



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

Meeting Report - September 2006

The Canadian On-Farm Food Safety Working (COFFS) Working Group met in Ottawa on 20th & 21st September 2006. This report highlights the matters discussed, key issues and the directions taken during the Working Group meeting.

National Traceability Initiatives

Gwen McBride, provincial co-chair of the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Task Team on Traceability made a presentation on its work. She noted that the team had been formed in November 2005 at the request of ministers and was reporting directly to the ADM committees on policy and regulations. Since its inception it had focussed on the core elements of a “national livestock traceability system” and reviewed matters related to: governance; roles and responsibilities (industry, federal and provincial governments); access to information; standards; regulatory supports; non-regulatory supports; and costs, cost-sharing and benefits. Ministers at their June meeting had approved a consultation program that involved the formation of an industry/government steering committee. Ms. McBride emphasized that the task team was fully aware of the current traceability initiatives and the importance of building on existing on-farm programming, including the on-farm food safety programs. There was a frank and positive exchange with the Working Group members and a clear commitment to work together on this important matter over the coming months.

Recognition Update:

The Working Group continued its discussion the new audit cycle proposal for on-farm oversight tabled by the governments at the April meeting of the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Subcommittee on On-Farm Food Safety. During the course of the discussion a number of alternate proposals were reviewed in detail. The Working Group noted with appreciation the government suggestion that the oversight regime be simplified and arrived at a consensus on a revised proposal. An ad hoc task group was established to detail this new proposal. A Working Group conference call was scheduled so that a submission could be made in advance of the next Subcommittee meeting in mid-October.

Task Group Reports:

National Auditor Training Module - Renewal

The task group reported on progress. Contracts with the selected providers for the food safety module (English and French) and for the auditor training module (in both official languages) were in preparation and expected to be circulated shortly. Notice was provided that the next step would be a series of pilot projects for the modules in late 2006. Launch of the renewed training program was on track for early 2007.

Baseline Research Project

With an extension in funding approved by AAFC, this project is now slated to be completed by November 2006. Drafts of the various sections had been circulated to both the Research Task Group and Working Group members for review. The task group chair - Terry Grajczyk - invited input in the form of examples of Canadian surveillance projects.

Delivery Options Project - Phase IV

The chair of the task group - Connie Kehler - reported that a meeting on the draft report had been held with the consultants. Work on the project is progressing on time and within budget. The Working Group approved an amendment to the project to permit more detailed reporting to the participating farm groups on the benchmarking of their delivery systems. The task group agreed to speed up delivery of the final report information to assist the Sustainability Task Group with its work (see below). A presentation by the consultants was scheduled for the next Working Group meeting.

Producer Risk Management Project

Officials from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada reported that the Working Group's project workplan and budget had been approved. A contribution agreement was in draft form and would be reviewed within the week with CFA. This should result in the project beginning in early October. The Working Group agreed that the project steering committee should now be formed so that the request for proposals for consultants could be developed, circulated and reviewed in time for a decision at the next Working Group meeting in November. AAFC officials indicated that recent administrative decisions within the department now required all project funded under this program to be completed by 31 December 2007, giving the Working Group something less than 14 months for its work.

Communications and Promotion

Reports were provided to the Working Group on communications activities over the summer months. The success of symposium on the Canadian Approach to Food Safety and of the three presentations by Working Group members at the International Association for Food Protection's 93rd annual meeting Calgary in August was noted. These presentations and those of the post-farm presenters had been posted on the Working Group's website. The event reports submitted by the presenters as well as other Working Group members attending the symposium were reviewed. These indicated that workshops of this nature were valuable in informing target audiences about the national on-farm food safety programs.

The Working Group's presentation to the conference on risk management innovations co-sponsored by the Canadian Farm Business Management Council and AAFC's Private Sector Risk Management Partnerships Program was also reviewed. This event in mid-September had provided the Working Group to reach new audience of industry and government stakeholders, primarily from the insurance and financial risk management sectors, as well as many federal and provincial government officials not familiar with the on-farm programs.

The participants also reported on an information session held on the day prior to the meeting with the Veterinary Drugs Directorate of Health Canada. This session had been well received by the officials and a new relationship with the on-farm programs in the poultry and livestock sectors was developing as a result. Follow-up plans were discussed on the issues raised during the session.

It was also noted that the Working Group's request for information sessions with senior officials at CFIA and AAFC were still under discussion with the likelihood that the AAFC session would take place in October.

The task group co-chairs - Connie Kehler and Melissa Struthers - reported on recent correspondence with AAFC and led the Working Group through a wide-ranging discussion of the potential themes for a food safety conference in 2007. The task group will now refine these proposals and resubmit the concept plan for replacing the Farm Leaders meeting to the department for consideration.

Program Sustainability Task Group

The task group reported that it had developed a draft discussion paper on program sustainability for use during the upcoming round of consultations on the "next generation of agri-food policy and programming". The Working Group briefly discussed the draft and agreed to submit comments in writing by early October. A further draft would then be prepared for review and discussion prior to its circulation to the member organizations. At that time a decision would be taken as to whether or not the Working Group should seek to participate on its own in the consultations.

Presentations on Approaches to Conformity Assessment and Auditor Training

Three members of the Working Group - Dawn Lawrence from the CQA Program (hogs), Nicole Sillet from the CQM Program (dairy) and Steve Leech from Safe, Safer, Safest Program (chicken) - shared with their colleagues the approaches to conformity assessment and auditor training established for their national programs. These involved an in depth review of the delivery model chosen for the programs (all three are using provincial delivery agents), the sections of the management manuals covering conformity assessment, including approaches to certification decision-making, internal audit, etc, and the commodity-specific auditor training programs. This portion of the presentations also included a review of the forms, audit reporting mechanisms, etc. This session ran just under three hours and saw an excellent exchange of ideas, challenges and solutions. A further session, involving presentations on three more national programs was scheduled for the next meeting.

3rd Party Audit Services Risk Assessment Workshop

The Working Group scheduled time on its agenda for a workshop to assess the risks of the four (4) options on the 3rd party audit of national programs currently under consideration by the FPT Subcommittee on On-Farm Food Safety. This session was facilitated by consultants from Mercer Oliver Wyman who have engaged by CFIA to assist the subcommittee and its task group on this matter. The workshop involved a group assessment, using an anonymous voting technology. The four options under consideration are: CFIA undertaking the 3rd party audit, CFIA in conjunction with the provinces and territories providing the audit, the Standards Council of Canada as the national accreditation body serving this function, or organizations in the private sector undertaking it. The consultants had previously surveyed stakeholders, national producer organizations and government officials, to identify the risks associated with the 3rd party audit concept and these were reviewed and assessed by the Working Group. A second session with the government stakeholders participating is scheduled for October and the report from the task group to the main FPT subcommittee would follow.

Next Meeting Dates

The Working Group's next meeting will be held on November 30th and December 1st in Ottawa. At that meeting the development of the Working Group's 2007/8 workplan would be a primary topic of discussion.

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