



## On-Farm Food Safety in the Beef Industry

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Food safety programs have been cropping up all over the globe in most developed countries. In Canada, there are 21 different commodities who are participating in a food safety program. Each commodity is at different stages of implementation but there are some basic similarities between these programs.

These programs are HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points) based. HACCP programs are designed to reduce food safety risks and this system is internationally recognized. Why is that important? It's important because some countries are beginning to demand that there is a quality control system in place before they are willing to bring in food products. The other important factor that these programs have in common is that they are all producer driven. These programs have spawned out of a growing concern of food safety and have been the industry's response to being proactive in maintaining consumer confidence and market share.

### **What has the beef industry done in terms of food safety?**

A team of industry leaders working with specialists from across the beef industry developed a national on-farm food safety program for beef producers called the Quality Starts Here (QSH), Verified Beef Production (VBP) program. Again, this program is HACCP based and is designed to help implement and verify the good production practices on-farm that minimize food safety risks.

### **What does this mean to beef producers?**

The program consists of three fundamentals:

1. **Good Production Practices** - These management practices have been identified as the most critical to on-farm food safety. In many cases, producers are already implementing these practices. One example would be ensuring that cattle are clean and dry (minimal tag on hide) before shipping.
2. **Effective Records** – These records provide the proof that what a producer is saying that they are doing is actually what is happening. Producers may find these records useful in helping them make better management decisions.
3. **Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's)** – These are the good production practices that are actually happening on farm and being followed by everyone in a consistent manner. There are six SOP areas: (i) animal health, (ii) cattle feeding, (iii) cattle shipping and receiving, (iv) pesticide control, (vi) biosecurity and (vii) personal hygiene and training.

### **What does a producer have to do to get involved with the program?**

The first step would be to contact the provincial delivery agent (contacts listed below). Currently in Nova Scotia workshops are being developed. Once the workshop plan is complete a producer would be required to attend an evening workshop in their community. At this point there is no obligation to continue on with the program as it is still a voluntary program. So whether a producer is simply looking for more information or is keen to start the program, both will be welcomed to attend a workshop.



The second step would be to start keeping (if they are not already) all of the outlined records and formalize management SOP's. For cow calf producers it is required that they must have at least six months of records to be on the program.

After six months of records are kept, a producer may want to complete the program by becoming audited. This means that a third party, trained individual would visit the farm and ensure that all of the necessary records are in place and that the SOP's have been documented. It's this portion of the program that really gives it some credibility.

**How much will it cost?**

If a producer is not already keeping records and documenting SOP's, there is a cost of the producer's time. Initially this may be greater as SOP's are being defined and the program is being set up. However, as a producer gets involved with the program the record keeping will become second nature and therefore will not require as much time.

Currently, organizers in Nova Scotia are searching for program funding to allow for workshops to be held free of charge, which is not necessarily the case across Canada.

At this point in time however, there may be a cost to the audit. If a producer chooses to take the next step and become a certified beef operation, it had been proposed that a full audit will be required every eight years. In between the full audits, a producer may be required to be partially audited, offer the program records, or self declare that they are fulfilling the program requirements. As the audit portion of the program develops more information will be available.

**For more information, or to sign on to this program, please contact either:**

Amy Sangster  
AgraPoint  
199 Innovation Dr., AgriTECH Park  
Truro, NS  
B2N 6Z4  
(902) 896-0277

Nova Scotia Cattle Producers  
PO Box 1474  
Truro, NS  
B2N 5V2  
(902) 893-7455