



Agriculture and
Agri-Food Canada

Agriculture et
Agroalimentaire Canada



2010-2011 **Annual Report**

Agri-Subcommittee on Food Safety
For Period Ending March 31st 2011

Canada 

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Message from the Co-Chairs

As co-chairs of the Agri-Subcommittee on Food Safety (ASFS), we are pleased to present its first annual report for the fiscal year 2010-2011.

Government and industry share a common vision of providing consumers with safe, high quality and nutritious food. In this regard, industry and government have complementary roles, with government setting standards and providing oversight while industry is responsible for the production of safe food in compliance with, or exceeding, government standards. Since no food safety system can assure zero risk, industry and government must also be prepared to react quickly to protect the consumer when problems are identified.

During its first year of operation, the ASFS has provided a forum for an enhanced level of dialogue and learning between industry and government regarding proactive initiatives affecting food safety. Based on the premise that food safety should not be seen as a “competitive” issue, representatives from the major agricultural sectors participate and openly share information on new procedures and new technology for the benefit of all.

The ASFS brings agri-food representatives along the supply chain together with government partners, who also share their progress in continually improving the food safety system in Canada. Over the past year, the Subcommittee has watched with interest the progress made by federal partners in implementing the recommendations of the Report of the Independent Investigator into the 2008 Listeriosis Outbreak (the Weatherill Report). Industry members from the meat-processing sector also reported on how their sector has responded to the recommendations for which they are responsible. The Subcommittee looks forward to the release of the Government of Canada’s final report to Canadians on action taken to implement the Weatherill Report recommendations and further strengthen our food safety system.

We are confident that this first report demonstrates how industry working with industry and industry working with government is essential to ensuring that Canada is a world leader in food safety.

Dennis Laycraft, ASFS Industry co-chair
Executive Vice-President of the Canadian Cattlemen’s Association

Anna Romano, ASFS Government co-chair
Executive Director, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

SECTION I:

Introduction: the Agri-Subcommittee on Food Safety (ASFS)

Raison d'être

The Agri-Subcommittee on Food Safety (ASFS) was formed following a meeting of Value Chain Roundtable (VCRT) Chairs with senior government officials in November 2009, in response to the recognition that food safety is a cross-cutting issue that would benefit from a forum for dialogue among industry and government representatives. The Subcommittee held its first meeting in June 2010.

Governance and Communication

The ASFS is composed of industry and federal government representatives, and is co-chaired by one government member and one industry member. Industry members are from the Beef, Pork, Food Processing, Grains, Horticulture, Organics, Pulses, Seafood and Special Crops Value Chain Roundtables, as well as the Poultry, Dairy, Retail and Food Service sectors, and the Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition. Government members are from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), Health Canada (HC) and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC).

In 2010-2011, the Subcommittee finalized its terms of reference (appendix 1) and developed membership principles (appendix 2). The Subcommittee also created a website, www.ats-sea.agr.gc.ca/rt-tr/sa-eng.htm, which includes information on its membership, provides records of decision from ASFS meetings, and makes the terms of reference available to the general public.

In the first year of operation, the Subcommittee met four times. Planning and coordination of the Subcommittee's operations was supported by the VCRT Secretariat with additional resources coming from the Food Safety Review Secretariat, AAFC.

Responsibilities

The ASFS provides a forum for dialogue among government and industry partners from input suppliers to final marketers. The Subcommittee also provides a bridge to the industry value chain roundtables and other industry fora to promote broader communication concerning joint government and industry food safety priorities. AAFC, CFIA, HC and PHAC retain decision-making authority and responsibilities.

SECTION I:

Introduction: the Agri-Subcommittee on Food Safety (ASFS)

Specifically, the ASFS works toward the following goals:

1. Contribute to the development and implementation of food safety policies and standards (set by either government or industry) that reflect current food safety knowledge and best practices.
2. Consider the application of principles for stronger food safety systems and governance across the Canadian food safety system.
3. Provide a forum for government and industry dialogue on their respective responses and joint actions to improve the food safety system.
4. Consider ways to strengthen the government and industry partnership on consumer food safety education through further engagement of the industry roundtables or other appropriate groups.
5. Consider opportunities to strengthen food safety performance reporting in Canada using data from multiple available sources and identifying potential additional data sources in order to stimulate continuous improvement.
6. Analyze the implementation of agreed-upon actions and ensure results are reported regularly to the value chain roundtables and other industry fora, as well as to appropriate fora within HC, CFIA, PHAC and AAFC. (See appendix 1 for details.)

SECTION II: Accomplishments over the past year

The objective of this report is to look back at the ASFS' accomplishments over the past year and also to build upon these accomplishments in 2011-2012. In the first year of operation, the Subcommittee used its meetings primarily to exchange information on members' respective roles and responsibilities; gain knowledge of food safety initiatives, learn about emerging issues and threats to the food safety system; and examine opportunities to enhance Canada's food safety system.

This report highlights the ASFS accomplishments made between June 2010 and March 2011 in the following thematic areas:

- a. Food safety policies and standards in Canada: development and implementation;
- b. United States Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA);
- c. Food safety performance measurement and reporting;
- d. Weatherill Report recommendations: industry and government action.

a. Food safety policies and standards in Canada: development and implementation

Food safety is an area of shared jurisdiction and responsibility among government, industry and consumers. Food safety policies and standards can be set as regulatory requirements by government or as private quality assurance initiatives by industry. Between June 2010 and March 2011, members of the Subcommittee shared information that contributed to a better understanding of food safety policies and standards within the food safety system.

Federal government representatives provided updates on broad systemic food safety legislative, policy and regulatory initiatives in their departments and industry representatives provided updates on industry initiatives which have demonstrated an improvement in food safety through prevention, surveillance, detection and awareness.

Highlights

Health Canada shared its weight-of-evidence guidance document on factors to consider for appropriate and timely action in a foodborne illness outbreak investigation. The document is the first of its kind and there has been international interest in using it as a model.

The CFIA shared progress made in the area of pathogen reduction in meat and poultry, a federal, provincial and territorial priority area. CFIA's Executive Vice-President, George Da Pont, discussed advancing food safety legislation as referenced in the 2010 Speech from the Throne and raised the possibility of creating a 2-3 year schedule for updating CFIA regulations and tackling the 30 or 40 major pieces of regulations in related groupings.

SECTION II: Accomplishments over the past year

PHAC Associate Deputy Minister, Krista Outhwaite, discussed PHAC's role in food safety and recognized the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders in enhancing food safety. She noted that epidemiological curves from food recalls clearly show the effectiveness of recalls in controlling the spread of illness.

Albert Chambers of the Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition gave a presentation on the complexity of food safety programs in Canada. He indicated that there are numerous programs, both mandatory and voluntary, on-farm and off-farm, industry-led and government-led. It was agreed that a variety of programs, both mandatory and voluntary, is preferable to a one-size-fits-all approach. The challenge is to ensure that the optimal level of coordination is achieved and maintained.

Nik Nanos of Nanos Research shared his company's survey results, compiled at the request of the Globe and Mail as part of their investigative series on food safety in Canada. He indicated that, overall, Canadians are quite confident in the level of food inspection in Canada. Canadians also believe that there are more food recalls now than there were in the past and see this as a sign that the inspection system is working well, not as a sign of a crisis.

b. United States Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA)

In 2011, President Obama signed into law the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) of 2010. Subcommittee members heard from various speakers on the impact of the legislation on Canadian agri-business. Members were informed that the new legislation moved the US from a reactive position on food safety issues to a preventive one; the act also gave the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) important new tools to hold imported foods to the same standards as domestic foods and directed the FDA to build an integrated national food safety system in partnership with state and local authorities.

Highlights

The CFIA gave a presentation outlining potential impacts on Canadian exporters, and associated implications for the CFIA.

The CFIA also informed the Subcommittee of key food safety initiatives in the US, and on Canada – US collaborative initiatives aimed at maximizing both countries' efforts to enhance food safety. Related web links to the US FDA website on its Foreign Food Inspection Program were shared with the members.

AAFC gave an overview of US food safety legislation and related trade implications and its trade advocacy strategy.

SECTION II:

Accomplishments over the past year

The Subcommittee also heard from James Hodges, the Executive Vice-President of the American Meat Institute. Mr. Hodges spoke about industry's primary responsibility for ensuring a safe food supply, with government playing an important oversight role.

In response to the FSMA, government members indicated that they would continue to monitor the impact of the new legislation.

c. Food safety performance measurement and reporting

A key goal of the ASFS is to consider opportunities to improve how food safety effectiveness is measured and reported in Canada. For example, a better understanding of trends and baseline information could support food safety performance measurement and reporting, and potentially help to mitigate food safety risks.

Highlights

At the January meeting of the ASFS, Rory McAlpine from Maple Leaf Foods shared a discussion paper and initiated a dialogue on the challenges of creating and implementing a more robust system of food safety performance measurement and reporting in Canada by all stakeholders. Following the dialogue, a Performance Measurement and Reporting Working Group (PMRWG) was formed.

d. Weatherill Report recommendations: industry and government action

Over the course of the past year, one of the recurring themes of the ASFS meetings was the implementation of the recommendations stemming from the *Report of the Independent Investigator into the 2008 Listeriosis Outbreak* (the Weatherill Report). At the first meeting, in June 2010, AAFC Deputy Minister John Knubley described the work of the Special Committee of Deputy Heads, the group responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Weatherill recommendations. Deputy Minister Knubley told the members that the Special Committee considers that the Subcommittee is an excellent means for the kind of collaboration and improved coordination between government, industry and the public that is called for in the Weatherill Report.

Highlights

During each meeting held in 2010-2011, members provided updates on progress made or on new developments related to food safety through a roundtable on progress in food safety and through updates, presentations, and discussion papers. For example, the Subcommittee heard from Health Canada about its updated *Listeria* policy, its new weight-of-evidence guidelines, and work on faster tests for *Listeria*. PHAC reported on changes in its governance structure and on its new Foodborne Illness Outbreak Response Protocol,

SECTION II: Accomplishments over the past year

which was finalized in June 2010. CFIA discussed governance changes recommended by the Weatherill Report and introduced the newly appointed Chief Food Safety Officer of Canada, Dr. Brian Evans, who addressed the committee about his new role.

CFIA also reported on the hiring and training of additional inspectors, and on the launch of the Government of Canada Food Safety Portal at www.foodsafety.gc.ca/english/fssa/role.asp#a.

Industry members from the meat-processing sector shared information on the work the meat industry has done to respond to the recommendations of the Weatherill Report. The Subcommittee heard that a Best Practices Manual for *Listeria* Control was developed jointly by the Canadian Meat Council, the Canadian Poultry and Egg Processors Council and the Further Poultry Processors Association of Canada and is being used by companies that process ready-to-eat meat. In addition, the sector has accelerated capital investment in food safety technologies, testing capacity, food safety/quality assurance hiring and training across the industry, and numerous processed meat companies are reformulating products with anti-microbials like lactate diacetate, which inhibit the growth of *Listeria*. Under direction from major retail and food service customers, some Canadian companies are also moving to food safety certification under the Global Food Safety Initiative, a collaboration between leading food safety experts from retail, manufacturer and food service companies, as well as service providers associated with the food supply chain. In line with the call by the Canadian Meat Council and the Canadian Poultry and Egg Processors Council to make food safety a non-competitive issue, the sector has seen cooperation through some cross-company technical help in response to product recalls and subsequent corrective actions. Finally, companies have provided input to Health Canada on the revised *Listeria* Policy and to CFIA on anticipated changes to the Meat Hygiene Manual of Procedures.

In short, the ASFS has been the vehicle for information-sharing and strengthening partnerships between industry and government. This is consistent with the Independent Investigator's concern that improved communication and collaboration among all partners is necessary to prevent foodborne illnesses and to act in a concerted way when an outbreak of foodborne illness occurs.

SECTION III: ASFS work plan for 2011-2012

To effectively pursue its mandate and achieve the goals outlined in the work plan for the upcoming year, the Subcommittee aims to move from learning and information-sharing into a more action-oriented period with demonstrated results. This section outlines specific priorities for the upcoming year organized by themes and discusses the future direction for the ASFS.

a. Specific priorities for 2011-2012

The Subcommittee will focus on the following priority areas/themes for the upcoming year:

- Food safety hazards and surveillance;
- Consumer food safety education;
- Food safety governance, legislation and regulations;
- Food safety performance measurement and reporting;
- Food safety infrastructure needs.

b. Future direction of the ASFS

Members will continue to learn from and share ideas with each other through this important forum. Topics of discussion will be influenced by emerging food safety issues at the local or international level in this complex and increasingly integrated global economy. The Subcommittee will be an ongoing forum for government and industry dialogue and collaborative action.

SECTION IV: Conclusion

Over the past year, the dialogue within the ASFS on initiatives that respond to the Weatherill recommendations has moved industry and government closer to a national and coordinated approach to food safety. The ASFS is the only forum that brings together policy makers, regulators and industry partners from input suppliers to final marketers, to address both the agricultural and public health aspects of food safety. The commitment to improved dialogue between industry and government has been demonstrated by the participation of senior government officials at each meeting. John Knubley, Deputy Minister, AAFC; Carole Swan, President, CFIA; George Da Pont, Executive Vice-President, CFIA; Brian Evans, Chief Food Safety Officer, CFIA; and Krista Outhwaite, Associate Deputy Minister, PHAC, attended one or more meetings in 2010-2011.

As a result of its work in 2010-2011, the Subcommittee now has the knowledge base to move from information-sharing to action-oriented results in support of its shared commitment to continuous improvement of the Canadian food safety system. The ASFS has focused on building a common understanding of the issues affecting food safety in Canada across a broad range of key industry and government stakeholders.

As we work together in 2011-2012, the ASFS has an opportunity to consider how the Subcommittee can deepen its contribution toward a national and coordinated approach to food safety. It is up to governments, industry and consumers to ensure that the Canadian food safety system is robust and can respond adequately to the rapidly evolving nature of food safety risks. To accomplish this, the ASFS will continue to consider ways to improve how all stakeholders work together to enhance food safety.

SECTION V:

APPENDIX 1:

Agri-Subcommittee on Food Safety: Terms of Reference

Preface

Beginning in 2003, sector-specific roundtables that involve participation from across the value chain were established to build a strengthened industry-government partnership, in order to gain recognition for world-leading Canadian capabilities and to secure maximum benefits from federal agricultural policy frameworks such as Growing Forward.

The nine existing value chain roundtables (beef, pork, grains innovation, organic, horticulture, special crops, pulses, fish and seafood, and food processing) maintain active mandates. One cross-cutting element that has become evident in the work of all roundtables is food safety, particularly as the food safety policy and regulatory landscape and food safety risks are evolving rapidly in Canada and internationally. When the co-chairs of all of the roundtables met at the All Chairs Meeting in November 2009, a subcommittee of the Roundtables to focus on food safety was proposed.

Recent food safety and zoonotic disease events, such as *E.coli*, *Salmonella* and *Listeria*, have highlighted the need for industry and government to enhance efforts to manage food safety risks. The Agri-subcommittee on Food Safety will help facilitate dialogue between government and industry in response to emerging food safety events. For example, the subcommittee can provide a forum for government and industry dialogue on their respective responses and joint actions in response to the 2008 listeriosis outbreak, particularly regarding the recommendations of the Weatherill report.

Rationale

Food safety is an area of shared jurisdiction and responsibility among governments, industry and consumers. Each has important roles to play and collaboration among all partners is key to the success of the overall food safety system. The collective challenge for all partners is to build better risk-based food safety systems that are grounded in prevention and continuous improvement.

While there is a recognized need for engagement with all stakeholders, including consumers, the subcommittee is designed to promote dialogue between industry and government, given their primary responsibility for food safety. This forum is complemented by other food safety stakeholder engagement mechanisms, such as the Health Canada Food Regulatory Advisory Committee, which includes broader consumer, researcher, public health and industry representation.

Mandate

The purpose of ASFS is to provide a forum for dialogue among government and industry partners from input suppliers to final marketers. The ASFS will provide a bridge to the industry value chain roundtables and other industry fora to promote broader communication

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concerning joint government and industry food safety priorities. AAFC, Health Canada (HC), CFIA and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) always retain decision-making authority and responsibilities.

Specifically, ASFS will work to:

1. Contribute to the development and implementation of food safety policies and standards (set by either government or industry) that reflect current food safety knowledge and best practices.
2. Consider the application of principles for stronger food safety systems and governance across the Canadian food safety system.
3. Provide a forum for government and industry dialogue on their respective responses and joint actions to improve the food safety system.
4. Consider ways to strengthen the government and industry partnership on consumer food safety education through further engagement of the industry roundtables or other appropriate groups.
5. Consider opportunities to strengthen food safety performance reporting in Canada using data from multiple available sources and identifying potential additional data sources in order to stimulate continuous improvement.
6. Analyze the implementation of agreed-upon actions and ensure results are reported regularly to the value chain roundtables and other industry fora, as well as to appropriate fora within HC, CFIA, PHAC and AAFC.

Membership

The subcommittee will be co-chaired by one senior executive from the federal government and one from industry. The work of the co-chairs and overall operations of the subcommittee will be supported by AAFC.

Initially, industry will have up to 12 members, (one from each of the nine existing roundtables and one from each of three additional organizations if required), with one member from each government organization: AAFC, HC, CFIA, PHAC (at the Director level or higher) occupying the remaining seats, for an initial total of up to 16 members on the subcommittee.

Continuity in membership is vital to assuring the success of the subcommittee. Every effort will be made by members to ensure their ongoing, active participation in the operations.

SECTION V: APPENDIX 1: Agri-Subcommittee on Food Safety: Terms of Reference

Membership considerations

The subcommittee is a government and industry forum for dialogue on food safety issues. Each value chain roundtable will identify one official representative. Industry membership will reflect the broadest possible range of perspectives from across the various roundtables and the value chain (e.g. input suppliers, producers, processors, further processors, traders/marketers, retail and food service interests).

CFIA, AAFC, HC and PHAC will be represented, although the subcommittee may want to consider if and when to invite any other federal departments or agencies, and provincial/territorial governments on a permanent or ad hoc basis. A limited number of federal employees whose duties are of relevance to the mandate of the subcommittee may sit as observers.

From time to time, members will assess whether composition is enabling the roundtable to benefit from the full range of perspectives and expertise it requires in order to fulfill its mandate.

The ASFS can nominate additional members from sectors or organizations not represented at the roundtables if they so wish and guests can be invited as appropriate. Decisions with respect to the operation of the subcommittee will be made by consensus.

Confidentiality

To be productive, dialogue must be as frank and open as possible. Statements by individual members are assumed to represent their personal views unless identified as positions of the organization they represent. Members agree that unless otherwise indicated (e.g. organizational commitments to agreed-upon action items), individual statements should not be construed or represented to others as an official position of any organization.

Building Agreement

Collaborative research and analysis will, as required, assist the subcommittee in building a shared understanding of issues and opportunities.

Reporting

The subcommittee's success will depend, in part, on the shared commitment of all of its members to delivering on agreed-upon actions and results. Members agree to hold each other mutually accountable for the achievement of results. Individual members will report to the subcommittee as a whole on the status of agreed-upon actions. In addition, it is expected that the subcommittee will provide periodic updates to the federal roundtables as well as to appropriate fora within HC, CFIA, PHAC and AAFC.

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Frequency / Duration

The subcommittee is expected to be an ongoing forum for government and industry dialogue and collaborative action. In the first year of operation, the subcommittee may need to meet at least four times. As it evolves, less frequent meetings may be required.

Costs

AAFC will cover up to 50% of reasonable and appropriate travel and accommodation costs (as determined by relevant Treasury Board policies and directives) that are directly related to a member's participation in a subcommittee meeting, the expenses of the meeting and research as required.

Secretariat

Planning and coordination of the subcommittee's operations will be supported by the VCRT secretariat, AAFC.

SECTION V: APPENDIX 2: Agri-Subcommittee on Food Safety: Membership principles, Process and Criteria

Membership principles

1. The ASFS will seek members with expertise or experience related to its mandate.
2. Industry membership should reflect the broadest possible range of perspectives from across the various agri-food sectors and value chains.
3. Additional members should represent sectors or organizations not currently represented on the subcommittee.
4. To ensure continuity in membership, members will commit to a two-year term with the possibility of extension.
5. If a member misses three consecutive meetings of the ASFS, he or she will be asked to step down and the sector will be asked to propose a replacement.
6. In order to facilitate the mandate of the ASFS, membership will be limited to a maximum of 20 individuals.

Process and Criteria

- Industry members shall be nominated by their value chain roundtable or sector organization, and should meet the following criteria:
 - demonstrated knowledge and commitment to food safety
 - demonstrated ability to represent the entire supply chain of their sector
 - demonstrated knowledge of the federal food safety system
 - demonstrated ability to act as a liaison between the sector and the ASFS
 - demonstrated ability to work with government and industry members toward a common goal
- Federal members shall be nominated by their respective Deputy Heads and shall meet the following criteria:
 - demonstrated knowledge and commitment to food safety
 - demonstrated knowledge of food safety policy issues
 - demonstrated ability to represent the federal government
 - demonstrated ability to work with government and industry members toward a common goal

SECTION V: APPENDIX 2: Agri-Subcommittee on Food Safety: Membership principles, Process and Criteria

- Nominees will demonstrate how they meet the criteria for membership by providing a biography that includes evidence of the relevant experience and expertise required.
- Final decisions on membership shall be made by the federal and industry co-chairs.
- The industry co-chair shall be chosen by the Subcommittee as a whole.
- The federal co-chair shall be chosen by the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.
- In addition to meeting the criteria for industry members and federal members respectively, the industry co-chair and federal co-chair shall meet the following additional criterion:
 - demonstrated ability to facilitate discussion and action among government and industry members representing diverse views and interests.

SECTION V: APPENDIX 3: Members of the Agri-Subcommittee on Food Safety as of March 31, 2011

| Names | Organization |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Co-Chairs | |
| Dennis Laycraft (Industry Co-Chair) | Canadian Cattlemen's Association |
| Anna Romano (Government Co-Chair) | Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada Food Safety Review Secretariat |
| Industry Members | |
| Albert Chambers | Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition |
| Brian Read [Beef] | XL Foods / Canada Meat Council |
| Chris Kyte [Food Processing] | Food Processors of Canada |
| Jackie Crichton [Retail] | Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors |
| Laura Telford [Organics] | Canadian Organic Growers |
| Patrick McGuinness [Seafood] | Fisheries Council of Canada |
| Rob Meijer [Poultry] | Cargill Ltd. |
| Rob Freeman [Food Services] | McDonald's Restaurants of Canada Ltd. |
| Tyler Bjornson [Grains Innovation] | Viterra |
| Rory McAlpine [Pork] | Maple Leaf Foods Inc. |
| Rick Phillips [Dairy] | Dairy Farmers of Canada |
| Sherry Casey [Pulses] | Loblaw Companies Ltd. |
| Tom Halpenny [Special crops] | Mustard Capital Inc. |
| Federal Members | |
| Barbara Jordan | Canadian Food Inspection Agency |
| Marian Harymann | Public Health Agency of Canada |
| Paul Martin | Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada |
| Samuel Godefroy | Health Canada |