

1. Introduction

Welcome to Canada's beef on-farm food safety program – Verified Beef Production (VBP).

The VBP program evolved from the original *Quality Starts Here* ✓ program to focus on food safety. It is geared to complement food safety programs in meat processing plants and at retail, to manage food safety risks across the food chain.

This Producer Manual has been built around the concept of proactive management regarding potential food safety hazards. The international food safety standard called “HACCP” (pronounced haa-sip) has been adjusted to apply to beef cattle operations. Technical aspects of the program have been reviewed and recognized as sound by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

Many of the practices in this manual are designed to complement what goes on in beef cattle operations across the country – and perhaps provide a few new ideas to improve the care of beef cattle.

This is a voluntary program, so producers can choose to implement the practices, or go the next step which is an on-farm audit to prove they are meeting program requirements.

Beef cattle operators continue to acknowledge their role in responsible use of animal health products, and this program provides the opportunity to demonstrate due diligence to the world.

This program manual replaces the former Beef Cattle Producers Reference Guide version 6.3 dated November 25 2004, as part of continual improvement to the VBP program.

2. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in the Verified Beef Production program are designed to reduce or eliminate the possibility of a food safety concern on a beef cattle operation. They are a set of *Must Do* requirements and recommended procedures to help reduce the chance of a hazard, along with a record keeping component to demonstrate what was done.

The SOPs in this program are focused on the two potential hazards of primary concern – possible chemical residue from animal health products and possible broken needle fragment in live cattle.

SOPs are provided for you in this manual, and they are focused on use of animal health products, medicated feed or water, control of pesticides, and cattle shipping procedures. There are five SOPs:

- SOP 1 – Animal Health Management
- SOP 2 - Feed and Water: Medicated and Non-Ruminant Feed
- SOP 3 – Cattle Shipping
- SOP 4 – Pesticide Control and Manure
- SOP 5 – Training and Communication

Each SOP has a **Must Do** component outlined as **grey shaded**, and recommended procedures because not all are applicable to every operation. The recommended procedures are designed to

support your efforts in this area, and you should choose to apply those which make sense on your beef cattle operation. Each SOP has specific information which needs to be recorded so you can provide proof to an auditor and anyone else that you have managed program requirements satisfactorily. You can use the sample records provided or integrate existing records with information requirements.

The practices which are not shaded in grey are recommended practices that partially relate to food safety, or can help you avoid a potential hazard. Please review these and choose to follow those which are applicable to your operation. While many of these are already standard practices, communicating the importance of following these types of procedures will ensure consistency among *all* who do this work on the beef cattle operation. Most errors are inadvertent, or unintended, and often discussion on the correct actions goes a long way to avoiding potential problems and improving consistency. An auditor can interview persons doing these activities to determine which ones are routine on your beef cattle operation.

Many of the recommended practices also improve product efficacy (products work better) or intended results.

When errors occur

Some producers or feedlot operators may go a lifetime without experiencing a drug residue or a suspected broken needle in an animal. Because food safety programs are “anticipating” in nature, it is important there are some procedures in place to address potential problems regarding its *Must Do* (grey shaded) requirements. In HACCP-based on-farm food safety programs, these potential problems are known as a *deviation*.

The secondary question would then be “how would you fix it?” – which is known as a *corrective action*. It’s essentially the answer to the question “what would you do if something goes wrong?”

If something goes wrong, consider:

1. What can be done to immediately correct the problem
2. Who to talk to and record their advice/date it
3. If problem can’t be corrected, what can be done or who should be notified
4. What to do so the error doesn’t occur again
5. Need a record of action(s) taken – could be on a current form used in your cattle operation

Some examples of where this would apply:

- Wrong medication to animals or wrong medicated feed
- Incorrect dose or error in following label direction
- Broken needle
- Positive drug residue found in slaughter cattle

When addressing problems or errors that occur with the *Must Do* requirements (grey shaded areas in this manual), record what was done and how it was corrected. Some suggestions are outlined for you in the “If something goes wrong” section for each SOP. One can write down what was done on a current record or on a separate sheet, whichever is simplest for you.

What is the relationship between the VBP Program and government regulations?

While an audit will not assess compliance to any provincial, municipal or federal regulation governing practices on the farm, it is important to continue to comply with regulations. The desired

outcome from the perspective of the VBP program is avoidance of potential contamination of cattle, and feed/water for cattle. This includes disposal of animal health products, herbicides, and other chemicals.

There is potential for an additional farm audit to take place should a major food safety-related contamination occur. This is to ensure the integrity of the program and the adjustment of applicable SOPs so that the contamination doesn't happen again. We anticipate this to be a *very rare* event, but please understand that the VBP program may want to re-audit should it be deemed necessary.

Governments continue to maintain the option of on-farm inspections (example: medicated feed or non-ruminant feeds) independent of this program.

Auditors will not review provincial regulatory requirements but will observe any unusual circumstance that may relate to food safety on the beef cattle operation.

3. What do I need to do?

One person from your beef cattle operation will need to complete training to understand the requirements for the Verified Beef Production program. Then those persons undertaking the tasks for each SOP will need to understand the *Must Do* and recommended procedures outlined in this manual, so effective communication must take place. These persons will need to understand enough of the SOPs so that they understand normal procedures, what to do if something goes wrong, and what information to record. People will also need to know the difference between *Must Do's* and recommended practices for the VBP program.

The *Must Do's* are the minimum requirements of the Verified Beef Production program, and are shaded grey in this Producer Manual. These *Must Do's* are designed to help avoid a potential food safety hazard, or deal with it before it becomes unmanageable or a problem to the next customer along the beef chain. Pay particular attention to the *Must Do's* as they are the practices which will be audited by a qualified 3rd party auditor who understands beef cattle production.

Record Keeping

All records relating to *Must Do's* (grey shaded) must be kept for 2 years. Some records or documents need to be accessible to those who use the information. Well-organized records will assist in preparation for any on-farm audits and for annual self-declarations or records assessments.

The VBP program requires the following records and information:

- Animal treatment and processing records for all animal health products used in the beef cattle operation.
- Initials on records indicating withdrawal times are checked prior to shipping cattle to slaughter.
- If cattle are not shipped to slaughter, and shipped before withdrawal times are met, a record containing information on the date when treatment or processing information was communicated to the next buyer.
- Record of all broken needles and evidence that information was communicated to the next buyer. This is especially important if the animal was sold or shipped to slaughter.
- Medicated feed records including amount fed and target cattle (i.e. group identification). This includes medicated water.
- Written veterinary prescriptions for all extra-label use of animal health products and feed/water medications.

- Record for herbicide or pesticide use on pastures and hay fields on your operation, so that “safe to graze” dates were observed.
- Information indicating verification took place regarding “Must Do” VBP requirements. (see section 9 for more detail). This can be someone from your operation.

Consider having back-up copies of important records in case of misplacement or unexpected events, such as computer failure, fire or damage by animals (dogs and curious cattle).

On-Farm Audits

Although it may sound ominous, an on-farm audit is essentially a check on how a beef cattle operation is applying the VBP program. It is a review of records and observations - used to determine if a beef cattle operation is meeting the minimum requirements of the program. It is done by a person with both a background in beef cattle production, and training in audit procedures. It is an objective “outside eye” on food-safety related practices ... relating to the Must Do requirements of the program.

An audit of a beef cattle operation provides authenticity for both the VBP program and for beef producers or feedlot owners. An audit is required by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency in order to receive program recognition.

Beef cattle operations will first undergo what is called a full audit, which is a review of all the “Must Do” SOPs as part of registration requirements. Upon successful completion of the audit and any possible corrective actions, a producer will become registered with the VBP program.

To maintain registration, a producer or feedlot operation submits either a sample of records or a self-declaration checklist each year to the provincial delivery agent. The VBP coordinator will review and provide an indication that program requirements have been met. The sequence occurs once annually, and then in the ninth year, a full audit is required and the cycle continues.

VBP Audit Pattern:**F - R - S - S - R - S - S - S***each year over 8 years, then repeat*

F = full on-farm audit
R = records assessment only
S = self-declaration

► **random audit may occur in any of the five self-declaration (S) years**

What do I need to do to prepare for an on-farm audit?

After completing VBP program training, cow/calf producers must have at minimum six months of records or in the case of feedlots, three months of records. These records need to be complete according to the minimum program requirements too, so ask for a checklist from your provincial VBP coordinator.

Once ready, call your provincial coordinator who will assign an auditor. The auditor will then contact you to arrange for a suitable time/day. The provincial coordinator will take steps to address possible conflict of interest between a producer and an auditor. Potential conflict of interest includes current or former business arrangements, family ties, or close contact as friends etc. If unsure, please talk to the coordinator as we want all involved to make objective observations and preserve the integrity of the program.

Look at the audit as a learning opportunity. It is not an inspection - it's a review of program Must Do's and recommended practices.

Please have someone present to guide the auditor around the premises, and let family members and/or staff know that the auditor may ask them questions regarding their role within the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Records relating to the Standard Operating Procedures will also need to be available.

4. SOP 1 – Animal Health Management

The goal of procedures in this SOP is to minimize the risk of drug residues, antibiotic resistant bacteria and broken needles in cattle.

Drug residues and broken needles are not “removable” after cattle leave the premises, so producers must pay particular attention to these potential risks within their operations.

If cattle are exposed to chemicals such as those found at garbage sites, (for example lead batteries, used pesticide equipment/containers, treated seed) contact a veterinarian for appropriate action. Sudden and unexplained deaths may be due to poisoning. An investigation should take place, so that a food safety incident doesn't occur when salvaging survivor animals.

Animal Identification - linking treated cattle with their withdrawal times

The purpose is to clearly link the animal with its treatment or vaccination record for the duration of the withdrawal period. The VBP program allows for individual animal identification and group/pen identification in the case of group treatments.

In the case of group treatments when animals are not individually identified, all cattle in the group must be held for the required period for the drug product with the longest withdrawal time. If cattle are removed from the treatment group, they must be individually identified and held for the longest withdrawal period for that group.

If marking cattle with spray paint or crayons, check the product label to ensure it is approved for use in livestock.

a) Storing Animal Health Products

- Store animal health products according to label directions. Improper storage could lead to altered withdrawal times and chemical residues in cattle, or reduce product effectiveness.
- Keep storage areas organized to reduce the chances of people using improper medications, and ensure labels are clearly readable. If labels are not readable, post a copy of the product label insert (extra paper from product boxes or a printout) where people can access them.
- If receiving or storing products intended for other species of livestock, store on a separate shelf or in a manner which clearly indicates these products are not for use in beef cattle. This is to avoid potential mix-ups and unintentional use.
- Discard drugs that have expired or have been accidentally frozen or exposed to excess heat.
- Dispose of used and outdated animal health products in a manner that does not contaminate cattle feed or water.