



Did You Know...?

Milk samples are taken at every dairy farm each time the milk is picked up, and again at the dairy. Each sample is tested for bacteria, antibiotics and other quality components. Contaminated milk is discarded, the source of the problem is identified, and the farm responsible is heavily fined.

Livestock medicines education courses have been offered in Ontario since 1994 to ensure the responsible use of livestock medicines on the farm.

Farmers must be trained and certified to purchase and use pesticides under Ontario's Pesticides Act. Ontario farmers have reduced pesticide use by more than 52% since 1983.

The federal Health of Animals Act makes it mandatory for farmers to report certain diseases to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Any farm that experiences a reportable animal disease is immediately quarantined, assessed and corrective actions are taken to eliminate the disease.

On-Farm Food Safety programs require farms to follow biosecurity procedures to prevent disease. Biosecurity includes controlling access by people, animals, vehicles and equipment. Some farms require people to have a shower, or to wear disposable coveralls or plastic boot covers before entering the barn.

Say What You Do, Do What You Say

Record keeping is an important part of all OFFS programs, as a way to identify areas that could possibly affect food safety or quality. Records are kept on things such as animal feeds, medical treatments or purchases of chemicals, animals or seeds.

Farmers may have to make changes to meet quality assurance program requirements, such as relocating or replacing their fuel or feed storage areas, or installing monitors such as temperature controls. They may also need to adjust their farm practices such as employee training, farm waste disposal, pesticide application or how they clean and sanitize barns and equipment.

Once a farm has met program requirements, it can apply for certification. An independent evaluator must verify the farm is meeting the requirements by visiting the farm, interviewing the farmer, reviewing records, Standard Operating Procedures and Assessment Forms. Any deficiencies must be corrected and the farm re-assessed for certification. Farms must pass regular evaluations to maintain their certification.

On-Farm Food Safety Programs

ARE A GOOD INVESTMENT

Farmers invest in On-Farm Food Safety programs. It's considered the cost of being in the food business today. Everyone benefits from their investment.

The farm is just the first step to a safe meal. We all have a role to play in ensuring our food is the best quality and the safest it can be.

On-Farm Food Safety Programs in Canada:

- Canadian Egg Marketing Agency: Start Clean-Stay Clean
- Chicken Farmers of Canada: Safe, Safer, Safest On-Farm Food Safety Assurance Program
- Canadian Cattlemen's Association: Quality Starts Here Verified Beef Production
- Canadian Pork Council CQA® Program
- Canadian Quality Milk Program
- Canadian Turkey Marketing Agency: On-Farm Food Safety Program
- Canadian Sheep Federation: Food-Safe Farm Practices Program
- And work is underway on programs for veal, bison, deer, elk, goats, hatcheries, fruits, vegetables, honey, grains and more!

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

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Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

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How Safe Food Starts ON THE FARM



Food is a necessity of life, and the farmers who produce it are more aware than ever of the importance of their work. As Canadians, we expect safe, high quality foods. Every partner in the food chain plays a role in food safety - from the farm to our tables.



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The Ontario Farm Animal Council (OFAC) represents Ontario's livestock and poultry farmers and associated businesses on issues in animal agriculture such as animal care, food safety and the environment.



WORKING TOGETHER TO KEEP FOOD SAFE



Safe Food Begins on the Farm

Farmers are in the business of producing food and they take pride in their work. They have taken responsibility by adopting On-Farm Food Safety programs. Food processors, retailers and consumers, here and around the world, want assurance that Canada's food is grown with quality and safety in mind.

On-Farm Food Safety programs are a combination of science-based principles and practical on-farm experience. These programs have been established to ensure that farmers are following good management practices. The goal is to minimize the risk of unsafe food.

On-Farm Food Safety (OFFS) programs are being developed by farmers' organizations for farm animals and food products. Some, such as the Raw Milk Quality Program, have existed for more than 30 years. There are many different programs, but they all share common principles.

On-Farm Food Safety Programs

FOCUS ON THE FOLLOWING:

- Good Agricultural Practices
- Training and education
- Systematic risk reduction
- Record keeping and verification
- Traceability and tracking with animal and crop identification

Why the move to on-farm food safety?

The farm is the first step in producing safe food. On-Farm Food Safety (OFFS) programs are designed to prevent problems and mistakes. This complements the routine testing of our food by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

On-Farm Food Safety programs document the quality and safety of the products and processes in each step of raising crops and animals. The aim is to prevent problems by identifying and controlling potential biological, chemical and physical hazards. Although problems are not common, one is one too many when it comes to our food.

GOOD AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

Programs are based on existing Good Agricultural Practices on the farm that specifically address quality and food safety. Farm groups or government have mandated some practices, such as the salmonella control program for egg farmers. These practices are updated as new risks are identified or new technologies emerge.

HACCP PRINCIPLES

All OFFS programs are based on internationally recognized Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) principles of identifying where potential risks could occur, correcting and monitoring them. HACCP-based programs don't stop at the farm gate: they are used by animal feed mills and food processors.

VALIDATED AND VERIFIED

To be certified, farms must be validated, generally by an independent professional, such as a veterinarian or qualified crop specialist. Auditors review farm records and practices to ensure the farm meets program requirements. While many programs are currently voluntary, a number of food processors, retailers and trading partners are asking for foods that are produced under a verified food safety program. For example, a number of pork processors will only buy pigs from farms in the Canadian Quality Assurance program. The number of Canadian farms enrolled in OFFS programs is growing rapidly in response to market demand.

BIOLOGICAL HAZARDS

Microorganisms and the toxins they produce occur in nature and present the greatest food risks. Bacteria, moulds, viruses and parasites are examples which can cause foodborne disease such as food poisoning. It's difficult to eliminate these hazards completely, but controls can help minimize microbiological contamination.

CHEMICAL RESIDUES

Pharmaceuticals, pesticides, fertilizers and disinfectants can all be used in farming. These products must be used according to government regulations and manufacturer instructions. OFFS programs verify that farmers are using products responsibly.

PHYSICAL HAZARDS

Physical hazards include any physical substance that could be found in food, such as glass fragments. Physical hazards rarely occur. OFFS programs outline how to eliminate the possibility of physical hazards contaminating food.

TRACEABILITY

The discovery of BSE in Canada demonstrated why traceability programs are important. Herds and individual cows can be identified quickly. Consumers, farmers and governments demand reassurance that potential problems can be quickly identified, quarantined and removed from the food chain. Traceability of farm animals from birth-to-processor and farm shipments of other agricultural products are being included in some OFFS programs.



On-Farm Food Safety Six Main Steps:

1. Register:

Farmers enroll; review the requirements and program materials.

2. Requirements:

Farmers review what's needed for each type of animal or crop produced on their farm. This includes mandatory requirements such as holding a valid Grower Pesticide certificate or registering livestock under the Canadian Cattle Identification Program. Additional voluntary requirements such as passing a livestock medicines education course or regular testing of water used on their farm may also be necessary.

3. Education:

Training workshops, professional advice and regular updates are provided to farmers on how to implement the program.

4. Record keeping:

Farmers must keep records and meet the qualifications of the program for a specific period of time.

5. Validation:

Farms must be validated, by an independent professional, such as a veterinarian or qualified crop specialist.

6. Maintenance:

Farms must continue to meet program requirements and maintain required records.