



ASK THE EXPERT

Mansel Griffiths

The Need for a National Food Safety Strategy

To remain competitive in the increasingly globalized food trade, our industry must be proactive in its approach to food safety. Like no time in the past, the agri-food industry must work together to create a unified approach to food safety.

The agriculture and agri-food sector including government, academia and industry all recognize the importance of food safety. But the ways and needs of each group to meet them can be quite different.

Although Canada does not have a national food safety strategy, many initiatives have been undertaken throughout the industry. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Agriculture Policy Framework (APF), created in 2001, has identified food safety and quality as key in reaching the future vision of the agriculture and agri-food industry in Canada.

Through the APF, a number of food safety initiatives have been undertaken. Three federal/provincial/territorial committees have been active in developing policies and regulations in a number of food safety areas, including meat regulations, traceability systems and surveillance programs. These committees are: The Canadian Food Inspection System Implementation Group, the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Agri-Food Inspection Committee and the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Committee on Food Safety Policy.

To augment the APF, federal, provincial and territorial government officials are developing a National Food Policy Framework. The intent of the Framework is to better address food-related health and safety issues as well as industry competitiveness and market access issues across all jurisdictions and commodities.

As well as government initiatives, the Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition is an industry-based initiative that involves members from all segments of the food chain. Their interest is to develop and implement a national, coordinated approach to food safety. In 2004 they coordinated a one-day forum for both industry and government to share information on food safety issues, particularly in the areas of national food safety standards and industry training programs.

To help with the coordination of these food safety initiatives, a National Food Safety Strategy (NFSS) meeting has

been planned for March 21 to 23. The partners for this initiative include Health Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Public Health Agency of Canada, Ontario Food Protection Association, Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education and the University of Guelph through the Canadian Research Institute for Food Safety.

The National Food Safety Strategy Symposium and workshop project is designed to bring all the key players from across Canada together to share ideas and current activities, and collaborate on next steps for a national food safety strategy. The symposium will bring together food safety specialists from across Canada (federal and provincial government, academia and industry) for their input. The outcome of the NFSS symposium and workshop will feed into the National Food Policy Framework discussions. On March 21, a one-day symposium will be held for all interested stakeholders. The symposium will be followed by a two-day workshop for further discussion by a selected group of participants in a break-out session setting.

The results of the workshops should help ensure that all sectors collaborate fully on activities designed to strengthen food safety in Canada. Some of the anticipated benefits include: better coordinated food safety research using best practices to develop standardized training programs, coordinated surveillance programs and

better communication among food safety personnel across the board.

This project will bring food safety responsiveness to the forefront and will allow industry to foresee potential food safety problems before they threaten markets. Ensuring safe food practices and products will add value to the Canadian agri-food sector in terms of increasing market differentiation, containing or reducing costs of operation and supporting global competitiveness. For more information, visit: www.oac.uoguelph.ca/CRIFS

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Mansel W. Griffiths, B.Sc., Ph.D is director of the Canadian Research Institute for Food Safety at the University of Guelph.