



## Canadian On-Farm Food Safety Working Group Groupe de travail du Programme canadien de salubrité des aliments à la ferme

### **Meeting Report - February 2006**

The Canadian On-Farm Food Safety Working (COFFS) Working Group met in Ottawa on 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> February 2006. This report highlights the matters discussed, key issues and the directions taken during the Working Group meeting.

### **On-Farm Food Safety Programs and CFIA**

As a continuation of its dialogue with senior officials of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the Working Group held a productive discussion with Ms. Debra Bryanton, Executive Director, Food Safety and Mr. Martin Firth, Manager, Policy and Strategies, both of the Programs Branch. A wide range of issues was covered but the primary focus was deepening the recognition of the Canadian approach to on-farm food safety both within the Agency and by other key stakeholders, including foreign regulators and customers. Topics reviewed included:

- the importance of preventing duplication of programming within CFIA and on farms in meeting emerging concerns such as bio-security, animal care, etc;
- the recognition of the national on-farm programs by CFIA as it develops new regulatory requirements and the provision of positive incentives, not active disincentives, for producers to participate in these voluntary programs;
- the role that the national programs and producer participation in them will have in demonstrating that national goals are being achieved in the field of food safety;
- the importance of proactive and collaborative initiatives to the communication of the Canadian approach to on-farm food safety and the national on-farm recognition program within the Agency, with downstream stakeholders in Canada and with international regulators and customers; and,
- the need to finalize formal arrangements concerning the national recognition program, including on-going funding for its administration and, if required, ministerial endorsement of the federal/provincial/territorial policy document.

In addition, a number of other issues of interest were discussed. These included: the future of gFARAD which provides essential services to veterinarians and producers, labelling issues related to country of origin and Canada grades, traceability, premises identification, method of production claims, the proposals to amend the Feed Act regulations regarding medicated feeds, and the trilateral security and prosperity initiative.

It was agreed that the core issues identified above would be followed up and that the dialogue between the Working Group and CFIA would continue throughout 2006.

### **Can-Trace Update:**

Norm Cheesman, Director, Can-Trace, joined the Working Group by conference call and provided an update on this supply chain initiative to develop a Canadian data standard for traceability. He reported that from fall 2005 through the beginning of February, three working groups had been very active. These had reviewed whether or not the first version of the Can-Trace standard could be easily integrated into the existing national on-farm or post-farm

HACCP or HACCP-based industry programs as well as other initiatives such as organic or identity preservation programs. Working Group members had been surveyed. This group identified several impediments in the language that reflected an inadvertent bias towards the usages of the downstream segments of the food chain and made a series of recommendations for changes to the standards working group. These and other suggestions received from users and other interested parties had been reviewed and the standards working group had adopted many changes to “neutralize” the language and improve the standard. A third working group had completed an assessment of the data standard’s applicability to multi-ingredient situations and concluded that it was appropriate. The Can-Trace steering committee would be considering these reports and recommendations at its next meeting in early March along with proposals to move forward on awareness building. Mr. Cheesman thanked the Working Group for its continued participation on the steering committee as an observer and the assistance of its members in the work to date. He re-iterated the standing invitation for national commodity groups to join the Can-Trace initiative. Later in the meeting, the Working Group named Ms. Melissa Struthers, CAIA, as its observer to the steering committee for 2006/7.

### **Information Technology in On-Farm Food Safety:**

The Working Group continued to explore options for the introduction of information technology solutions into the audit and certification programs with a presentation on digital writing by Mr. Chris Sanford, AgraPoint International Inc.. This approach utilizes digital pens, an encoded form and/or paper system and software, that would permit an auditor to use both a paper based and a computer based record system. The solution appears to have a number of advantages such as the potential to reduce bio-security risks, an easy transition for auditors and perhaps better acceptance by producers. The Working Group identified a number of questions and requested further information on the solution and its costs to permit further discussion within national producer groups and at the Working Group.

### **Update on the On-Farm Implementation Program:**

Ms. Anita Stanger, Director, Food Safety and Quality Programs Division, AAFC, joined the Working Group to continue discussions begun in September 2005 on possible changes to the On-Farm Implementation Program. She reported that AAFC officials were in the process of making a change to individual producer funding levels for awareness sessions and to the national producer organization caps for these sessions. Producers would be eligible for up to \$300 in funding for these sessions, with a cap of \$100 per commodity. This is a change from the previous maximum of \$100/producer and \$50/commodity session. NPO’s would be now given greater flexibility in claiming for sessions with the introduction of an averaging approach in recognition that some sessions might cost more than \$100/producer to stage and others less. Ms. Stanger also noted that AAFC was interested in determining what the future usage of the OFI Program would be through to the end of the current APF and in assessing what demand there might be for implementation funding under a possible successor agreement or APFII. AAFC was proposing a survey of NPOs. The Working Group also had before it a memorandum raising similar questions about the OFI program and systems development component as well as a report from its communications and promotions task group on a communications strategy related to the OFI program. Working Group members identified a number of areas where an expansion of funding eligibility would be helpful under both programs both in the current funding period and in the future. It was agreed that the Working Group would survey its members and share the results with AAFC by mid-March.

## Recognition Update:

Three aspects of the official recognition process were reviewed. Ms. Nicole Sillet, National Co-ordinator, Canadian Quality Milk Program, provided a report on the recently concluded **pilot of Technical Review Part II**, the gap analysis of an NPO's management system vis-a-vis the government requirements. She reported that the pilot had been a very positive experience. The CFIA review team had been very open and flexible in their approach. The process had concluded early and the results had been beneficial. Ms. Sillet also provided some "lessons learned": reference everything to facilitate the process, provide all documentation that is referenced, provide as complete answers as possible on the questionnaire, include terms in the definition section if they differ from CFIA's terms, and do not use "not applicable" (remove that section from the responses). The CQM Program is now considering the requested changes.

Ms. Valeriya Staykova, Policy and Strategies, CFIA and Mr. Walter Debicki, CEMA, provided an update on the work of the FPT subcommittee's **3<sup>rd</sup> Party Audit Working Group**. They noted that administrative delays and the length of the MERX posting period for an RFP meant that the consultant's work on this project would not be completed until late summer. The proposals were due back in early March and then the consultant would be selected. They noted that five options for 3<sup>rd</sup> party audits were to be reviewed: by CFIA only, by CFIA and provincial governments, by private sector certification bodies, by the Standards Council of Canada and by independent accredited auditors.

Mr. Rick Gammer, **On-Farm Food Safety Recognition Program**, CFIA, provided an update on that program. He noted that CFIA was reviewing the results of the gap analysis pilot to determine any required changes and that the next applicant, Chicken Farmers of Canada, had been identified. As agreed, the provinces would participate in this second pilot. Mr. Gammer also noted that the updated manual for Technical Review Part I was in the final approval stages and indicated that the Working Group's recent letter had been received. Input was requested from Working Group members about upcoming applications for both Technical Review Parts I and II. Some tentative time frames were identified by members, mostly later in 2006. It was also reported that CFIA was working with the Canadian Sheep Federation on the development of its management system. Other interested groups were invited to request assistance as they developed their systems.

## Emerging Issues

Mr. Justin To, Canadian Federation of Agriculture, provided an update on the status of the **Agriculture Sector Council**. He reported that in late 2005, the participants in the process had endorsed the formation of a sector council for primary agriculture. This recommendation was now being considered by Human Resources and Social Development Canada and would likely be placed before the new minister in the late winter or early spring. The establishment of a sector council would provide a forum for the development of training programs, the conduct of research related to human resource needs, etc. The Working Group considered this a positive development and agreed to monitor this activity and to consider how it might identify and provide input on future training needs vis-a-vis on-farm food safety programs.

## National Auditor Training Module - Renewal

The Working Group received and discussed a report from its task group on auditor issues on the two proposals received from parties interested in transforming the auditor training module into a distance learning format. Both proposals provided interesting approaches. The task

group recommended that additional information be sought from the interested parties to clarify or elaborate on the proposals and that a further discussion be held at the April Working Group meeting. This was agreed to. The task group also reported that it was undertaking further review and would be seeking additional information respecting the course content and delivery of the food safety module from Lakeland College and ITA Saint Hyacinthe and would make recommendations at the April meeting as well.

#### **Delivery Options Project - Phase IV**

The Working Group confirmed the membership of the steering committee for this project and its chair, Ms. Connie Kehler. The steering committee had met in mid-January, prepared the RFP for the project and circulated it. Proposals were due on February 21<sup>st</sup> with the next meeting of the committee scheduled for March 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>. It was noted that the project had received funding for only Phase 1 - the research phase. Funding for Phase 2, the development of the business model analyses could be requested upon completion of Phase 1.

#### **Producer Risk Management Project**

The draft application for funding under AAFC's Private Sector Risk Management Program was reviewed and amended. The Working Group agreed that the application should be submitted as a basis of further discussion and that further work was required to develop the details of this project and its implications for an in-kind contribution by the NPO's and general farm organizations.

#### **Other Working Group Activities**

Over the two days, the Working Group reviewed the status of the activities under its 2205/6 workplan. It was noted that AAFC had recently agreed to extend the funding for the baseline research project and the communications and promotions activities through to 30 June 2006. This would permit the completion of the baseline research concept paper as agreed in November. The Working Group reviewed a set of recommendations for promotion in 2006/7, should the new funding application be approved. It finalized its participation in the workshop session on the Canadian Approach to Food Safety at the International Association for Food Protection's annual meeting in Calgary in August 2006 along with the Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition. It received an update on the development of the promotional display and viewed the new design. It heard that progress was being made on the launch of the Working Group's website and that this was on track for late March. The major remaining step was translation of the materials into French and their posting.

#### **Working Group Administration and Governance**

A revised terms of reference was approved for the Working Group. The primary changes involved the December 2005 decision to establish a chair and vice chair or two co-chairs. Other changes dealt with the task groups and certain reporting requirements. The Working Group also reviewed the membership of its task groups and its representatives on various external bodies, including Can-Trace, the FPT subcommittee on on-farm food safety, etc.. Changes were made.

## **Roundtable on Commodity-specific Projects**

Working Group members provided brief updates on the status of their national programs. These covered such matters as official recognition, the development of new components or programs, auditor training, producer implementation, the completion of pilot projects, etc.. A number of common items were identified and there were several valuable exchanges on issues of interest.

## **Future Meeting Dates**

The Working Group agreed that its next meetings would be held on April 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> and June 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> in Ottawa.

**Prepared by Albert Chambers, Consultant, COFFS Working Group**

Contact: Suite 1101, 75 Albert Street  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1P 5E7  
T: (613) 236-6659 or 233-7175  
E: afchambers@monachus.com