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CanadaGAP holds annual meeting in Island capital

By Andy Walker andy@peicanada.com 7 hrs ago

Island producers who participate in the CanadaGAP program tend to score slightly higher than the national average when it comes to their audit score.

The not-for-profit corporation that runs the food safety program for the fruit and vegetable industry held its annual meeting recently in Charlottetown. It was the first time CanAgPlus has held its annual gathering outside the nation's capital and the day included a town-hall session with producers.

Executive Director Heather Gale noted the average Island score in 2019 was 94.6 per cent, compared to the national average of 93.98. She explained field vegetable producers accounted for 29 per cent of the 1,650 audits conducted this year. That was followed by tree and vine fruit (24 per cent), small fruit (19 per cent), potatoes (18 per cent), greenhouse fruits and vegetables (seven per cent) and repacking, wholesale and brokerage houses (three per cent).

Gale noted the Safe Food for Canadians regulations came into effect in January and CanadaGAP has been focused on ensuring full alignment with the requirements. She explained the Canadian Food Inspection Agency conducted a comparison of the new regulations with the certification program offered by CanadaGAP.

"The comparison project was a success, showing that CanadaGAP is 100 per cent aligned with the regulations with respect to the food safety requirements," the annual report notes.

The audit program also received a renewal this year under the federal Food Safety Recognition Program. Gale noted participation in the program rose significantly in Alberta and Nova Scotia this year.

She told the open house it was not the job of the organization to educate the growers on the regulations in the food safety manuals but rather to help producers meet the standards that are laid out. She reminded producers that they must follow the regulations whether they agree with them or not.

CanadaGAP is an oversight body and the audits are conducted by the two auditing firms -- Bureau de normalisation du Quebec and NSF Canada Ag. A third certification body, SGS Canada stopped offering CanadaGAP audits in June but its certification certificates will remain valid until they expire.

She told the group of approximately 40 people who attended the town hall session CanadaGAP program is a comprehensive template of the procedures and manuals. If a producer disagrees with the results of an audit, Gale said there is an appeal procedure in place through the certification body. She said regardless of the results of an appeal "there will be no repercussions for you at the next audit. These matters are treated confidentially and separately from the audit and certification process. Subsequent auditors are not privy to the details of a prior appeal."

There is also a process to file a complaint to CanadaGAP about the audit process, the auditor or the services provided by the certification body. She cautioned that appeals or complaints can't be investigated without specific information adding there can be no follow-up if the identifying details are withheld.

Andy Walker