

# Implementing CanadaGAP ON THE FARM

*These positive stories from farms across the country showcase the success of CanadaGAP*

In the Fall of 2008, the Canadian Horticultural Council (CHC) launched the CanadaGAP Certification program. After years of developing the standards that would make up the On-Farm Food Safety (OFFS) program, it was time to move into the next phase—providing producers and packers with the opportunity to become officially certified to the program, as this was increasingly being required by many retailers, food service companies and food processors. Certification would also mean that producer/packer conformance to the program requirements could be assessed.

This news was not unanimously well-received by farmers. Many feared the program would be costly to implement and would cause people to be overloaded by tedious and unnecessary paperwork. Others worried they might not meet the stringent requirements. However, for many producers, implementing the program has turned out to be a positive experience that has allowed them to remain

competitive in the marketplace, both domestically and abroad; and to reduce the number of audits they must undergo on the farm or in the packinghouse.

## WINDSET FARMS, DELTA, B.C.

Windset Farms, a greenhouse vegetable operation in Delta, B.C., is just one of over 800 farms and packinghouses across Canada that has enrolled in the program to date.

Established in 1996, Windset has three facilities (with a fourth being built) in multiple locations, spanning a total of 65 acres. It employs 65 full-time staff and additional seasonal workers.

Suby Kaur is the food safety/quality assurance manager at Windset. She joined the company two years ago, around the same time

the CHC was rolling out the CanadaGAP program.

Initially, they were introduced to the CanadaGAP program by Loblaw Companies Ltd. Kaur explained that while Windset also maintains its own food safety program (in order to meet various customer requirements), she said the CanadaGAP program is “the most straight forward to implement in a pack shed.”

“It’s very user-friendly,” she says, noting that the already-written SOPs and documentation provided to the farm—especially Microsoft Excel format—are handy for producers, who are able to personalize the records provided to them, without having to “re-write the book.”

“It’s great because the audit is the same, the standards are the same (as other food safety programs), just the processes are different—they’re adapted to fresh produce production,” says Kaur.

## PROCYK FARMS, WILSONVILLE, ONT.

Christine Wheeler grew up on her family’s farm in Southwestern Ontario—founded by her grandfather in the 1930s. Her husband and brothers are now third-generation owners. Procyk Farms is 900 acres and they grow cabbage, cucumbers, peppers, tomatoes, sweet corn and zucchini. They have about 250 staff, 197 of which are seasonal workers from Mexico.

Procyk Farms became involved with the CanadaGAP program through the Guelph Food Technology Centre (GFTC) in 2006, when Loblaw Companies Ltd. began asking its suppliers to enrol in food safety programs.

Wheeler said the initial reaction of some people was, “Why do we have to do this?” Many producers had already been carrying



*Windset Farms in Delta, B.C. is one of over 800 operations currently enrolled in the CanadaGAP Program. Food Safety/Quality Assurance Manager Suby Kaur is pictured in this photo (on the right).*

out a lot of the food safety-related practices outlined in the CHC manuals but they simply had not been writing them down.

She says one challenge with the program is the language barrier, since Procyk Farms is comprised of a largely Spanish-speaking workforce. "Having all of the material translated from English to Spanish has been a lot of work," says Wheeler.

For Wheeler, a primary benefit of being enrolled in the CanadaGAP program is the assurance that the next generation is ready to compete worldwide. It's a matter of staying with the times, according to Wheeler, although she said initially, it can be difficult for older generations to adapt to new rules.

"It becomes easier as time goes on and eventually any negative responses become positive," she says.

### LÉGUNORD INC., SAINT-GÉDÉON, QUE.

Légunord Inc., a wholesaler that also operates a carrot packinghouse, was founded in 1982 by two market gardeners: Les Maraichers Potvin and Le Potager Grandmont. Légunord supplies the three major retailers in Quebec: Loblaw Companies Ltd., Sobeys and Jardin Mérite with shallots, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, leaf lettuce, and more.

Claire Boivin is responsible for packing-house production and food safety and traceability at Légunord. She says the CanadaGAP program is both demanding and achievable. "With a great deal of hard work, employee co-operation and the support of each farm, success is achievable," she says. "We had to believe in it (CanadaGAP) and make sure it was the best thing to do for our customers."


### SHABATURA FARMS, WINDHAM CENTRE, ONT.

Mary Shabatura has been involved with the CHC OFFS Program since the 1990s. Owner of Shabatura Produce, she is a long-time member of the Ontario Fruit & Vegetable Growers' Association and remembers when the industry resolved to mandate the CHC with creating a food safety program for horticulture. "I think that was one of the smartest things we did," she says. "They've done a good job."

A farmer for over 30 years, Shabatura is responsible for food safety on her farm, which measures 800 acres and produces tomatoes, peppers, sweet corn, strawberries and cabbage.

"At first glance, it (the CHC OFFS Program) can be overwhelming," she says, adding that once farmers realize the program addresses things they are already doing, like monitoring water quality, hand washing, manuring manure, etc., it doesn't seem so daunting.

Shabatura says another benefit of the CanadaGAP program is that it has become a very well-recognized standard (recently benchmarked as meeting the requirements of the Global Food Safety Initiative), which was what the Canadian industry greatly needed.

Visit [www.canadagap.ca](http://www.canadagap.ca) for more information. 

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