

Renewed approval for Verified Beef Production program

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The Verified Beef Production (VBP) program has received a renewed stamp of approval from the On-Farm Food Safety Recognition Program of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA).

This recognition program, overseen by CFIA with the assistance of joint federal / provincial teams, provides official government oversight for on-farm food safety programs in Canada, to ensure they are technically sound and appropriately adapt the internationally recognized approach of Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP).

"This continued recognition is very important for our producers, consumers and both domestic and international customers," says Terry Grajczyk, VBP program manager. "It reinforces that the VBP program is technically sound, meets internationally recognized standards and has ongoing oversight by those with appropriate technical expertise and authority."

VBP first successfully obtained recognition from the program in 2003 and has maintained this status ever since. However, all recognized programs are expected to regularly review their requirements and implement improvements. The updated programs are then "re-reviewed" by CFIA to ensure they continue to adapt HACCP appropriately and translate requirements effectively in their producer materials.

"HACCP is a very proactive approach to food safety," says Grajczyk. "Regular review and improvement for HACCP-based programs is not only encouraged but expected. This go-around, the main focus of improvement for VBP was to update the format and language of parts of the program documentation to make the requirements easier to understand and more user-friendly."

The major producer document used in the VBP program is the Producer Manual, which includes standard operating procedures (SOPs) for management practices in five areas, designed to reduce or eliminate the possibility of a food safety concern on a beef cattle operation. These areas include: animal health management, feed and water, cattle shipping, pesticide control and manure, and training and communication.

For improved clarity and use in the updated VBP program, requirements in the Producer Manual were separated into two categories: those that are "Must Dos" and those simply "recommended," with the Must Dos highlighted in the manual for faster and simpler reference.

In addition, a number of "fine-tuning" improvements were made to simplify and enhance the specific requirements at the farm and feedlot level.

Beef producers themselves played a critical role in the process, says Grajczyk. "The requirements were initiated by a technical team, and then reviewed by beef producers with an aim to keep the program current, practical and streamlined."

The overall result of the updates are to support stronger competitiveness for Canada's beef industry, as food safety continues to grow as a major factor in consumer buying decisions, says Grajczyk.

Managed by the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, the national association representing the interests of Canada's beef producers, Verified Beef Production is Canada's auditable on-farm food safety program. Originally introduced as a general education program, it has since expanded to include an option for producer validation. More information is available at the National VBP Web site at www.verifiedbeef.org.