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Dairy Farmers of Canada

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Introduction

Dairy Farmers of Canada (DFC) has been involved in many levels of food safety management at the farm level and beyond.

DFC has developed and implemented the Canadian Quality Milk (CQM) Program, an on-farm food safety program for dairy producers, which helps producers proactively improve food safety on their farms. In addition, DFC supports animal identification and traceability through the National Livestock Identification for Dairy (NLID) program and Agri-Traçabilité Québec (ATQ).

Complementary to CQM, DFC is also working on developing a biosecurity program for dairy farms, is collaborating with other animal commodities to the elaboration of a National Farmed Animal Health Strategy, and has recently completed the development of a code of practices for the care and handling of dairy animals. All of these activities are closely linked to food safety and demonstrate dairy producers’ commitment to excellence in producing milk for Canadian consumers.

The Canadian Quality Milk Program

Over the last 10 years, DFC has collaborated with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) in the development of the Canadian Quality Milk (CQM) program to provide producers with the necessary tools to address food safety and to demonstrate due diligence as an important element of food production. CQM is an on-farm food safety program designed to help producers prevent, monitor and reduce food safety risks on their farms.

The CQM program is based on the internationally accepted principles of HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points), which is a science-based and proactive approach to food safety that focuses on preventing and minimizing the risk of food safety hazards. The CQM program is designed to help producers improve food safety management on their farms. The dairy processing sector uses a food safety program based on the same principles.

Dairy Farmers of Canada is one of many agricultural organizations that are implementing on-farm food safety programs. Canadian producer organizations are developing their programs using the same baseline through the Canadian On-Farm Food Safety program, which has adapted HACCP to the farm.

The CQM program identifies areas of critical risk and best management practices to help address those risks. Producers on the CQM program strive to improve milk and meat safety on their farms by:
  - Keeping permanent records to monitor critical control points and to address microbiological and chemical contaminations;
  - Following best management practices related to milk and meat safety;
- Developing standard operating procedures to identify tasks and responsibilities for each participant in producing and harvesting milk; and
- Developing corrective action plans to ensure that family and staff know what to do if something goes wrong.

Dairy producers on the CQM program closely monitor the following key areas of milk and meat safety:
- Milking animals treated with veterinary drugs (prevention of residues in milk)
- Effective cooling and storage of milk (controlling microbiological growth)
- Shipping animals (prevention of residues and physical hazards in meat)
- Use of livestock medicines and chemicals (prevention of residues in milk)
- Rigorous sanitation of milking equipment (microbiological hygiene)
- Assessment of wash water for microbiological parameters

Producers also implement best management practices in other areas such as manure management, feeding, animal identification, medicine and chemical storage, milking, and staff training.

The CQM program offers registration to producers who have implemented the program on their farms. Producers undergo an on-farm audit and once they are registered, they are subject to regular audits to ensure that they continue to meet requirements.

Led by CFIA, the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Governments have developed, through industry consultation, a recognition process: the On-Farm Food Safety Recognition Program. The Recognition Program provides technical review of producer materials, technical review of management systems, implementation assessment and on-going monitoring. The CQM program has achieved technical recognition of both its producer materials and its management system. It has also maintained its recognition status through on-going monitoring by CFIA.

Dairy producers have recognized the value and strength the CQM program offers the industry as a whole, and has set a national target of December 31, 2010 for all Canadian dairy producers to be registered with the program. Provinces are working towards the target and the number of registered producers is growing quickly.

Due to its HACCP-base, the CQM program has the ability to respond to new science and new food safety demands. The program also has the flexibility to be integrated with programs developed by other food chain partners, such as truckers, processors and retailers to ensure that food safety is adequately addressed all along the whole food chain. DFC, together with the Dairy Processors Association of Canada (DPAC), recently organized a conference on “A New Approach to Food Safety” which focused on the metrics system of quantifying hazards for the whole food chain. The system is an extension of HACCP-based programs and addresses the entire dairy food chain.
Identification and Traceability

DFC supports cattle identification and traceability efforts, as they contribute significantly to food safety. Cattle identification and traceability enable the industry to respond quickly to food safety or animal health issues, and to mitigate problems.

The National Livestock Identification for Dairy (NLID) program and Agri-Traçabilité Québec (ATQ) are the two systems currently in place, and they are required by the CQM program. NLID is a national cattle tagging system that identifies individual animals so that trace-back is possible. ATQ is the identification system in Quebec. NLID requires animals to be tagged before the animal leaves the herd of origin, but in practice, many dairy producers tag their calves shortly after birth. The ATQ system requires producers to tag their calves within 7 days of birth or before they are transferred from the farm of origin, whichever comes first.

DFC is involved in national efforts to improve the current identification systems to track animal movements and to link with the entire food chain; thereby, strengthening the traceability component from farm to fork.

On 4 June 2009, DFC is holding a national meeting to develop a national plan for the development of a national traceability program for the dairy production in Canada. Organizations delivering cattle traceability in Canada such as Agri-Traçabilité Québec, OnTrace Agri-Traceability (Ontario) and the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency (CCIA) will explain the system they can offer to meet DFC’s needs. AAFC and CFIA will discuss the requirements of the system that the government would like to see developed and the provinces will comment on the plans that are elaborated around the country to realize a fully functional traceability system for dairy cattle.

DFC considers full traceability including premise identification, animal identification and animal movement as an essential requirement to ensure food safety at farm level.

Biosecurity

DFC has initiated discussions with the CFIA to develop a national plan to address biosecurity of Canadian dairy farms. DFC intends to work closely with the beef industry to develop a biosecurity system which is compatible for the entire cattle industry. Biosecurity best management practices on dairy farms are outlined in the CQM program, which focus on preventing the introduction of disease into a dairy herd and also minimizing the spread of disease to individual animals once it has entered a herd.

The CFIA has established an Office of Biosecurity and developed a biosecurity fact sheet and checklist for dairy herds. Biosecurity is a critical issue to ensure the health and productivity of the Canadian dairy herd and the entire dairy industry.
Animal Health

Animal health is closely linked to food safety. To give an example of dairy farmers’ commitment to animal health, during the 70’s, Canadian dairy producers managed, with the support of governments, to eradicate brucellosis and tuberculosis from the Canadian dairy herd. DFC has been collaborating closely with CFIA to address animal health issues such as Bluetongue and Anaplasmosis. DFC is also closely involved in the work of the International Organization for Animal Health dealing with zoonoses (contagious diseases which can be transmitted from animals to humans), food safety and animal welfare.

DFC actively supports the development of a National Farmed Animal Health Strategy involving a strong government-industry partnership via the activities of the Canadian Animal Health Coalition which is a coalition of animal commodities. The strategy’s vision is to help Canada value and support the health and well-being of farm animals and their contribution to the well-being of Canadians, the environment and the Canadian economy. Some of the strategy’s goals are to help the industry avoid and respond faster to animal health threats; to improve market access, and to enhance our ability to protect public health, industry viability and farm animal care. The strategy also emphasizes the need for all major stakeholders to work together. It proposes a new governance system for animal health in Canada involving industry and government.

The National Farmed Animal Health Strategy now needs to be implemented, the measurable outcomes monitored and the strategy improved, as necessary. DFC is expecting the National Farmed Animal Health Strategy will be incorporated in AAFC’s Growing Forward program.

Animal Care

DFC has also been active in promoting animal care. Recently, dairy producers participated in the National Farm Animal Care Council’s process for up-dating the Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Dairy Cattle. The code is a guideline to help producers ensure that they are caring for their cattle properly. The code includes best management practices related to housing, management, transportation, processing and other animal husbandry practices. The up-dated code also provides the public with the assurance that dairy producers value their animals and invest heavily in their care and welfare.

Absence of Antibiotic Residues in Milk

The dairy industry pays a great deal of attention to the quality and safety of milk and milk products that are marketed to consumers. Every province has a raw milk quality program that checks closely for residues of therapeutic antibiotics in the milk supply. All raw milk received at processing plants is tested for antibiotic residues before the load is unloaded. Any milk that is found to contain such residues is discarded and the offending farmer is subject to strict financial consequences. Repeated offences can mean that the farmer is
shut off from the market until the authorities are convinced that he can market milk that consistently meets the strict quality standards.

Consumers are also concerned with other residues in food. The CFIA is responsible for the monitoring of any chemical residues, and evaluating if they violate Canadian standards and present a risk to consumer health. Canadian food fares very well on this: In 2005-2006, analyses carried out by the CFIA determined the MRL compliance rate for milk products to be 99%.

New Metrics for food safety

In March, DFC held a conference on food safety in the dairy industry. Many experts from various countries and the International Dairy Federation (IDF) talked about the scientific progress that allows food producers and processors to measure the level of microbiological hazards identified by HACCP. Together, metrics and HACCP promise to help prevent food safety issues - before they become food safety problems.

Conclusion

DFC is working diligently on many food safety fronts and dairy producers recognize the importance of food safety to their industry. The CQM program helps producers prevent, reduce and address food safety concerns on the farm, and DFC is moving the program towards the whole food chain approach and the new metrics system for hazard analysis and quantification.

Animal identification and traceability systems have already been implemented in dairy herds, and DFC is working on improving the systems currently in place. Biosecurity, animal health, and animal care are being addressed jointly with government and other industry partners.

Dairy producers are well-positioned in food safety; however, they are also aware that they must always look for opportunities to improve their practices and resulting products.