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COFFS WG *Newsletter*



CANADIAN ON FARM FOOD SAFETY WORKING GROUP
NEWSLETTER

OFFS Program – Wide Range of Positive Impacts Across Industry

The COFFS Working Group and the On-Farm Food Safety Program have brought food safety to the forefront with their efforts. It's not that producers or any part of the agriculture community haven't been doing their job properly, however, the OFFS Program has given the consumer a sense of security that producers are doing everything they possibly can to produce consistently safe and quality products for their table.

The OFFS program is from the gate to the plate. Using my industry, the chicken industry as an example, all aspects of on-farm production follow a HACCP-based OFFS program. The products in turn go to a plant that are fully HACCP approved and that have their own internal controls. From the plant, the products go to the super-market, which are also starting to put their own food safety systems in place until the products get to the consumer. The next step is to educate consumers to ensure they are using proper food handling and other prac-



tices to keep the products safe in their hands. There are 19 NPOs sitting around the COFFS table, all very smart people that have been tasked with the job of managing each individual program for their commodity group. The sense of cooperation around the table is unbelievable. As leaders, they share their strategies and information with each other to help make sure the groups not as far along in the process can benefit from the time, money and effort the forerunners have done.

In talking with the federal government, they have indicated to me this is a very worthwhile project and it needs to be carried forward. They do believe in food safety, the public wants it and the government is the catalyst to move this file forward. Under the capable leadership of the COFFS WG, OFFS programs will continue to bring success and have positive impacts to other areas and programs across the industry.

Eugene Legge

Chair, COFFS WG

www.onfarmfoodsafety.ca



OFFS Programs.....an idea in evolution.

Ten years ago discussion began about ensuring there was some process in place to address food safety issues originating on farm, to confirm positive practices, and to reduce or segregate any problems arising. And if that was not enough it was to be done on farm without placing an unreasonable, expensive burden on the farm or farmer. As well, there was a want to be able to do this on a cross commodity, national basis. Volunteer to boot -- with government recognition.

Sound impossible? When you consider that agriculture in Canada includes everything from milk to meat to produce to grains to seasonings to products from the wild to honey, it did seem impossible. But alliances, when they work, are an amazing tool.

Today we have 20 programs either in place or on their way. AAFC, CFIA and NPOs have worked together along with their specific groups and partners to make this a reality. Realizing that one box does not fit all - a lot of work has gone on and is going on by the COFFS working group to build a system with overall national principles and guidelines while still keeping the individual programs flexible enough for each segment of agriculture that hopefully would fit their timelines and realities in the market place as for demand.

Regardless how applied and where each agriculture group was in the system - they all have or are working at having a tool to have in place or to use to address food safety issues originating on farm, to confirm positive practices, and to reduce or segregate any problems arising. This is being done on a national basis - lining up very nicely with the BRAND CANADA image and includes government recognition.

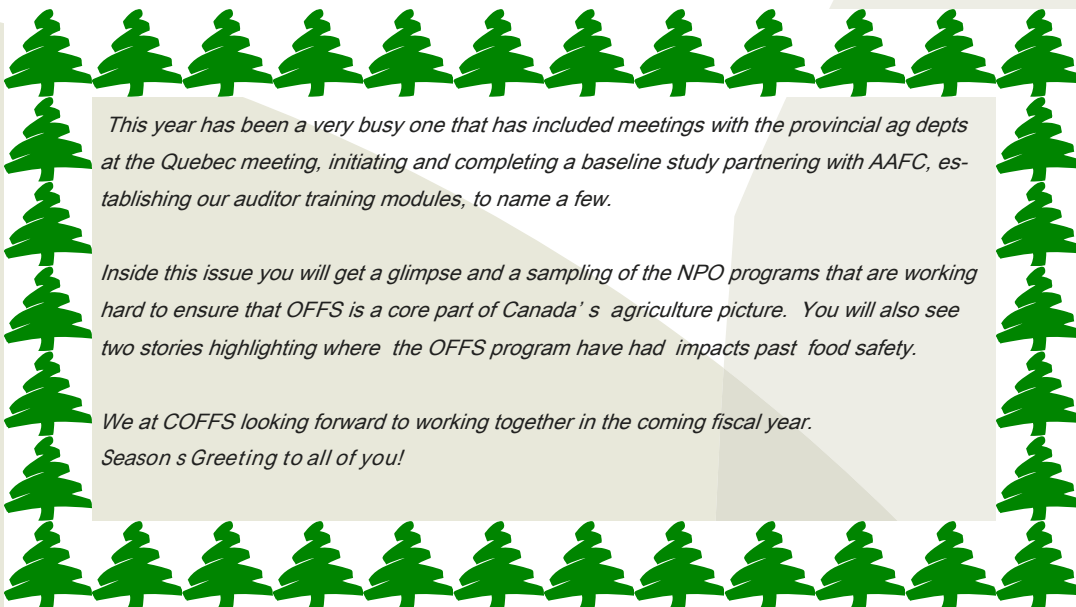
This process has not been without bumps - but what has been unique is the sharing of information, the collaborative process and the willingness of the industry/government partners at the table striving for the same goals. And the fact that we successfully got this far in a short time frame.

The impossible has been happening. So what is next? More mountains to climb. Other programs to consider. Producer costs and market pull to factor in. Federal initiatives changing. More partners in the mix.

But this formula so far has been amazingly successful - continuing to climb these mountains together only makes sense. It is why Canada is the trusted body it is.

Connie Kehler

- proud to be part of it.
COFFS program manager.



This year has been a very busy one that has included meetings with the provincial ag depts at the Quebec meeting, initiating and completing a baseline study partnering with AAFC, establishing our auditor training modules, to name a few.

Inside this issue you will get a glimpse and a sampling of the NPO programs that are working hard to ensure that OFFS is a core part of Canada's agriculture picture. You will also see two stories highlighting where the OFFS program have had impacts past food safety.

*We at COFFS looking forward to working together in the coming fiscal year.
Season's Greeting to all of you!*

www.onfarmfoodsafety.ca



This group is helping to build the foundation for the future of agriculture in Canada

Programs in:

Beef Cattle
Bison
Broiler Hatching Eggs
Chicken
Dairy
Table Eggs
Goats
Herbs and Spices
Hogs - Pork
Honey
Horticulture
Mushrooms
Sheep and Lamb
Turkey
Veal

Visit

www.onfarmfoodsafety.ca

For links to specific programs

OFFS Programs

Canadian Turkey Marketing Agency

The Canadian Turkey Marketing Agency (CTMA) OFFS Program shows that the turkey industry is proactive with respect to food safety and helps turkey farmers prove that they are meeting the increased consumer demands placed on the food-producing sector. Through the record keeping requirements of the program, farmers will have a paper trail to demonstrate they are raising birds using the most current best management practices to control salmonella and other pathogens on-farm, provide adequate flock biosecurity and ensure that turkeys marketed are free of medication or other chemical residues. The Program also helps to ensure that farm personnel are appropriately trained and simplifies the application of other programs such as the CTMA Flock Care program.

Turkey farmers have embraced the CTMA OFFS Program and implementation is well underway across the country. By October 2008, almost 75% of registered turkey farmers have been trained and 45% have been fully certified under the Program. CTMA's goal is that all registered turkey farmers will be audited to ensure compliance with the CTMA program requirements before the end of 2009. The development and implementation of the CTMA OFFSP has been facilitated through funding received from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC).

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Canadian Horticultural Council On-Farm Food Safety Program

Canadian-grown fresh fruit and vegetables have always been recognized for their high level of production safety and for their positive impact on the health of consumers. To maintain a high level of consumer confidence, the Canadian Horticultural Council (CHC) took the lead in the late 1990s to develop food safety programs on the farm for fresh fruit

and vegetables. The CHC was given a mandate by its members to deliver a realistic, cost effective, voluntary, market-driven OFFS program to and for the Canadian horticultural sector. The CHC is currently implementing or developing OFFS Manuals and HACCP models for 8 horticultural crop groupings.

The HACCP-based program brings into focus the potential sources of microbiological, chemical and physical hazards from field through shipping point. The result is a national standard of on-farm practices for production, storage and primary packing, with a ready-made set of tools, resources and templates to assist with implementation. These are auditable, national-level, HACCP-based standards whose uptake has been market driven.

The CHC has developed a certification scheme, including audit protocols and a scored audit checklist, to assess producer/packer conformance to the standards. "The CHC's conformity assessment scheme employs a certification body and third party auditors to verify farm conformance to program requirements. The CHC began offering its certification program in September 2008. The new certification program is open to suppliers who need to demonstrate to their customers that they are following the CHC OFFS manuals."

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ExcelGrains Canada

"ExcelGrains Canada" is a national on-farm food safety initiative that outlines the safest possible production practices for farmers producing cereals, oilseeds, pulse and special crops. The initiative is built on scientific data to give farmers and their customers' extra assurance that the grains were produced, handled and stored on the farm in the interest of food safety. This HACCP-based initiative was guided by farmers from all parts of

Canada in cooperation with scientists, agronomists, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, farmer and industry associations, CFIA and provincial/territorial governments. It's designed to create a marketing advantage and enhance Canada's reputation as a leader in food safety.

A Producer Manual is available now from the Canada Grains Council. The manual details safe production practices plus a process for record keeping demonstrating appropriate steps at the right time were in place on the farm. The manual is being used today by some farmers for Identity Preserved contracts to satisfy specialty markets. Farm audits are negotiated between the marketer or buyer and the farmer.

Eventually there will be a farm certification program with approved auditors. This component will be utilized when the farmer management committee in consultation with industry determines market demand is genuine and there is an advantage for farmers to voluntarily participate in an audit process that verifies compliance.

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Verified Beef Production

Verified Beef Production (VBP) is the national on-farm food safety program designed to uphold customer confidence in the practices of this country's beef producers.

Canada's beef producers already have a reputation for acting responsibly, but VBP takes that to a new level. Producers follow *Standard Operating Procedures* (SOPs) for animal health, cattle shipping, medicated feed, pesticide control and training/communications. Program elements were streamlined in late 2006 for a simpler, but more encompassing program, and has met with stronger interest from beef producers. Nearly 10,000 producers have taken a workshop and about 400 have become fully registered (audited). Several value chain alliances now require VBP as a base for their production protocols, such as Prairie Heritage Beef Producers, Ontario Corn-Fed Beef, Kerr Farms and others.

Benefits of the VBP Program:

- Enhanced veterinarian/producer relationships for decision-making
- Improved efficiency of product use and responsible pharmaceutical practices
- Promotion of detectable needles, researched by the cattle industry and now commercialized - resulting in more usage in the field
- Renewed orientation to consumer-based marketing

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Canadian Cervid Alliance Cervid Producers appreciate the value of OFFS Programs

Cervid producers across Canada are slowly embracing the value of On Farm Food Safety and other FSQ programs, helped along by animal health issues and a significant push from the Alberta government. Alberta's Minister of Agricul-

ture recently announced that participation in a recognized OFFS program will be mandatory for cervid producers in that Province by 2012. These "pushes" make Communication to Producers a top priority as we complete our Phase 2 Technical Review and participate in Working Group and audit and training development activities.

With an entirely volunteer Board and no employees, it is no surprise that the pace of accomplishments in FSQ activities and other Canadian Cervid Alliance priorities slows down in summertime. With snow falling and fall work mostly done, the pace will pick up over the winter months. The Cervid Alliance is currently developing a National Traceability Strategy with the assistance of IBM Canada. We plan to continue with Phase 2 of that project and Phase 3 of the COFFS project in 2008 / 2009.

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CHSNC Good Agriculture and Collection Practices

CHSNC (Canadian Herb, Spice and Natural Health Product Coalition) has developed Good Agriculture and Collection Practices (GACP) under the On Farm Food Safety Program and have completed technical review (funded by AAFC). Canada's new Natural Health Products (NHP) are in effect. Although growers are not included in the regulations, manufacturers and buyers will expect growers to follow Good Agriculture and Collection Practices (GACP). GACP are for both product in cultivation and those collected in the wild and are inclusive of raw material that goes for culinary and those going into medicine.

The GACPs are being developed by industry along with the Natural Health Products Directorate to flow directly into the Good Manufacturing Practices

(GMPs) that manufacturers of finished product are required to adhere to under Canada's new NHP regulations. Although the GACPs developed are voluntary, most manufacturers will insist that they are in place for the raw materials they purchase. There are very specific requirements for incoming raw materials into GMPs, and the quality of raw materials is key to the safety and efficacy of finished products. The majority of safety, quality and traceability issues that arise from raw materials are due to the failure to ensure correct identity and/or failure to ensure product purity.

Recognizing that a concrete plan to address these vital issues on the production/collection side was critical to ensure access to the market, the Canadian Herb, Spice and Natural Health Product Coalition along with the international and national partners including the World Health Organization worked together to develop an internationally recognized Plant Identification Practice. This practice is an integral part of the developed comprehensive outcome based GACP. The strong internationally recognized plant identification practice is the first developed in the world.

These GACPs will ensure a strong value chain of traceability and safety tightly linked with the existing processing good manufacturing practices in both the culinary and medicinal worlds. There is a large gap between production/collection and manufactured products across Canada and around the world. Developing Good Agriculture and Collection Practices that connect with Good Manufacturing Practices up the chain strengthens the chain, boosts consumer confidence and develops strong business relationships.

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OFFS Programs *continued*

Canadian Sheep Federation's Food Safe Farm Practices

The Canadian Sheep Federation's Food Safe Farm Practices (FSFP) Program is a voluntary program that was developed through a partnership between producer, industry and government personnel from across Canada. The program, which has been continually developing since 1997, addresses and anticipates potential food safety challenges facing the sheep industry. It examines all areas of production and outlines management options that are designed to minimize food safety risks.

The *Food Safe Farm Practices Producer Manual* has been through and completed CFIA Technical Review, being one of the first programs to achieve this milestone. In addition, the Canadian Sheep Federation's Board of Directors has demonstrated its commitment to on farm food safety (OFFS) by its inclusion in their 2008-2013 business plan. Nationally, almost 500 producers have been trained on this voluntary program, exhibiting their dedication to OFFS in the absence of market drivers. Two producers have gone through the audit process and received recognition. Currently,

there are ten qualified trainers for the program throughout the country, with plans in place to provide new trainer workshops so that more individuals are qualified to deliver the program as producer uptake increases. The Canadian Sheep Federation will strive to continually respond to producer feedback in the development and implementation of this program.

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Canadian On-Farm Food Safety Auditor Training Course Now Available On-Line

The Canadian On-Farm Food Safety Auditor Training Course is now available as an internet-based training course. This course, developed by the Canadian On-Farm Food Safety (COFFS) Working Group, was originally offered as a five-day on-site training course. Recognizing the need to provide easier access and lower cost delivery, the COFFS Working Group has now made this important component of the Canadian approach to on-farm food safety available on-line in two Modules and in both official languages.

Module 1: Basics of HACCP-Based On-Farm Food Safety - introduction to the Canadian approach to on-farm food safety, the basic concepts of food safety (food microbiology, microorganisms, toxicology), various food quality programs, HACCP principles and its application on-farm.

- French by L'Institut de technologie agroalimentaire de Saint-Hyacinthe
http://www.ita.qc.ca/Fr/formationcontinue/perfectionnement/agricole/liste_producteurs/salubrité+des+aliments/

- English by Lakeland College
http://www.lakelandcollege.ca/continuing_ed/courses/con_ed09120801.aspx

Module 2: Basics of On-Farm Food Safety Auditing - introduction to the basic principles of auditing and the application in the context of on-farm food safety programs.

Website to be announced when available

Completion of the two module internet-based Canadian On-Farm Food Safety Auditor Training Course is the first step to becoming an On-farm Food Safety Auditor. The second step is to complete other education and training requirements for individual national on-farm food safety programs. Information on these requirements and training courses must be obtained from the national programs. Go to the COFFS Working Group website for links to the national program websites.

www.onfarmfoodsafety.ca



Verified Beef Producers back beef value chain success

Food safety helps drive consumer confidence, says branded beef producers group

Canada's internationally recognized safety standards for food safety can help drive consumer confidence and influence buying decisions at the meat counter, says a group of Western Canadian beef producers who market their own branded product.

Prairie Heritage Beef Producers, which markets its product as "natural" beef produced without antibiotics, growth hormones, or animal by-products, has made registration in the Verified Beef Production (VBP) program a requirement for all of the 18 producers in its value chain. VBP is Canada's verified on-farm food safety program for beef and is based on internationally recognized food safety standards.

"At the end of the day, VBP is a tool that helps us prove to consumers that we're doing what we say we're doing," says Jason Hagel of Hagel Feeders in Linden, Alberta, a Prairie Heritage producer. "The cattle that go into the Prairie Heritage system really do not get sick. The procedures of the VBP program have played a big role in helping us keep the animals healthy without the use of antibiotics."

VBP standards have also helped Prairie Heritage build a retail base, says Hagel. "Some of the retail stores are wary of bringing in new product because they do not always know what they're getting. In that regard, VBP is a good tool. We can direct retailers to the Web site and they can see that our production practices are based on internationally accepted standards. The bottom line is that it's not just a good tool for niche marketers, but for the profile of the whole beef industry."

VBP is based on Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) principles. For Canada's beef industry, these principles have been adapted into Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) which cover animal health management, cattle shipping, medicated feed, pesticide control and training/communications.

A key component of the VBP program is strong record keeping practices. Although Hagel, who also produces commodity beef, already had an extensive record keeping program in place, the practice took on a new perspective in the context of running a combination natural/commodity beef feedlot.

"First, we make sure that the commodity animals which receive antibiotic treatments are tagged, marked, and segregated into a separate pen with records kept on all of that activity," says Hagel. "From there, we keep really good records of what's being fed and to which animals. Any time we receive supplement, we document it and store it in a separate and clearly labelled storage area."

Flushing feed mixing equipment is a crucial step in making sure residues from treatments do not end up where they do not belong. "In order to avoid consumption by unintended cattle, we flush any containers that contain medicated feed. The flushed feed is then used or disposed of so it does not present a contamination risk to other feed."

An example of a practice that was driven by Hagel Feeders' registration in VBP is checking the cattle for unknown broken needles before shipping them for processing. In line with Prairie Heritage Beef Producers' commitment to humane animal handling, this step also gives Hagel the opportunity to inspect the truck for anything that may cause the animals discomfort in the shipping process. "Stress on animals is 85 percent of the reason cattle get sick," he says.

More information is featured in a new article, "Verified Beef Production backs beef value chain success," available on the VBP Web site at www.verifiedbeef.org. The VBP Web site also features information on program fundamentals and the latest news and developments, including contact information to find out about VBP workshops across the country.

More information is available at the VBP Web site at www.verifiedbeef.org or by contacting the VBP program directly at (306) 737-2290 or (403) 275-8558.



Traditional Forest Food and Medicine Systems

Traditional Forest Food and Medicine Systems: Implementing CHSNC's GACP Program

First Nations Wildcrafters (FNW), BC at Port Alberni, specialize in non-timber and other value added forest products and services. For owner C. Anne Robinson of the Tseshaht First Nations and her husband Keith Hunter, traditional forest food and medicine systems are part of several thousands of years of history of their people, and one they hope to see continue for many generations.

“Our goal is to manage our forest resources for abundance and biodiversity, and to achieve the highest value for our products,” explains Hunter. “By managing the ecosystem to maximize our forest food system, we benefit the local community and build the wealth of the community.” FNW was formed three years ago, offering wild mushrooms, berries, floristry and other non-timber forest products for markets such as food, non-food, gift, feast and special ceremonies.

Facing marketing pressure to improve quality assurance, First Nations Wildcrafters, BC (FNW) set out to develop and implement a system that would work for their business. After attending a CHSNC pilot-training session in Victoria, BC in 2007, Hunter realized that the GACPs (Good Agriculture and Collections Practices) were an excellent fit to help meet their outcomes.

“We are looking at providing the highest quality of products that we can,” says

Hunter. “Setting that bar high to do the best you can do is important because we all deserve the best. I saw the GACP program as a way to reach for what was the best – that’s why I liked it.”

As one of the tools in a much larger management system, the GACPs were the first step for Hunter to work with his wild harvesters to implement wild harvest food collection practices and traceability standards. “The wildharvesters have benefited from the training, and as a result the quality and consistency of product coming in has improved. Everyone benefits and in turn, we can pay our wildharvesters better for their efforts.” Other related training includes harvester certification, GPS and mapping, quality and safety assurance and



management. “We want to build our local and regional capacity through mentorship and training efforts.”

As a result of implementing the GACPs and other processes, FNW has successfully entered a vendor program with a large supermarket to supply fresh mushrooms. “By implementing the GACPs, we’ve reduced our risks and improved the

quality and traceability throughout the supply chain.”

For Hunter, there are other management and training components that need to be implemented to fully integrate an ecosystem management strategy for their forest resources. A new agroforestry demonstration project has been established to fully integrate agro-forestry management to suitable areas in the forest for maximizing a forest food system. “Using a systems management approach and best practices will provide diversified revenue streams from the forest and improve the resource and management value of the forest for everyone.”

FNWs approach to traditional foods and medicines encompasses many other important components such as traditional food security, land utilization, community health, traditional culture and language preservation. “Our long-term goal is to ensure abundance and biodiversity for our grandchildren and great-grandchildren, so they have the forest foods and medicines they need just like their ancestors have relied on for generations.

We continuously work towards wellness.”

For more information:
<http://www.firsnationswildcrafters.com>

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The Canadian Approach to On-Farm Food Safety

Today, there are four main drivers for on-farm food safety: consumer concerns, government initiatives, customer demands and the actions of Canada's competitors. To respond to these demands, and to demonstrate that Canadian food is among the safest in the world, the agricultural community worked with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to develop on-farm food safety programs. The farm organizations have also worked with the federal, provincial and territorial governments to establish a process through which these programs can be officially recognized by the CFIA for technical soundness and administrative effectiveness.

On-Farm Food Safety Programs

Today's national on-farm food safety programs are developed by national commodity groups working with industry experts and experts from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to ensure scientifically sound practices.

National producer associations follow a generic process for developing an on-farm food safety program. First, they develop a national strategy. Then they evaluate current production practices, develop a generic HACCP model and determine how to control food safety hazards through Good Production Practices (also known as Best Management Practices or Good Agricultural Practices). The program developers use a science-based set of principles known as HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) to identify food safety risks and determine how to monitor, control and prevent the food safety risks. HACCP principles help the program developers to identify which good production practices should be employed to ensure that food safety hazards are minimized on the farm. Lastly, they develop a Producer Manual which explains the program requirements to producers.

Following that, National producer associations, often with cooperation from provincial producer associations, help producers implement the on-farm food safety program. National producer associations can also offer certification or verification services to producers because the program requirements are designed to be auditable. Certified or verified farms can demonstrate to customers that they meet program requirements and are committed to maintaining them.

The Canadian Approach is resulting in technically sound programs that are based on a rigorous "HACCP-based" approach which is consistent with the Codex Alimentarius Commission's approach to HACCP. Almost every project has made use of input from suppliers and customers, and have availed themselves of both reviews by CFIA and by farmers and other experts. Farm organizations have openly shared information amongst the projects - both successes and challenges. As a consequence, the On-Farm Food Safety (OFFS) programs that have resulted and are being developed are technically sound, practical, producer friendly and auditable.

For more information about the Canadian Approach to On Farm Food Safety

Visit

www.onfarmfoodsafety.ca

Or

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