



Canadian On-Farm Food Safety Working Group

Groupe de travail canadienne de salubrité des aliments à la ferme

Meeting Report - November 2007

The Canadian On-Farm Food Safety Working (COFFS) Working Group met in Ottawa on November 28th, 29th and 30th. This report highlights the matters discussed, key issues and the directions taken during the Working Group meeting.

Strategic Planning Session

The Working Group devoted November 28th to a strategic planning session under the guidance of the consultant, Mary Ellen Hodgins – Hodgins & Company Management Consultants Inc. The session utilized two scenarios as background context. These were a scenario where the Working Group would continue to have access to joint funding from the federal government and its member's organizations for collaborative initiatives over the next five years and one where it would be funded solely by member support. The consultants walked the Working Group members through a SWOT analysis, a review of their achievements over the past ten (10) years, the identification of key issues and trends and then focused on the coming five (5) years. Members identified priorities, possible projects, elements for inclusion in a communications plan and other activities for consideration in the plan. At the conclusion of the day, a task group was formed to work with the consultants as they refined the strategic plan with the objective of completing its development at the February 2008 Working Group meeting.

Canadian Food Safety and Quality Program Update

Bob Nawolsky, Program Manager, Food Safety and Quality Program Division, AAFC provided an update on the future of this program. He noted that federal, provincial and territorial (FPT) ministers of agriculture had announced earlier in the month that they would "seek the authorities needed for a transition period of up to one additional year starting April 1, 2008 during which time current APF programs would continue until new programs under Growing Forward are established" and that they would be holding further discussions and consultations on the food safety component of this initiative in early 2008. Members discussed the implications of this announcement for the national on-farm food safety program projects and those of the Working Group. It was indicated that AAFC would be accepting new applications in early January 2008 and requests to extend current project through to 31 March 2008 and beyond, subject to the confirmation in February or March 2008 that funds were available for the new fiscal year.

National On-Farm Food Safety Recognition Program

Warren Smandych, National Co-ordinator (CFIA), made a presentation on the current status of the program and sought input from national producer organizations on their expected utilization of the recognition process in 2008. He noted that there would be changes in the regional co-ordinators with the position in the Atlantic provinces being filled and a vacancy upcoming in the West. The future of the program under the Growing Forward Initiative was discussed and Working Group

members expressed strong support for the continuation of the program as a key component of the Canadian approach to on-farm food safety.

Germain Brazeau, CFIA, reported on the status of the FPT discussions on the protocol and procedures for the recognition program. The FPT subcommittee's mandate had been extended by the new FPT Food Safety Committee until May 2008. A series of conference calls and meetings has been scheduled to complete the outstanding items. These include issues related to the frequency of on-farm audits, the determination of the final approach to the 3rd Party audit of national programs and the final drafts of the FPT documents. There was a discussion of the future relationships between the Working Group and CFIA and the Working Group and a proposed new FPT subcommittee.

Nicole Sillett, chair of the Recognition Task Group, reported on the status of its current research project on audit frequency. The consultants had been requested undertake further analysis. A preliminary report was to be provided in late December with the final work completed in time for the task group members to use in discussions with the FPT subcommittee in the new year.

FPT Growing Forward Initiative

The Working Group held a very positive discussion with two senior officials from AAFC, Mr. Andrew Marsland, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy Branch and Mr. Claire Gartley, Director General, Agriculture Transformation Programs Directorate, on the future of the Canadian approach to on-farm food safety and the new FPT Growing Forward Initiative. Officials noted that ministers had been focused on the business risk management initiatives for much of 2007 but that their attention was now shifting to the other components of the Growing Forward Initiative. They indicated that consultations would commence again on food safety in the new year and that the input of the Working Group and of farm organizations would be valued at that time. Members raised a number of key issues and priorities for future programming and concerning the sustainability of the Canadian approach. The achievements of the industry/government partnership over the past 10 years were reviewed as was the fundamental premise of the national programs – that they would be ready for producers to use when the market demanded them. The importance of having clear and mutually agreed to performance indicators for the Growing Forward Initiative was discussed as were improvements that could be made to the existing programs for development assistance and on-farm implementation. The transition year announcement was reviewed and member expressed appreciation for the minister's decision to bridge the gap between the APF and the Growing Forward Initiative. Marsland and Gartley indicated an interest in future meetings and dialogue and at the conclusion of the session the Working Group agreed that it would prepare a summary of the discussion and share this with the officials.

Task Group Reports

National Auditor Training Module - Renewal

Chris Palmer, the Task Group chair reported. He noted that Module 1: Basics of HACCP-Based On-Farm Food Safety should be launched in January 2008 by Lakeland College and Institut de technologie agroalimentaire de Saint-Hyacinthe and that the pilot for Module 2 - Basics of On-Farm Food Safety Auditing was underway and would be completed in January. The evaluation, revision and formal launch of that module would be proceeded with as quickly as possible thereafter.

Delivery Options Project

Connie Kehler, Task Group chair, reported that Phase 2, Part 1 work had been completed and that the materials were available to the Working Group members. The consultants, Scott Wolfe Consulting Inc., were proceeding with Part 2 and this work was expected to be completed by the end of March 2008.

Communication and Promotion

Connie Kehler and France Lanthier, Task Group co-chairs, reported that the preparation of a new communications plan had been delayed until after the completion of the strategic planning exercise. Tracey Bryska, Manager, Public Affairs & Marketing, Manitoba Pork Council has been consulted with to prepare the communications plan. The final newsletter of 2007 was circulated for review by members and a date set for the receipt of comments. Concerns were raised about the on-going problem of keeping provincial government officials and provincial producer organizations informed about the Working Group's activities and progress in the development of national programs and the overall Canadian approach to on-farm food safety. It was agreed that this matter would be considered in the communications component of the strategic plan and that steps would be taken to increase the circulation of the newsletter and other information in the short term. AAFC officials offered to assist in this work.

Producer Liability Project

Dale Riddell, Task Group chair reported on the project and Ariella Abecassis and Trevor Mapplebeck of Oliver Wyman presented their initial set of conclusions and recommendations via a conference call link. The presentation reviewed the approach taken which involved both focus group sessions and individual interviews with producers, a review of existing materials from national programs and a review of additional risk management initiatives in other countries and of the insurance coverage currently available in Canada. The consultants presented their preliminary conclusions in the context of three risk categories - contaminated food risk, knowledge management risk and external risks. Their recommendations for reducing the residual risk producers' face included:

- influencing the development of public sector programs to address food safety liability risks;
- developing standard wording of contracts with buyers to limit producers' liability;
- developing risk financing tools such as a protection fund to cover liability claims; and,
- working in collaboration with insurers to help them understand food safety liability exposures and develop adequate risk transfer tools.

The final project report is to be submitted to the Working Group in January 2008 and it is expected that consideration of the recommendations will commence at the February meeting.

Producer Implementation Cost Survey Project

Albert Chambers, Working Group consultant, reported on behalf of the Sustainability Task Group chair. He noted that fewer groups than expected had agreed to participate in the project and that fewer surveys than hoped would be completed through the interview process as a result. The survey firm had commenced interviews and the project was on track for completion in early 2008. Martine Talbot, UPA, indicated that her organization had engaged a consultant to study how food safety and traceability program costs could be better managed and that the results of this project would be shared with the Working Group.

International Scan Project

Jennifer Milton, COFFS Working Group project manager, reported that the Canadian Pork Council and the Canadian Horticultural Council (in conjunction with the Canadian Produce Marketing Association, the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers and the Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors) reports had been received as requested at the September meeting and that these were available to the members. It was noted that additional funds could be reallocated with the Working Group 2007/8 budget for this project. It was agreed that an ad hoc group would be formed to review the scope of the proposed next steps in this area and report back to the Working Group prior to the circulation of an RFP.

Other Matters

Invitation from Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition

An invitation to the members of the Working Group to hold a joint session with post-farmgate members of the Coalition in February 2008 to discuss a supply chain national strategy was reviewed and agreed to.

Proposal by AAFC for Baseline Research on Implementation

A proposal put forward by the Food Safety and Quality Program Division for a collaborative initiative on the implementation of the national on-farm food safety programs was discussed and agreed to. This project will be launched in the new year and completed in the first quarter.

Next Meeting Dates

The Working Group's next meeting will be held in Ottawa on February 6th and 7th 2008.

Prepared by:

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