



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

Meeting Report - June 2005

The Canadian On-Farm Food Safety Working (COFFS) Working Group met in Ottawa on 9th and 10th June 2005. This report highlights the matters discussed, key issues and the directions taken during the Working Group meeting.

Workplan 2005/6

A new reporting framework for its workplan and activities was presented to the Working Group for consideration and review. Now in a quarterly, tabular format the reports will provide members with a clear presentation of the objectives, deliverables and status for each activity. Timelines are identified for task undertaken by the co-ordinator and by the task groups. The approach was positively received and several modifications to enhance clarity were considered. Working Group members indicated that they now have a reference tool that will assist them to both plan their contributions to each activity and communicate with their stakeholders. The new format will also assist CFA in preparing its quarterly reports to the Canadian Food Safety & Quality Program. A quarterly report will be issued prior to each Working Group meeting and used as the basis for progress reports and discussions on the activities identified in the workplan.

Communications and Promotions Strategy

The strategy prepared by the Communications and Promotions Task Group was presented and reviewed. The strategy had been requested by AAFC to justify some of the Working Group's proposed activities for 2005/6. The Task Group had met in early May, agreed on the format for the strategy (it follows a format used by AAFC internally) and revised several of the proposed elements. The new strategy: identifies the target audiences (primarily producers and customers, with consumers and other stakeholders listed as secondary audiences), sets out the messages and details the proposed activities (common editorial materials, website development, intranet development for the Working Group members and communicators, development of a banner display in French and English, collaborative participation in events such as fairs, exhibitions and trade shows, a biannual newsletter and presentations at conferences about the Canadian approach to on-farm food safety. The Working Group approved the strategy and it has been circulated to all the member organizations for formal endorsement prior to its submission to AAFC in mid-July. If funded the strategy will be in place for 12 months, likely September 2005 to August 2006.

Internal Auditing Workshop

The options for the scope of the workshop and its timing were discussed. It was agreed that the workshop would be a three day session, provided by an accredited training group and contain some examples of direct relevance to internal auditing of bodies offering the certification, auditor training and standard development services. It was also agreed that a date in early November would be best. The Task Group on Auditor

Issues will select the provider and make the final decision on the dates and location for the workshop in July.

Workshop on Administrative Assessment

CFIA will be asked to provide a one-day session on the newly finalized government requirements for a management manual of a national on-farm food safety program similar to that provided in 2004 on the technical review requirements. If possible this session would be scheduled with the September 2005 Working Group meeting.

Updated Legal Opinion on Potential Liability Issues

As part of its activities in 2004/5, the Working Group commissioned an update to its 1999 legal opinion on liability issues related to the national on-farm food safety programs. This update was completed in March 2005 and an oral presentation was made at the meeting by David Wilson from Johnston & Buchan LLP. The opinion considers changes in legislation and case law as well as the more mature state of the national programs. Wilson noted that new scenarios needed to be considered in relation to new interpretations of “economic loss”, “standard of care” and “the role of the defendant in causing the claimant’s loss”. As a high level analysis, the update does not answer all the questions that a national program owner should consider. However, it does provide a basic checklist of risk management strategies that could be followed to reduce or manage the potential liability risks associated with the national on-farm food safety programs. Copies of the 2005 update and the 1999 original opinion are to be circulated to all member organizations.

Official Recognition

CFIA Recognition Program: Germain Brazeau, Tina Johansson and Warren Smandych provided a brief report on the status of technical reviews and other elements of the CFIA - On-Farm Food Safety Recognition Program. Several reviews are newly underway (bison, potatoes) and several others are due to be completed soon. National programs were encouraged to identify when they expected to request technical review. They noted that no program had yet identified itself as the participant in the gap analysis pilot project which has been designed to test the government requirements for a management manual of a national on-farm food safety program. CFA indicated that it expected to have the management system documentation pertaining to the national auditor training module ready by mid-summer and would be prepared to participate in the pilot project with whatever national program came forward.

3rd Party Audit of National Programs: Walter Debicki (COFFS WG representative) and Germain Brazeau (Chair) of the FPT Subcommittee on On-Farm Food Safety’s working group on 3rd party audit reported on progress to date. They indicated that the project was now expected to run considerably longer than planned. A stakeholder survey was planned to identify options and then additional time would be required to review the results. As a result it the working group would likely report to the subcommittee in the spring of 2006.

Information Technology Showcase

There was a brief discussion of the web-based demonstrations that had taken place in March. Members expressed appreciation for having had the opportunity to view a range of products from several service providers. It was agreed that this now brought the Working Group's activity to a close.

Emerging Issues

The Working Group took note of several new initiatives that could impact on the national programs. These included the recently released national quality management strategy for organic livestock and the trilateral initiative announced by Prime Minister Martin, President Bush and President Fox in March - the "security and prosperity partnership of North America". It was agreed that both initiatives would be added to the list of those being monitored by the Working Group. In addition, an update was provided on ISO 22000 and the related technical specifications (ISO TS 22003, 22004 and 22005). There was a discussion of the potential impact that these standards related to food safety management systems, traceability and the audit and certification of food safety management systems could have on the market's expectations vis-a-vis the national programs.

Implementation Costs Project

Further consideration was given to a new project on implementation costs based on a revised draft prepared by OMAF officials for the Ontario on-farm food safety steering committee. This continued that begun on a Working Group conference call on May 12th. Following a presentation by Dawn Pate (OMAF) the Working Group considered the scope, objectives, deliverables and costs of the project. The changes to include previous suggestions were noted and new improvements were identified. As the deadline for applications for the next round of funding is June 24th, it was agreed that the proposal would be revised and reviewed again on a conference call on June 16th or 17th (this was later rescheduled to June 20th). The project, if approved by Working Group and funded by AAFC, will provide for the collection and analysis of data on the implementation costs of national programs and provincial delivery agents (primarily from Ontario), the development of other business models for the delivery of key services, the identification of a short list of options and further refinement of the business case's for each as well as the preparation of a final report. The objective is to enhance the information available to national commodity groups and their provincial stakeholders about the costs of implementing all aspects of the national programs. This will meet a key demand from farm leaders who are being asked to make major long-term decisions. This project would build on earlier research by the Working Group in its delivery models and Certifarm projects and research undertaken by other groups, such as the Saskatchewan multi-commodity group.

On-Farm Food Safety Auditors

Auditor Certification: As a follow-up to its discussions in March of emerging trends in food safety auditing, the Working Group invited the National Quality Institute and its global partner RQBQSA International to make a presentation on food safety auditor certification. This was made by Don Wilson (NQI Executive Director - National Capital Region) and Michael Carmody (President - RABQSA). The presentation covered the background the merger of the major US and Australian auditor certification bodies into

RABQSA and, its relationship with NQI (it major Canadian equivalent) and with similar bodies in several Asian countries. Next discussed were the current trends in personnel certification, based on ISO 17024, and the impact that this was having on the emergence of competency based certification. RABQSA's project on food safety auditor certification in partnership with the Australian government was described and it was noted that the new competency requirements and certification program should be released in July 2005. Finally, the opportunities available to the COFFS Working Group vis-a-vis certification of on-farm auditors were addressed. The presentation and the discussion that followed were referred to the Task Group on Audit Issues for further consideration and it was agreed that the Working Group would continue to monitor developments very closely.

Task Group on Auditor Issues: The task group also reported on its recent conference call and updated the Working Group on its discussions related to the future of the national training module in the context of the licensing agreement expiry date of 31 December 2005. The members of the Working Group provided discussed several options and provided direction. The task group will be meeting again in July and is expecting to report on a course of action for the module as well on other matters prior to the September meeting.

ISO 22003: With respect to the development of Canadian positions on ISO 22003 - requirements for audit and certification of food safety management systems, the Working Group agreed that its views should be put forward in the stakeholder group. Heather Holland (CFA) was delegated to represent the Working Group at the stakeholder meeting on June 17th and to take positions on a range of issues (e.g. auditor competency, audit frequency, certification body requirements, etc) consistent with those negotiated with the FPT subcommittee and included in the government requirements.

Canadian Food Safety & Quality Program

Expert Review: The reply from AAFC and CFIA to the Working Group's letters of March 21st concerning the "expert review" of documentation during the development of national programs was reviewed. While the reply responded to some of the issues raised, there was still significant concern about the performance of the CFIA expert review team. However, as AAFC had rejected the Working Group's proposal to make expert review optional, it was agreed that individual groups would need to ensure that their expectations vis-a-vis timelines, etc were clearly stated and that both the CFS&Q Program - On farm component administrators (CFA) and AAFC officials were fully informed. CFA agreed to have further discussions with AAFC officials and the CFIA's expert review manager. CFIA officials from the recognition program noted that steps had been taken to ensure that the expert review team was fully up to date on the requirements of technical review, its documentation, etc.

Producer Implementation Program: It was reported that several applications had been received and were in the process of being considered (i.e. dairy and cattle) and that discussions had started with other groups. No funding had yet been approved.

APF Review: The Working Group discussed the newly announced review process for the Agriculture Policy Framework. It was noted that the panel had meet only once and that it had not yet decided on its approach to reviewing the Food Safety & Quality

Chapter. It was also noted that the panel chair had indicated an interest in having input from stakeholders, including either the COFFS Working Group or the national producer groups or both. The options were discussed. It was agreed that further consultation was required prior to any decisions being taken.

Promoting the Canadian Approach

Three opportunities for promoting the Canadian approach to on-farm food safety were discussed. The Working Group approved the development by the co-ordinator of a symposium proposal for submission to the International Association for Food Protection consideration. The symposium if agreed to would be part of the IAFP's 2006 annual meeting in Calgary. The Working Group's proposal would involve an overview and presentations on the on-farm and post-farm programs and on the official recognition programs. Participation would be sought from downstream groups and CFIA. The offer from the Western College of Veterinary Medicine to participate in the January 2006 national student symposium was also approved. Dawn Lawrence agreed to co-ordinate this activity. Finally, a brief update was provided on the proposed International Conference and a more detailed report requested for September's meeting.

Unfinished Business

The Working Group agreed to reschedule its roundtable on research for the September meeting.

Prepared 21 June 2005
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