



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

Meeting Report - June 2004

The Canadian On-Farm Food Safety Working (COFFS) Working Group met in Ottawa on 24th and 25th June 2004. This report highlights the matters discussed, key issues and the directions taken during the Working Group meeting.

Terms of Reference

The Working Group finalized a new terms of reference. This discussion had begun at the April meeting and was a response to a request from the Canadian Food Safety & Quality Program. Since its establishment in late 1998, the COFFS Working Group had utilized a simple mandate statement as the basis for its activities. The new terms of reference set out a Vision for on-farm food safety in Canada, the Working Group's mandate, roles and responsibilities, its membership and governance, its modes of communication and its administrative arrangements.

Issues Related to CFIA Regulations

The Working Group was pleased to have Robert Carberry, Vice-President, Programs, CFIA, present for a discussion of the relationship between the national on-farm food safety programs and CFIA programs. It was noted that CFIA had taken a leadership role in the establishment of both the Canadian approach to on-farm food safety and the federal/provincial/ territorial recognition program and that relations with the Agency were very positive. However, as implementation of the national programs moves forward, it had become increasingly clear that CFIA's programs could have a major impact on their adoption by producers. The exchange between Working Group members and Mr. Carberry was very positive. A number of issues were fully discussed. It was agreed that CFIA programs should foster adoption of the national programs and that further work was required. The Agency's positive response to the Working Group's recent letter about the implementation of the proposed transfer of information requirements under the Meat Inspection regulations was noted as an example of where progress had been achieved. At the close of the discussion, Mr. Carberry agreed to participate in the Working Group's September meeting for a continuation of the dialogue on this important matter.

Can-Trace Initiative

Rowan Lalonde and Norm Cheesmond presented a status report on the Can-Trace initiative. A number of the Working Group's members (national commodity groups and general farm organizations) are participating in the initiative and the Working Group has observer status on the steering committee. Implementing the 2004 "roadmap" was well underway. The standards working group had prepared draft standards that were to be piloted over the course of summer by the beef, produce, pork and seafood sectors. A working group on small and medium sized enterprises had made recommendations that were being utilized in the pilots and by the business case working group. Contracts for the latter's research had been issued. A communications group had submitted several reports and was continuing its work. Finally, once the pilots and the business case research had been completed, a working group was to

be established to consider the integration of the standards into existing programs such as the on-farm food safety initiatives. Working Group members expressed considerable interest in participating in this work which is likely to begin in the early fall. The presenters noted that consultations were expected to begin about that same time on revisions to the "roadmap". It was clear that the Can-Trace initiative was continuing to evolve and so it would be necessary to include all the stakeholders in a process to update its vision and workplan.

Future Training Needs

The Working Group considered how best to proceed with its work on future training needs. It had before it the report from its November 2003 workshop on this subject held in conjunction with the Association of Community Colleges of Canada (ACCC) and a proposal from ACCC on a possible course of action. It also heard a presentation by Brigid Rivoire, Executive Director, CFA on the discussions underway within the farm community about establishing a sector training council. It was agreed that a task group would be formed and that it would be asked to provide a preliminary report at the November meeting.

National Certification Body Project

An update was provided and the current draft business plan circulated. It was noted that the project steering committee had approved some changes to the services package and that this would now include offering national programs two types of service: full certification of farm operation's compliance to each program's requirements and an option where by farm operations would provide a producer declaration of compliance and be subjected to random audits. There was considerable discussion of this new approach. Several members indicated that it was in line with their organization's current thinking although there were some variety in these approaches. The concept of the supplier or producer declaration had been borrowed from the ISO system, where, for example, it is an option under ISO 14001. It was noted that it had also been recently adopted by the Australian's for one their livestock food safety programs. The project materials should be available by mid-July in time for the meetings identified by some of the interested groups. It was reported that the CFS&Q Program review committee had not approved the activities in the application associated with consultations and that an appeal had been made by CFA. This would be dealt with in mid-July. The 4th Farm Leaders meeting had been postponed from July and a date would likely be set at the September meeting.

Working Group Projects & Task Groups

The activities outlined in the 2004/5 workplan were reviewed in some detail. It was agreed that the following Task Groups would be formed to advance these items:

- Promotion and Communications;
- Baseline Research and other Research Issues; and,
- Auditor Training and other related issues.

Official Recognition

The results of the April FPTAFIC subcommittee meeting were discussed (a report having been circulated immediately thereafter). Germain Brazeau, On-Farm Food Safety Recognition Program, CFIA provided information on CFIA's latest thinking concerning the review of management manuals of national programs. A new step would be added to technical review to provide an opportunity for a national program to have its management system assessed against the government requirements. Upon successful completion of this step, CFIA would issue a

letter of non-objection, an approach utilized by Health Canada in some of its approvals. Brazeau also introduced the concept of balancing the requirements of the 3rd party audit and on-going FPT assessments of a national program against the rigor of its management system. An interim report from the Frequency Task Group was also reviewed. Consideration was being given to the recommendations of the COFFS Working Group for a risk based approach and a longer period between audits on lower risk farm operations. The Working Group's representatives reported that the discussions in this Task Group were proceeding very positively. Members discussed whether risk categorization could take place within commodities as well as amongst them. The example of a farm operation where the animals were destined for immediate slaughter might fall into one risk group while the products of another farm might be going through several more stages of production prior to slaughter. It is expected that the work of this Task Group will be completed by late August.

The Working Group considered the revised section of the requirements document that concerns conflict of interest. This had been prepared subsequent to the Charlottetown meeting. The Working Group proposed changes and these will be submitted to CFIA.

Preparation of the documentation for the next FPTAFIC subcommittee meeting is on track. A revised draft of the government requirements document will be circulated in late August. Comments will be due in mid-September and the meeting is still scheduled for October 4th to 6th in Ottawa. The Working Group will be provided with this draft as soon as it is released and will consider it at its September meeting.

Auditors E&O Insurance

The Working Group was updated by representatives of Marsh Canada via a conference call. Concerns were expressed about the availability of the application and materials in French. It was agreed that solutions to this challenge would be explored over the coming months.

Risk Management - Producer Issues

The Working Group returned to the matter of additional risk management tools for producers who are enrolled in on-farm food safety programs. Farmers and their leaders continue to express concern that with traceability, farm operations need access to more than just the national on-farm food safety programs. Bruce Stephens from AAFC's Private Sector Risk Management Partnerships (PSRMP) Program provided an overview of this program and its potential value to the Working Group. The program provides funding to groups to explore the risks and develop partnerships with the private sector to manage them. It was agreed that further discussions would take place and that a report would be presented in September.

Federal Funding for Aquaculture On-Farm Food Safety

After further discussion, it was agreed that the COFFS Working Group would support the request of the Canadian Aquaculture Industry Alliance for federal funding for the development and implementation of national on-farm food safety programs for this sector of primary production.

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