



Canadian On-Farm Food Safety Working Group

Groupe de travail canadienne de salubrité des aliments à la ferme

Meeting Report - September 2007

The Canadian On-Farm Food Safety Working (COFFS) Working Group met in Edmonton on 18th and 19th September 2007. This report highlights the matters discussed, key issues and the directions taken during the Working Group meeting.

Canadian Food Safety and Quality Program Update

Randy Bismonte, Senior Program Officer, Food Safety and Quality Program Division, AAFC provided an update on the future of this program. He noted that since the Working Group's June meeting, ministers of agriculture had made further progress on the next federal/provincial/territorial framework for agriculture policy and programming. The "Growing Forward" initiative had endorsed a continued government/industry partnership in food safety. However, details of the new programs were not yet complete. He noted that it was expected that ministers would meet again in late October (since postponed to mid November). The Working Group raised concerns about transition funding, given the termination of funding under the Agricultural Policy Framework programs at the end of February 2008. Bismonte reported that senior officials and ministers were aware of this concern and that detailed information about the impact of the termination of funding and projects had been provided by the division. He indicated that officials were preparing to respond under several scenarios: an extension of funding for current programs, a transition program, new programs, etc. The Working Group decided to approach senior AAFC officials with an offer to discuss the current status of projects and future program options prior to the next ministers meeting.

Task Group Reports:

National Auditor Training Module - Renewal

Albert Chambers, Working Group consultant, reported on behalf of Chris Palmer, the Task Group chair. He noted that there were some delays in the launch of Module 1: Basics of HACCP-Based On-Farm Food Safety. He noted that the development of a new exercise on HACCP was still underway and that the request information about the three types of Good Production Practice (GPP) recognized by CFIA had been completed. Work on Module 2 - Basics of On-Farm Food Safety Auditing is also proceeding but had experienced some delays due to the negotiation of the contract with the delivery agent. It was hoped that these would be resolved shortly and the pilot would commence in the fall with a public launch of Module 2 early in 2008.

Delivery Options Project

Connie Kehler, Task Group chair, reported. She noted that further discussions about data confidentiality with the groups participating in Phase 1 had produced a mixed outcome. As a result the consultants had been asked to review the potential undertaking further analysis and responded that they believed more detail could be provided on:

- Average cost data per producer;
- Separate national/provincial costs; and
- Split out producer paid auditing vs commodity paid auditing.

As for Phase 2, the consultant's proposal was expected in late September and would be reviewed by the Task Group in early October. The membership of the Task Group was discussed and two Working Group members agreed to join.

Communication and Promotion

Connie Kehler, Task Group co-chair, reported on the work undertaken since the June meeting. The summer newsletter had been prepared and circulated. A writer had been engaged to develop the feature article for the next newsletter. This would focus on "success" in the on-farm programs. Volunteers were to be identified for interviews. The subject of the newsletter's audience was revisited. It was noted that the current target audience included industry stakeholders, producers and government officials. The challenge of reaching producers through the interface of national and provincial commodity groups and general farm organizations was noted. It was agreed that an additional effort would be made through a new email vehicle, "COFFS News", to increase awareness of the newsletter. Kehler also reported on the project to develop a new communications plan. The RFP had been sent to three consultants and the Task Group was expecting launch this project prior to the November meeting.

Producer Liability Project

Dale Riddell, Task Group chair reported on the project. He noted that the consultants were at work. The first of the focus group sessions with producers had been held, in Guelph in early September. The second session would take place in Portage la Prairie in mid-October. There had been some challenges encountered as some participants viewed the potential outcome of the project as creating a new burden for producers. However, it is expected that the focus groups will yield valuable input for the project. An update by the consultants is planned for the November Working Group meeting.

Producer Implementation Cost Survey Project

Albert Chambers, Working Group consultant, reported on behalf of the Task Group chair. He noted that the Task Group had convened two conference calls since the last meeting to review drafts of the questionnaire prepared by the survey firm, review the sampling protocol for the participating commodity groups, discuss the timing of the survey and prepare letters for informing both provincial groups and individual farmers about the survey. Work was also underway on a pre-survey worksheet for participating producers to assist them to describe and cost their responses to the key questions requiring detailed input. It was reported that the participating groups were collecting the names of volunteers and that it was expected that the survey would be in the field in October and November.

Recognition Update

The Working Group decided to establish a formal task group on recognition to replace the ad hoc group of representatives to the FPT subcommittee on on-farm food safety. Nicole Sillet was elected as chair. She reported on the current discussions within the subcommittee and noted that it and CFIA were working to finalize as many elements of the recognition scheme as possible prior to

the last meeting of the FPT Agri-Food Inspection Committee (FPTAFIC) in November and the transfer of the subcommittee to the new FPT Food Safety Committee. The Working Group reviewed in detail the current draft of the protocol and made suggestions for changes. An update was provided on the status of the negotiations on audit frequency. The new Task Group was authorized to undertake further statistical analysis in support of the Working Group's proposals.

International Scan Project

Follow-up to the Working Group's pilot project was discussed. Albert Chambers, Working Group consultant, reported on the discussions with officials at AAFC about their participation in a broader scan. The suggestions made by Working Group members in response to a request for detailed proposals about next steps were reviewed and it was agreed that phase 2 might involve targeting a limited set of national programs in comparison with a selected list of their international counterparts. It was noted that two member organizations, 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) had recently completed detailed comparisons of one or more programs with their Canadian programs. It was agreed that access to these reports would be requested and their methodologies reviewed prior to developing an RFP for further work on the project.

Presentations

Bioniche E.coli Vaccine

Rick Culbert, President, Bioniche Food Safety and Professor David Smith, University of Nebraska, made two presentations on Bioniche's E.coli vaccine. Mr. Culbert's presentation focused on the origin of the vaccine product, its potential value to the food industry as a preventive measure to reduce the incidence of pathogenic E. coli in the environment, and the challenges of introducing a vaccine in the livestock industry, the purpose of which was to deal with a downstream problem. The presentation also reviewed the current status of Bioniche's applications in Canada and the United States. Professor Smith's presentation reviewed the research conducted by his team in Nebraska on the efficacy of the vaccine in various settings. The Working Group discussed the role that vaccines and other interventions, such as probiotics, could have in reducing the incidence of food borne pathogens. Mr. Culbert invited the Working Group to participate in an independent website that Bioniche was launching on E. coli and food safety. It was agreed that this offer would be considered at the next meeting.

On-Farm Food Safety Program Implementation in Alberta

The Working Group devoted a significant portion of the second day of its meeting to a set of presentations and a discussion of on-farm food safety program implementation in Alberta. This session commenced with a joint presentation by Cara Dary, Manager, Quality and Technical Services, Alberta Pork and Bill Laing, CQM Program Co-ordinator, Alberta Milk. This presentation reviewed in detail the implementation activities with pork producers and dairy producers. Topics discussed included: updates on provincial training numbers and registrations, the registration process and cycle, audit and registration costs and implementation successes and challenges.

This presentation was followed by an update by Kim Whitehead, Head, Safe Food Systems Section, Alberta Agriculture and Food. His presentation covered the new organizational structure for food safety within the department, programs to assist in on-farm and post-farm program implementation,

etc. The presentations generated lively discussions and provided an opportunity for the Working Group members to better understand the degree of uptake in Alberta, the level of co-operation amongst provincial organizations and with the provincial ministry in the implementation of the national programs. The provincially focused presentations were followed by the regular roundtable update and discussion by the national program co-ordinators.

Other Matters

Working Group Administration

Changes to the staff responsibilities for the Working Group's activities following the departure Ms. Jocelyne Galloway to a new position at the Public Health Agency of Canada were reported. Justin To, CFA Executive Director, was assuming overall responsibility for Working Group project administration. Joan Champagne would be taking on additional responsibilities for contract administration assisted by Jennifer Milton, now on a full-time basis. Connie Kehler, Executive Director of the Saskatchewan Herb and Spice Association would be assuming administrative responsibilities for projects related to communications, the recognition subcommittee and the delivery options project. Albert Chambers, the Working Group's consultant, would be continuing to work, as requested, on special projects.

Strategic Planning Session

The Working Group agreed to devote a major portion of its November meeting to the development of a strategic plan for the next five years. The session would be facilitated and a questionnaire would be circulated in advance to assist member organizations to undertake internal consultations and develop their input.

Next Meeting Dates

The Working Group's next meeting will be held in Ottawa over three days, November 28th, 29th and 30th to accommodate other meetings and the strategic planning session. Dates were also suggested for the February 2008 which will also be held in Ottawa.

Prepared by:

Albert Chambers
COFFS Working Group Consultant
24 October 2007