sheep Farmers (OSF). The financial cost of predation not only costs farmers, in terms of preventative measures, such as fencing and LGD; it also costs Ontario taxpayers, with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) paying farmers over \$717,000 in the 2021 FY for losses of livestock caused by wildlife. This cost does not include the cost borne by municipalities and OMAFRA in sending investigators out to farms and administering the program. Nor does this cover the costs of veterinarians to help those maimed by predators to recover, the production losses of animals who are stressed from predation and the mental health toll predation takes on the farmer. Without being able to properly protect livestock from predation, taxpayers should expect to see an increased incidence of predation and increased costs.

Livestock guardian animals are one of the most common forms of predation prevention control used by Ontario sheep producers. These include Livestock Guardian Dogs (LGDs), donkeys, and llamas, with LGD being the most popular choice. However, there are instances when municipal by-laws hinder the efficient use of LGDs on farming operations as the by-laws are intended primarily for dogs kept for companionship, breeding, or non-working purposes. We have reviewed work done by several Ontario municipalities where LGDs have been specifically addressed when creating or revising existing by-laws. Below are some of the primary areas of concern and suggested options for consideration by your municipality.

Add Definition of Livestock Guardian Dogs (LGDs) and Herding Dogs to by-laws

We propose that:

"Livestock Guardian Dog" (LGD) be defined as a dog that works and/or lives with domestic farm animals (e.g. cattle, sheep, poultry) to protect them while repelling predators and is used exclusively for that purpose.

"Herding Dog" means a dog that has been trained and is actively being used in a bona fide farming operation for the purposes of controlling livestock on the farm.

There are different breeds of LGDs of which the most popular breeds in Ontario include Great Pyrenees, Akbash, Kuvasz, Maremma and Anatolian Shepherd and crosses between these breeds. Although not an exhaustive list, dogs generally used for herding include Border Collies, Australian Shepherds, Blue & Red Heelers and Huntaways.



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Dog Registration/Licensing Requirements

Paying annual dog registration/license fees for numerous working farm dogs can become a significant cost for sheep producers. We would encourage municipalities to exempt LGDs and herding dogs from annual license fees as is done in many jurisdictions for assistance/service dogs and working police dogs. The definition of

Requirement for Dogs to Wear a Collar and Tag

LGDs' instincts are to guard and follow the flock, sleeping and working outdoors in all kinds of weather. Collars can become snagged on branches or fences and become a skin irritant in hot or wet weather. We suggest that municipal by-laws allow owners to remove the collar and license tag (if applicable) from a guardian or herding dog while the dog is being actively used in farming practices provided that the owner uses an alternative means of identification linking the animal to the name and address of the owner, e.g. either a tattoo or microchip containing the required information.

Requirements for Kennel Licensing and/or Limitation on Number of Dogs Kept

In some areas bylaw requires a person with more than three dogs at the same premises to secure a kennel license. Coyotes are very smart and will lure the dogs away while the remaining coyotes kill the sheep or lambs from behind or will attack the dogs directly. It is not uncommon for farmers to have more than two LGDs, especially when they are training younger dogs. This is especially true in areas where there is heavy predation. As well, larger sheep flocks in Ontario (several over 1500 animals), require numerous dogs to provide adequate protection especially where higher numbers of predators are present.

We would propose for your consideration that a person may keep more than three dogs at a premise without obtaining a kennel license provided:

- the person is keeping sheep (or other livestock) upon the same premises.
- the premises is on land that is zoned rural and agricultural.
- the person provides proof of producer registration issued in the name recorded by the Ontario Sheep Farmers, Beef Farmers of Ontario, Ontario Goat,
- the dogs are registered/licensed annually in accordance with relevant municipal by-laws (if required)
- and that the dogs are LGDs and or herding dogs.

Running At Large

A dog shall not be running at large if it is a LGD and is on their leased or owned property.

Barking Restrictions

LGD are exempt from barking restrictions if actively engaged in guarding livestock against predators. Under the Farming and Food Production Protection Act farmers are protected from nuisance complaints made by neighbours provided they are following normal farming practices. The use of LGD on sheep farms is a widely used practice in Ontario and other sheep producing jurisdictions.



Aggressive/ Dangerous Dog designation

LGD act aggressively and show aggression towards things they view as a threat to the livestock they are protecting. As such, an exemption, like that for police dogs should be considered.

OSF wishes to work cooperatively with you to ensure that municipal bylaws take into consideration the use of LGD when developing their bylaws. We would be pleased to communicate with the appropriate municipal officials to review with you Ontario sheep producers' needs and concerns in this area.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and we look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



John Hemsted,
Chair

