



The CanadaGAP Program

Helping producers, packers demonstrate food safety vigilance on the farm

By Heather Gale

Canadian farmers have always been aware of the important role they play in food safety. Today, as market pressure increases, they are taking steps to effectively manage risk, implement food safety procedures on the farm and document those procedures to provide proof (should they require it). The CanadaGAP program was designed by the Canadian Horticultural Council (CHC) to help producers and packers accomplish this.

CanadaGAP is an On-Farm Food Safety (OFFS) program for fresh fruit and vegetables. The program consists of national food safety standards and a certification system for produce suppliers. Six crop-specific OFFS manuals have been designed for producers and packers implementing Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs). The program is based on HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points) and undergoes a rigorous technical review and oversight by Canadian government officials. It is open to suppliers who need (and want) to demonstrate to customers they are meeting the national OFFS requirements.

Designing a User-friendly OFFS Program

Since its beginnings, CanadaGAP's objective has been to deliver a food safety program that is both accessible and user-friendly. This has been achieved through the development of the following "ready-made" materials:

- Generic HACCP models have been developed so farms are not expected to create their own HACCP plan. The HACCP approach is rigorous and focuses on mitigating risks and preventing contamination before it occurs.
- The OFFS manuals, which are designed to be used "off the shelf" to minimize the amount of writing that producers and packers need to do to document their programs.
- Written procedures so producers and packers are not required to create their own Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures (SSOP).

Key components of the program address employee training and personal hygiene, effective use and handling of agricultural chemicals, manure and other agronomic inputs, water quality, pest control and waste management, sourcing of farm inputs, assessment of production sites and building premises, regular inspection, cleaning and maintenance of equipment and facilities, traceability and recall.

Certification and its Benefits

The CanadaGAP program responds to the needs of the marketplace. Increasingly, retailers, food service companies and food processors require suppliers to be enrolled in or certified by a food safety program.

In early 2009, several Canadian food companies officially endorsed the CanadaGAP program standards and began requiring growers to become enrolled in the program (or a similar certification program). These include Loblaw Companies Ltd., McCain Foods Canada, Simplot Canada and Lamb-Weston.

Program participants are required to pass a third party audit specifically

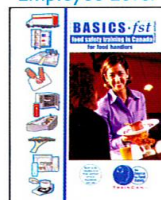
based on the CHC's OFFS manuals. This involves having a third party auditor from an independent certification body come to their operation, review their OFFS manual and related records, visit their facilities, interview the operator and staff and assess their conformance to a specified audit checklist. Since the audit checklist covers all commodity-specific modules, multi-crop producers need only one audit. Upon passing the audit, the producer or packer will be certified to the program.

The CHC is presently pursuing benchmarking of its program to the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) and GlobalGAP requirements to obtain recognition of equivalency with foreign customers who are requiring internationally benchmarked programs. With successful completion of the benchmarking processes, certified participants will have the benefit of using a "made in Canada" program to meet the food safety requirements of the international marketplace. ●●

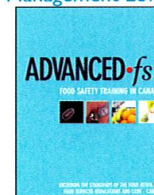
Heather Gale is the national program manager for CanadaGAP. She is also the food safety coordinator for the Canadian Horticultural Council, a voluntary, not for profit national association that represents fruit and vegetable growers, packers and storage intermediaries. For more information, contact Heather at 613.226.4880 ext. 214 or offs@hortcouncil.ca.

FOOD SAFETY TRAINING & CERTIFICATION

Employee Level



Management Level



Meet Local & Provincial Requirements

Over 80,000 professionals certified across Canada and growing



23 Lesmill Road, Suite 103
Toronto, Ontario M3B3P6
Toll Free: 1-888-687-8796
Tel: 416-447-9588
Fax: 416-646-0877
Email: info@traincan.com
Web: www.traincan.com