



A tidal wave of change for meat processing in the province.

The new meat regulations, which are a component of the *Food Safety and Quality Act* finally passed by the McGuinty government, will mean a busy spring for meat industry stakeholders in Ontario.

Highlights of the new regulations include: the licensing and inspection of freestanding meat plants (FSMPs), the strengthening of process controls and operational requirements, and the mandatory training of food handlers. FSMPs are defined by the products they produce and to whom they are sold. They include businesses that process products like bacon, deli meat and smoked ham, and businesses that produce items like roasts, chops and steaks and sell them to wholesalers, foodservice operations and retailers. FSMPs do not slaughter animals and are not federally registered.

The new regulations will be phased in according to the size of the business. All abattoirs and large FSMPs (processing over one million kilograms of meat products in 2004) will have to comply by June 1, 2005. Medium-size FSMPs (processing between 500,000 and one million kilograms of meat products in 2004) have until April 1, 2006, and all other FSMPs (processing 500,000 kilograms or less of meat products) must be licensed by Oct. 1, 2006.

Robert Vanderwoude, manager of Policy and Audit Services with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food (OMAF), says, "The reason for the regulations is to have a common standard in Ontario for all meat processing that is not federally inspected, delivered by OMAF with our trained inspectors."

Tom Baker, director of the Food Inspection Branch, with OMAF says the old regulations did not allow Ontario to be in full harmonization with the *National Meat and Poultry Regulations and Code*. For example, he says, "We did not have the authority to impose good manufacturing processes (GMPs). We could recommend and assess the plant against them but at the end of the day we didn't have the authority



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to take compliance action against them if they refused to have written sanitation programs."

The three step staged phase in of the regulations gives stakeholders a chance to assess what type of work and training they will need to accomplish in order to comply with the regulations.

As I write this, OMAF is holding a series of consultation meetings right across the province with industry stakeholders. Baker says part of the rationale is just to walk processors through the new regulations, to show them how the new act is structured and point out what's new. The ancillary purpose is to consult industry on policy that is not part of the regulations as yet. Those discussions include at what pace and whether or not Ontario should proceed with mandatory HACCP, non-ambulatory animals, and on-farm slaughter of food animals, inedible material disposal and recordkeeping for traceability. The first meeting was held in Guelph, Ont., on Feb. 24. Baker says a lot of the ques-

tions dealt with concerns about how to comply with the regulations, about whether or not a facility would fall under the definition of a FSMP to determine whether or not they would stay under the local health unit and, of course, costs.

As with all change, there will be definite costs to be borne by the processor. Included in the announcement for the new regulations was \$25 million in transitional funding over three years. Baker says cost is one area that's really difficult to assess. "We don't know a lot about the FSMPs yet, they will really vary widely. A significant portion of these operations are not only processing meat, they're processing other commodities and meat is just one of their product lines. So it gets a little difficult to tease out what it would cost to comply with the meat regulations. We know there are going to be costs involved, so we're trying to get some input on the most rational way to distribute this \$25 million to help industry get there."

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