



Canadian On-Farm Food Safety Working Group

Groupe de travail canadienne de salubrité des aliments à la ferme

Meeting Report - February 2007

The Canadian On-Farm Food Safety Working (COFFS) Working Group met in Ottawa on 13th and 14th February 2007. This report highlights the matters discussed, key issues and the directions taken during the Working Group meeting.

Task Group Reports:

National Auditor Training Module - Renewal

Chris Palmer, the task group chair, and Jocelyne Galloway (CFA) reported on the status of this project. A meeting was held in early February with SGS concerning the auditor training module. This had been a productive discussion and a tentative schedule for the transfer of the materials to the SGS training website and the running of the pilot had been determined. The pilots for the English and French food safety modules delivered by Lakeland College and ITA St Hyacinthe are to begin in March. The Working Group reviewed the course delivery agents approaches to testing and retesting, records retention, etc. A discussion was also held on the concept of a “registry” of successful students for use by the national producer organizations. The Working Group also considered the future management of the module by CFA or another body following the completion of the APF in March 2008.

Sustainability Task Group

Steve Leech reported on the task group’s work in developing a submission for the second round of consultations on the Next Generation of Agri-food Policy (APFII). The Working Group reviewed the draft document and suggested changes and additions. The task group indicated that a revised draft would be circulated following the meeting, with a relatively short turnaround time, so that the closing date for submissions (28 February 2007) could be met. It was agreed that the final submission would be sent to AAFC and to the FPT subcommittee on on-farm food safety.

Delivery Options Project

Bob Hyde of Scott Wolfe Management Inc., the project consultants, provided an update on the final round of briefings with the twenty-one (21) participating organizations. He indicated that this phase of the project had provided useful feedback to these organizations and to the project as a whole. He stated that most of the groups were planning to make use of the benchmarking information in designing or revising their delivery mechanisms. The Working Group gave further consideration to phase 2 of the project, funds for which have been requested in a 2007/8 CFSQ Program application. Members expressed an interest in securing information that will be of greater value to the Working Group as a whole from this phase of the project. The task group chair, Connie Kehler, requested that members provide their input following the meeting so that work could begin once the project was funded.

Certifarm Project

Charlie Gracey, project consultant, provided the Working Group with an update from this independent project. He noted that the participating organizations had asked for very specific information related to the costing of audits under various approaches, not a full scale revision of the early business model work. His report indicated that audit costs, exclusive of administration by either an NPO or a national certification body, could be significantly reduced if the new audit frequencies being discussed with the FPT subcommittee and by various NPO's were implemented. However, he also noted that in all the scenarios considered, high enrollment by producers was essential to driving down costs and that bundling with other management systems would produce additional savings for farmers.

Communication and Promotion

Connie Kehler, task group co-chair reported. She noted that with the departure of Melissa Struthers as CAIA representative on the Working Group, the task group needed a new co-chair. France Lanthier, Canadian Sheep Federation, volunteered to take on this position. The Working Group discussed options for participating in promotional events in 2007/8 and a draft brochure for use during these events. This single handout would replace those used in 2006 and would complement the materials provided by NPOs for the events. A list of possible events was discussed and a short list will be developed for review at the next meeting. The proposal to engage a communications consultant to work with the task group in developing a three year plan was given further consideration and members were asked to suggest names so that this project could be initiated once funding is obtained in April.

Producer Liability Project

A brief update was provided. The project was experiencing delays in selecting a consultant. AAFC officials had indicated that the project could still be managed within the available timeframes and supported the steering committee's decision to proceed at a slower pace.

Recognition Update

The Working Group discussed in considerable depth several issues, including its case study on minimum audit frequency, the proposed adherence criteria and the work of the 3rd party audit task

group. Germain Brazeau and Valeryia Staykova (CFIA) reported on progress in several areas. The Working Group decided to engage a statistician to work with it on the audit frequency issue and authorized CFIA to seek AAFC's approval for reallocation of funds in the 2006/2007 budget for this purpose. It was noted that 3rd party audit task group is working on an executive summary and set of key questions for consideration by the FPT subcommittee at its April meeting [Note: This meeting was subsequently postponed until June 2007]. The Working Group considered again the cost implications of the government requirement for 3rd party audit and re-iterated its view that these costs should be covered by government as a public good.

Presentations

Approaches to Conformity Assessment and Auditor Training

Walter Debicki, Canadian Egg Marketing Agency, reviewed the conformity assessment system used in the Start Clean, Stay Clean™ program. He highlighted the scoring system used, the training of auditors and the program's professional development activities and the proposals for transferring more responsibility to the provincial marketing boards.

OMAFRA's Advantage GAP Program

Dawn Pate, Lynn Philp and Sandra Jones, from OMAFRA's food safety and traceability division, provided the Working Group with a pre-pilot presentation on this new program for primary producers. The Advantage - Good Agricultural Practices materials are designed to assist farmers with multiple commodities begin the process of implementing on-farm food safety practices. OMAFRA had reviewed the national programs and other materials to develop a set of GAPs that it believed would provide a starting point for some as well as minimum base for very small producers. They indicated that the materials were educational in nature and not intended to form the basis of a certification scheme. OMAFRA supports implementation of the national programs but is concerned that very small producers and those with multiple commodities will be hesitant to begin implementation without "starter" program. The materials are to be piloted in 2007 with producers. OMAFRA is looking for opportunities to collaborate with the NPOs or their provincial delivery agents in Ontario. The presentation generated a lengthy discussion. It was noted that the Advantage GAPs are not fully consistent with the national program requirements in some cases and that as a whole are not HACCP-based. Several members expressed concern about duplication and mixed messages for producers. It was agreed that a letter would be forwarded to OMAFRA raising these concerns and others. Some members expressed interest in working with OMAFRA on delivery of their national programs.

CFIA's Bio-security Initiatives

Dr. Keith Campbell, National Manager, Office of Animal Bio-security, CFIA provided an update on CFIA's bio-security initiatives for the livestock and poultry sectors. He noted that these initiatives had been stimulated by the recent avian influenza outbreaks but were part of a wide set of initiatives related to ensuring the health of the Canadian animal sectors and preserving market access. His presentation reviewed the office and its responsibilities, the proposals for the creation of an advisory committee, etc. One of his key messages concerned the importance of integrating bio-security activities with those of the national on-farm food safety programs.

Other Activities

Food Safety Conference

Jocelyne Galloway reported on the discussions with AAFC about re-profiling Working Group funds for a food safety conference in June or July 2007. These discussions were focussed on the proposed agenda, increasing the participation of officials from the federal, provincial and territorial governments, co-sponsorship by CFIA, participation of post-farm groups, speakers, etc, and international speakers. A task group was formed to co-ordinate the project and a preferred date was selected in late June.

Future of On-Farm Food Safety Programming

The Working Group discussed the future of the on-farm component of the Canadian Food Safety and Quality Program with Anita Stanger and Randy Bismonte (AAFC). This discussion focussed on both the near term, under the APF to the end of March 2008, and the long-term, post-APF period. Concerns were expressed about proposals to change the administration of this component in the near term, splitting it between CFA (current projects) and AAFC (new projects after April 2007). The issue of a seamless transition from the current to the future programs was reviewed as were matters concerning the On-Farm Implementation program. Concerns were also raised about the "competitiveness" of the OFI program vis-a-vis federal/provincial programs for implementing environmental measures.

Next Meeting Dates

The Working Group's next meeting will be held in late April or early May, subject to the approval of the 2007/2008 funding application and to consultations with the members on a date. The following meeting will be held in conjunction with the planned food safety conference in June.

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