

Verified Beef PRODUCTION



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INDUSTRY UPDATE

Volume 2 • Issue 2 • October 2006

Streamlined VBP program kicks off this fall

Producer-designed adjustments help make program more user friendly and compatible with efforts at processing and retail levels.

Less paperwork. Simpler auditing procedures. More flexibility to meet individual needs.

These are three features of the newly streamlined Verified Beef Production (VBP) program. The updated program is available in a revised version of the VBP Producer Manual and will be launched this fall at VBP workshops across the country.

"This is a major step in the evolution of the VBP program," says Terry Grajczyk, national program manager. "It will make Verified Beef Production much simpler and more practical for beef producers, while continuing to meet the goals of the program and maintain strong credibility with buyers of Canadian beef."

Along with general streamlining and fine-tuning to benefit producers and enhance the focus on food safety, the processes and standards of the VBP program are also adjusted to better complement other food safety programs underway at the processing and retail levels, says Grajczyk. "This helps to ensure all programs work together more seamlessly, to make quality assurance as efficient and effective as possible."

PRODUCER-DRIVEN PROGRESS

The VBP program has made some significant progress as Canada's beef on-farm food safety program. Over 3,600 producers have been trained in VBP workshops, and the rate of producers registering with the program has grown steadily every year.

With the updated program, VBP remains a completely voluntary, producer-driven effort, with a strong focus on practical approaches to ensure on-farm food safety, says Grajczyk. But within this framework, a number of improvements have been made to simplify, improve and enhance the specific requirements at the farm and feedlot level.

"Beef producers themselves played a critical role in the process," she says. "The requirements were initiated by a technical team, then reviewed by beef producers for a more practical and streamlined effort."

STRENGTHENING THE PROGRAM

A major thrust was clarifying the role of the VBP program and reducing its requirements, to create a more focused and user friendly system. "The VBP program's producer advisory committee was strongly in favor of a reduction of requirements and a focus on food safety only," says Grajczyk. "Along with strengthening the overall program, this would provide the flexibility needed to allow for the scope of beef cattle operations across Canada."

This resulted in an updated program with a number of key features:

- Continued focus on meeting withdrawal times for animal health products or feed medications.
- Continued focus to reduce the potential for broken needle fragments in live cattle.
- Fewer record keeping requirements.
- Simpler auditing procedures.
- Greater flexibility for producers to meet individual needs.
- Simpler requirements for mixing medicated feed.
- Removal of signed protocol requirements.
- Wording adjustments to improve clarity.

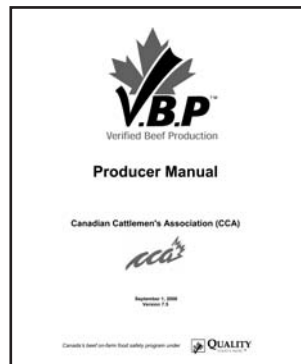
"The program still requires some record keeping," notes Grajczyk, "but far less than before. Many producers will be able to meet the requirements using the records they already keep."

Changes to the auditing procedures are also substantial, she says. The audit sequence has been simplified to one initial audit, followed by a series of records assessment or self-declarations annually over an eight year period. "This will help us reduce costs while still maintaining a credible program."

TAILORING FOR INDIVIDUAL OPERATIONS

Perhaps most important for some operations, the program offers more flexibility for producers to tailor the VBP program to the specific needs of their own farms or feedlots.

"Standard operating procedures still exist for use of animal health products, medicated feed or water, cattle shipping, and pesticide control," explains Grajczyk. "The difference in the new manual is that some requirements are noted as 'Must Do's' and some are recommendations. Producers will be expected to apply only those



Revised Producer Manual

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recommendations that make sense on their particular operations.”

The flexibility of the program also allows for regional differences, including areas with limited access to veterinarians, she notes. “Veterinarians are still an important part of the animal health partnership in all areas, with a broad advisory role to play in treatment protocols, drug and needle use, cleaning of health equipment and use of medicated feed and water. They are also required to provide prescriptions for extra-label use.”

NEW WEB SITE, RECORD BOOKS

In a related development, the VBP program is developing a revised Web site that will include a new option for on-line training. “This will help those producers who are long distances from workshops or prefer to learn on their own.”

The VBP program is also developing new pocket record books that will be available to producers in time for next calving season. The new record books include modifications to reflect program updates, along with additional space for age verification data.

“Both developments are part of our ongoing effort to make VBP a more accessible, more effective program,” says Grajczyk.

For future updates on the revised VBP Web site or for more information on the VBP program, visit the Quality Starts Here Web site, at www.qualitystartshere.org.

New VBP coordinators

The VBP program welcomes two new provincial VBP coordinators.

Dr. Blaine Franks, Alberta. Dr. Blaine Franks is a retired veterinarian with 20 years of large animal practice at Bashaw, Alta. He also has a background in adult education.

Betty Green, Manitoba. A former president of the Manitoba Cattle Producers Association, Betty Green has worked with the CCA Animal Health Committee and is an active producer in Manitoba’s inter-lake area.

Producer marketing alliances support VBP Program helps anchor branded quality opportunities

Among the steadily rising number of Canadian beef operations participating in the VBP program are those involved with several innovative producer marketing alliances. Each views on-farm food safety assurance as a critical component of its marketing success, and relies on the VBP program as a requirement of its members.



ONTARIO CORN FED BEEF

“Quality assurance has always been the basis of the Ontario Corn Fed Beef program. Once VBP became nationally recognized and had a nice, consistent rollout throughout the country, Corn Fed producers felt this was the specific program to go with. About 90 Ontario Corn Fed Beef producers went through VBP workshops this spring alone. With VBP becoming a pillar of Ontario’s new Market Access Program beginning in 2007, we expect lots more interest through the fall and winter months.”

– Dan Ferguson, VBP coordinator for Ontario, who has worked extensively with the Ontario Corn Fed Beef Program. The program delivers products with a recognizable brand that assures consumers of quality standards.

PRAIRIE HERITAGE BEEF

“We want to provide a direct link between the producer and the end consumer, where the consumer has confidence in how and where the animal was raised, how it was processed and how it was shipped. The VBP program is an important part of our system.”

– Murray Linthicum, a Prairie Heritage Beef producer from Glenworth, Saskatchewan. Prairie Heritage Beef is a conglomerate of 21 beef producers from across Saskatchewan and Alberta.

PEACE COUNTRY PREMIUM BEEF

“The group of producers that set up Peace Country Premium Beef were looking to get away from the commodity markets, by producing a product with branded quality. VBP is something we follow and promote. It gives our customers peace of mind that a third party has given a stamp of approval to how we raise the cattle.”

– Glenn Leitch of Spirit River, Alta., a member of the producer alliance that founded Peace Country Premium Beef. The group was incorporated in 2004 and began volume sales in January 2006.

For more information

To get more information on the Quality Starts Here, Verified Beef Production program, visit the Quality Starts Here Web site at www.qualitystartshere.org or contact the VBP office in your area.

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