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liaison

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency Magazine

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Canadian Food Inspection Agency

Agence canadienne d'inspection des aliments

Canada

liaison

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency Magazine

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Food for Feedback Fodder

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liaison is the voice of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, a federal science-based organization responsible for safeguarding the food supply, monitoring animal health and protecting plants and crops from pests and other environmental hazards.

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Cover Photo: *Vice Minister Pu Changcheng of the Chinese General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine in Canada for talks with top officials of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, including President Carole Swan and Dr. Brian Evans, Chief Food Safety and Veterinary Officer for Canada.*

liaison welcomes letters to the editor, suggestions and contributions. Please include name, e-mail address and telephone number.

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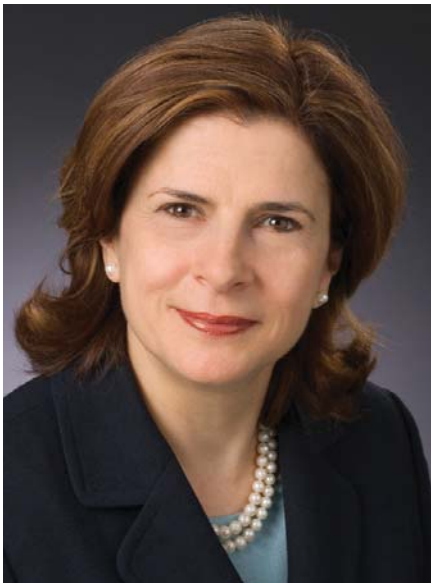
Message from the President



Carole Swan

Food can be derived in many different ways, from the gains of hunting, gathering and gardening, to the growing, harvesting, rearing and raising of food from plants and animals that has been happening for centuries in agrarian cultures. But never before has there been significant movement of food products to and from markets around the world quite like today's global marketplace.

The regulatory activities of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) impact the operations of industry stakeholders at all stages along the food supply continuum, and now a diverse global food market is challenging food safety systems everywhere. The potential implications of mass distribution networks are far reaching as products and ingredients travel worldwide for a variety of food choices and into processed products to compete for the consumer's palate.

This edition of liaison Magazine features the CFIA's efforts to meet the challenges of globalization and international trade, including the agency's activities on the international stage to support fair trade practices and the use of science-based standards. The agency activities and programs described in this edition impact the international trade of Canadian food, animal and plant life products. While food safety and animal health are subjects we examine, we also present stories on another important aspect of CFIA's responsibilities, namely the protection of Canada's plant life resource base and some of the international implications for this sector.

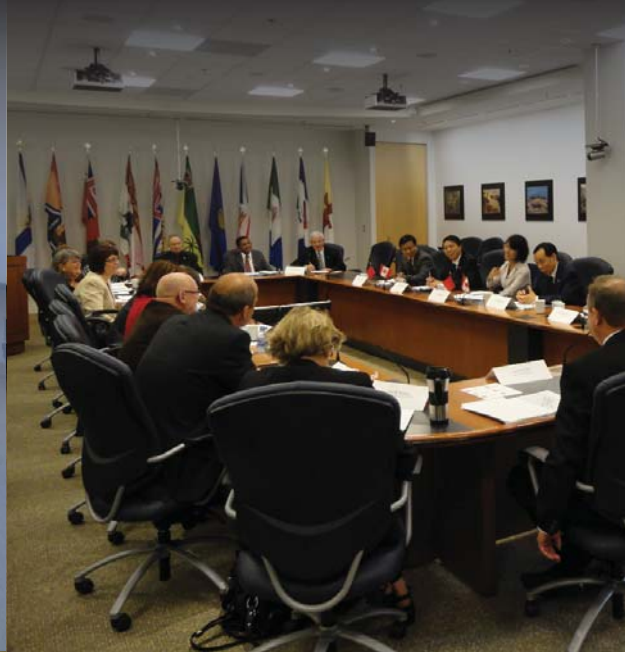
A focus on sound science is the backbone of our organization and the basis for critical services such as inspections, audits, licensing and accreditation. The focus on science is also reflected in this edition of liaison.

The realities of global trade in food, animal and plant products affect us all. The CFIA works to meet the challenges of these new realities with strong international partnerships, modernized approaches to legislation and inspection, and the latest in scientific innovation.

International Relationships

Support Safe and Fair Trade

by Thomas Costea



The advent of prolific worldwide trade in food, animal and plant life products not only provides great opportunities for Canadian industry sectors, it also brings into play an important theatre of international relationships. Bilateral relations with trading partners and active participation in the landscape of international standard setting organizations are responsibilities shared by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA).

The CFIA is engaged in efforts to support the safety of products traded internationally and promote the use of science-based standards in trade agreements. The agency does this through various channels, including involvement with international organizations that affect the food, animal and plant life resource base. The CFIA's participation in developing international standards contributes to science-based measures that can be applied to the conditions of international trade.

"We are active participants in international standard setting organizations to support the use of sound science in formulating standards and trade rules," says Debra Bryanton, Executive Director of CFIA's International Policy Directorate. "The CFIA is part of a government team effort endeavouring to negotiate Canada's position internationally, to provide a level playing field for industry and guard against measures that are driven by commercial marketing rather than based on science."

The Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, established in 1995 with the creation of the World Trade Organization, although not mandatory is largely the basis of trade rules for food products derived from animal and plant life products respectively. This agreement brought together three organizations concerned with food safety, animal health and the protection of plant life: Codex Alimentarius Commission, World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), as well as related activities with the Food and Agriculture Organization and World Health Organization. These bodies serve as reference points in reflecting international standards, however the standards emanating from their activities are not binding nor mandatory for trade rules.

Technical Specialist Postings

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) currently has four technical specialists at key international posts, with a fifth and sixth due to be added this winter and summer. The four current postings include:

- Beijing, China
- Tokyo, Japan
- Mexico City, Mexico
- Brussels, Belgium

A fifth posting in Moscow, Russia is expected to take place this winter and a sixth this summer in New Delhi, India. The role of these technical specialists, originally part of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy market recovery strategy for Canadian beef, now covers market access issues related to the entire range of CFIA programs in food safety, animal and plant health, including support for inspection and certification activities. The objectives of these posts are to facilitate and sustain market access through interventions and regular meetings with regulatory counterparts, maintain confidence in the Canadian system as a technical liaison between countries and CFIA, and better inform industry and government officials on the country environment.

Dr. Louise Carrière

A Chinese delegation with the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine at the table engaged in talks with top officials of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency; part of ongoing international relations.

"We support international standards that nurture a predictable environment for trade rules," says Bryanton. "We attempt to limit the application of inappropriate factors in trading agreements; factors outside of a science base which might impact our national standards. The ideal situation is to have international standards reflect Canadian regulations."

The CFIA integrates appropriate international standards into the federal regulatory framework covering food safety and the health of animals and plant life. Data from companies developing products is reviewed at the international level by expert committees with representation from participating countries to determine the likelihood of health hazards – risk assessments – and recommendations for actions to address those potential hazards – risk management. Scientific analysis shared through Codex for example, can contribute to recommended maximum residue levels for chemicals and toxins in various food products.

Codex is an intergovernmental body that examines food standards, guidelines and other recommendations to protect the health of consumers and support fair practices in food trade. There are currently 183 member countries of Codex, representing 99 percent of the world's population. Canada has been the host country for the Codex Committee on Food Labelling since its first session in 1965, typically attended by over 250 delegates representing 80-plus Codex member countries and 20-plus international non-governmental organizations.

The CFIA also pays a contribution to the OIE and the IPPC, both with over 170 member countries and territories. The OIE is dedicated to improving animal health worldwide and Canada is at the forefront of contributions to standards for science and risk management of diseases in animals raised for food, as well as animal traceability and identification systems (*Industry Collaboration Helps Develop Canada's Traceability System, Liaison Vol. 1 No. 2 Fall 2010*).

The IPPC carries out activities aimed at protecting the world's cultivated and natural plant resources from the spread and introduction of plant pests, while minimizing interference with the international movement of goods and people. The IPPC and the OIE not only engage in setting standards for animal and plant health, but they also contribute to capacity building such as accommodating reference laboratories for testing procedures. Professional development in the disciplines of animal and plant health is also promoted through peer review and agreements to share expertise and professional services.

"These organizations present an opportunity for all countries to join the international community in formulating and harmonizing standards," says Bryanton. "They also provide an important forum for discussion of emerging issues."

International Highlights

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) supports international trade relations by providing scientific and technical advice that often contributes to agreements on the conditions for movement of food, animal and plant life products. Recent examples include shipments of crop exports.

Canola Exports to China – The detection of blackleg in canola, a fungus disease spread by seed, threatened Canadian shipments to China. The CFIA implemented molecular diagnostic procedures by harmonizing sample processing and testing protocols with those used by China. The CFIA worked in collaboration with other government departments and the canola industry to maintain market access while addressing China's concerns related to blackleg.

Pulse Crop Exports to India – A plant health memorandum of understanding between CFIA and India is under review for the importation of pulses into India, providing stability for Canadian exports. India currently requires pulses – peas, chickpeas and lentils – to be certified for its quarantine pests, including stem and bulb nematode, and fumigated with methyl bromide in the country of origin. Recognizing that Canada cannot effectively fumigate in cold temperatures, fumigation at port of arrival in India is allowed through exemptions to the requirement renewed every six months. Testing for stem and bulb nematode is done during loading in Canada and test results are received only after cargo has left port. Shipments that test positive must be re-routed to Singapore for fumigation under CFIA oversight prior to arrival in India. A bilateral framework of technical working groups has been drafted which provides for fumigation at port of arrival in India and removes the requirement for stem and bulb nematode testing.

Canary Seed Exports to Mexico – The presence of weed seeds in canary seed shipments halted Canadian exports to Mexico. The CFIA helped achieve a bilateral agreement for the importation of canary seed shipments into Mexico based on laboratory analysis for weed seeds. The analysis is done by CFIA's seed laboratory and operations staff.

Yves Lacroix

NEW REGULATIONS Provide Tools to

by Marcella Sousa

Food safety systems are evolving globally to meet the challenges posed by increased volumes of trade, consumer demands and variations in food safety frameworks among countries worldwide.

Increased volumes of imports into Canada have led to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's new proposed Imported Food Sector Product Regulations.

New proposed Imported Food Sector Product Regulations will help the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) minimize the risk of unsafe foods entering the country by reinforcing the accountability of importers for the safety of foods they import. The regulations will also allow the CFIA to respond more quickly and effectively in the event of food safety issues involving imported products. The proposed regulations are one initiative under the CFIA's Food Safety Action Plan, which involves a coordinated partnership to strengthen the safety of imported food and modernize food safety systems for all food sold in Canada.

"In an ever-changing global marketplace where the food we eat is sourced from around the world, the responsibility to protect Canadians from preventable food safety risks in imported products is shared between the CFIA and its partners, including other government departments and industry," says Mark Burgham, Director of the Imported and Manufactured Food Division at CFIA. "This regulatory proposal meets the CFIA's objectives of modernizing and strengthening Canada's food safety system by identifying and engaging our importer community, enhancing control measures within Canada and at its borders, and promoting a proactive approach to food safety that will assist industry in complying with CFIA's regulatory requirements."

This new regulatory proposal will provide new tools for importers to trace products and remove unsafe products from the marketplace quickly and efficiently.

Specific commodities shipped and sold nationally and internationally that are regulated under specific trade and commerce legislative frameworks include meat and poultry, fish and seafood, fresh produce, dairy, eggs, honey and processed products. Certain imported food products and ingredients that do not fall under these commodity groups – such as bakery items, fats and oils, spices, infant formula, alcoholic beverages and ingredients

Safeguard Imported Food

A control system and detailed record keeping – including shipment, distribution and product information, quality control results, sanitation, consumer complaints and corrective actions – will demonstrate due diligence by importers and potentially help rebuild lost consumer confidence in imported foods.

for various processed foods – are currently only subject to the health and safety requirements of the Food and Drugs Act and Regulations.

This new regulatory proposal will provide new tools for importers to trace products and remove unsafe products from the marketplace quickly and efficiently. The new regulations, under the Canada Agricultural Products Act, will require importers of food products to acquire a licence, develop and implement a Preventive Food Safety Control System and a recall plan, maintain detailed records of their products and notify the CFIA within 24 hours if they become aware of any product that poses a risk to the public.

"The licensing of importers will present the CFIA with an opportunity to build on the relationship with this sector and target important information to importers directly affected by food safety incidents," says Burgham. "Most of this industry sector already has control systems in place on a voluntary basis. This will become a requirement with the proposed regulations. Many of our trading partners are implementing similar requirements."

A control system and detailed record keeping – including shipment, distribution and product information, quality control results, sanitation, consumer complaints and corrective actions – will demonstrate due diligence by importers and potentially help rebuild lost consumer confidence in imported foods. Control systems and record keeping will also provide a solid foundation for communicating food safety requirements to foreign suppliers. Verification of licences, written control systems and recall plans, along with product and facility inspections, will be used by the CFIA to oversee compliance with the new regulations.

The CFIA completed a stakeholder consultation on the proposed importer regulations in the fall of 2010 and plans to officially pre-publish the proposed regulations this spring, allowing for a comment period before final publication later this year. It is anticipated that the regulations will be phased in, with certain provisions taking effect immediately and the provisions dealing with licensing and implementation of a Preventive Food Safety Control System taking effect in March 2013.

The CFIA completed a stakeholder consultation on the proposed importer regulations in the fall of 2010 and plans to officially pre-publish the proposed regulations this spring, allowing for a comment period before final publication later this year.

New Badges for CFIA Inspectors

Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) inspection staff interacting with regulated parties across Canada will be carrying badges starting this spring. The new badges are intended to clearly identify CFIA staff during inspection duties, especially in multi-jurisdictional situations.

"A badge will help with identification and garner trust when I'm dealing with people who may not be familiar with me or other CFIA inspectors," says Samuel Sabo, a Feed Specialist Inspector who has been involved in federal inspection for 18 years. "The badge also makes you feel like you are part of a team working to protect people and the food supply."

Rachel Mahoney

World Leaders in a Shared Vision for Managing Animal Health Emergencies

by Ingrid Van der Linden, Risk Analyst and Scientific Advisor, CFIA

International trade in animals and animal products has elevated the impact of animal disease emergencies over the last two decades, from the spread of foot-and-mouth disease and bovine spongiform encephalopathy in cattle, to outbreaks of avian influenza in poultry. The new global reality means that managing the risk associated with animals, products and diseases across international borders is challenging animal health emergency management systems in countries worldwide.

Leading international animal health specialists discuss Foresight for Canadian Animal Health (left to right): Dr. Joe Brownlie and Dr. Bill Parish of the United Kingdom, Dr. Lonnie King of the United States, Ted Bilyea, former executive vice-president of Maple Leaf Foods, Canada's Chief Veterinary and Food Safety Officer Dr. Brian Evans and Dr. Peter Black of Australia.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is taking the lead internationally in preparing for future threats to the health of domesticated and wild animal populations. Foresight for Canadian Animal Health (Fore-CAN) is entering the third and final year of a $1.9-million multi-jurisdictional project to develop a shared vision and alignment of strategies for managing animal health emergencies in the future.

"We have developed a network of Canadian and international stakeholders and experts in animal and public health, risk assessment, disease surveillance and foresight," says Dr. Shane Renwick, the CFIA's Director of Animal Health Science Foresight and manager of the Fore-CAN project. "Canada is the only country to bring together these international parties on the subject of animal health emergency management."

Fore-CAN has engaged partners from the federal, provincial, academic, industry and social sectors both in Canada and internationally, including the Australian and United Kingdom Offices of the Chief Veterinary Officer, the Royal Veterinary College and the Office of Foresight in the U.K. and the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The basic premise behind the Fore-CAN project is linking key stakeholders to better anticipate complex, future events using foresight tools including the development of future scenarios. This informs and supports government and industry decision-making and improves long-term planning for animal health emergencies. New knowledge and insight gained from foresight exercises allow government, industry and other relevant organizations to proactively identify and develop the animal health surveillance and emergency management capabilities and capacity that will be required to address future challenges.

Fore-CAN partners have identified issues and driving forces, drafted plausible future scenarios and their implications, mapped the current

Continued on page 16

Setting the Standards for Seed Testing

by Thomas Costea

It is said in some circles that the sustenance of life on our planet begins with a seed. The international organizations dedicated to evaluating the quality of seeds for plant life often talk in these tones to remind people that the importance of seeds is sometimes taken for granted.

Seed quality assurance systems are important to global food security, as well as supporting the trade of seeds in the international marketplace. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) works with the seed sector in Canada and various partners to maintain the infrastructure for seed certification, including the accreditation of private laboratories.

The Seed Science and Technology Section at the Saskatoon Laboratory of the CFIA is an accredited International Seed Testing Association (ISTA) laboratory and a member of the Association of Official Seed Testing Analysts (AOSA). The Saskatoon seed lab actively participates in these two key seed testing organizations to serve the Canadian public, farmers, seed growers and sellers, by testing and monitoring seeds imported into Canada, grown and sold in Canada, as well as for export.

"Our accreditation as a Canadian ISTA laboratory allows us to meet international standards, as well as promote the acceptance and harmonization of Canadian standards and test procedures conducted at private labs across Canada accredited by CFIA," says Janine Maruschak, Head of the Seed Science and Technology Section with the Saskatoon Laboratory. "We also develop protocols, accreditation standards and monitor for quality so that private sector laboratories can conduct service testing for seed certification. This supports the viability of the Canadian seed sector as the demand for certification from export markets continues to increase."

The CFIA sets standards for private laboratories and the Canadian Seed Institute audits accredited labs against the standards. The CFIA looks to ISTA and AOSA seed testing rules to develop Canada's seed testing procedures and Seed Laboratory Accreditation and Audit Protocol to help set the standard for private labs. There are approximately 37 accredited seed laboratories in Canada that are subject to CFIA and Canadian Seed Institute monitoring.

Fully trained and accredited seed analysts at Canadian Food Inspection Agency's Saskatoon Laboratory reviewing samples of corn seedlings.

"The CFIA incorporates international procedures and processes into the Canadian laboratory accreditation program" says Maruschak. "It's a practical program that we have implemented in a cooperative, step-by-step fashion that can be adapted to evolving standards originating with the International Organization for Standardization."

Accrediting private labs to test for seed certification also frees up important resources, allowing CFIA to meet the demand for phytosanitary certification which attests that seed and grain shipments for export are free of regulated insects, diseases and weed seeds.

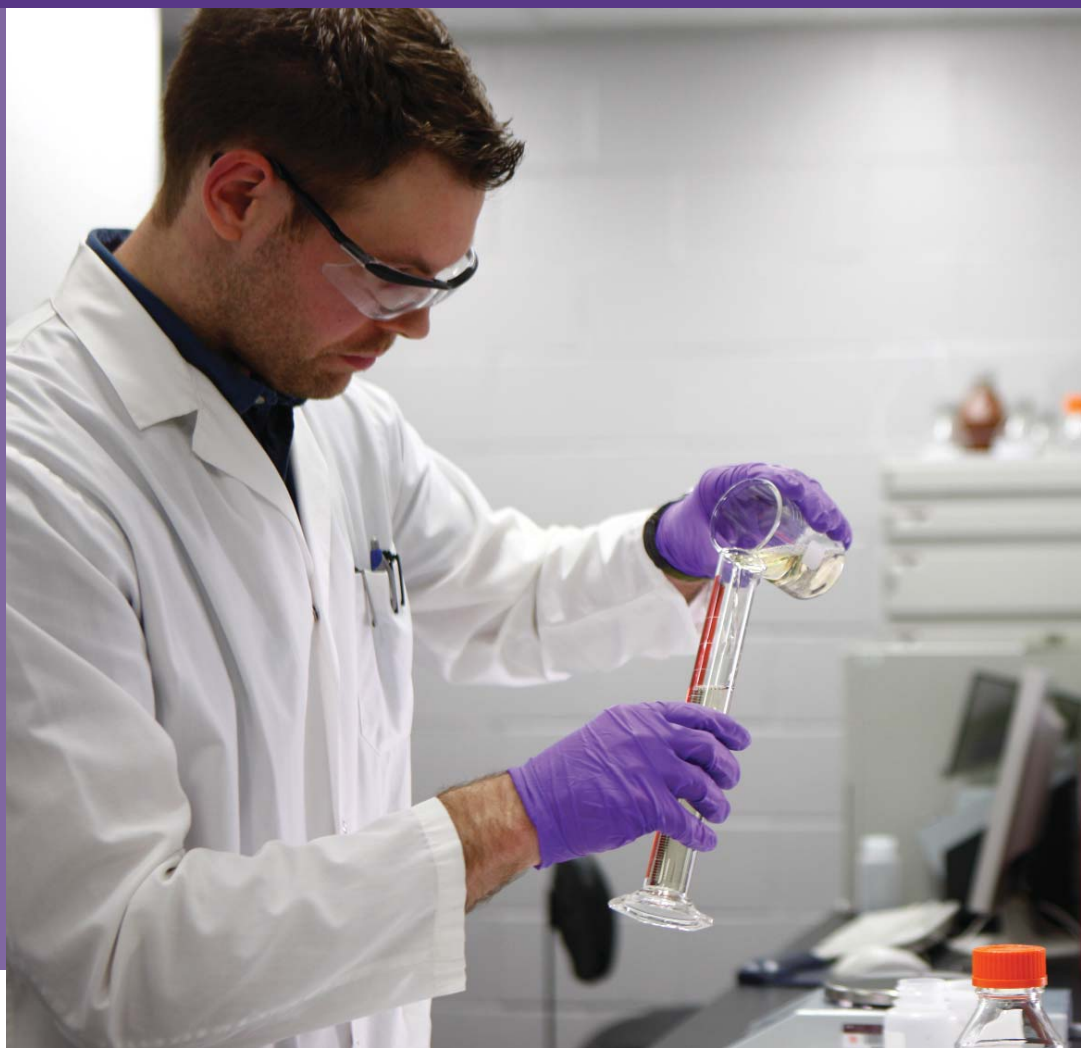
"The pressure on government to issue phytosanitary certificates is increasing, and it will help support the seed sector if we can expand private seed testing lab accreditation to include weed seed analysis for phytosanitary certification purposes," says Maruschak.

The benefits of the Saskatoon Laboratory's ISTA and AOSA membership include hosting international workshops, such as the ISTA Quality Assurance Workshop in October 2010 successfully held in Saskatoon. Maruschak is on the executive board of AOSA and Dr. Steve Jones, the Chief of Seed Purity and Germination at the Saskatoon Laboratory, is an executive committee member with ISTA and chair of its Rules committee. CFIA's National Seed Herbarium Biologist in Saskatoon, Dr. Ruojing Wang, sits on three ISTA committees: Purity, Genetically Modified Organisms and Proficiency Testing.

Allergen Testing Validation Protects Consumers

by Karl Kurz
Food Chemistry Specialist, CFIA

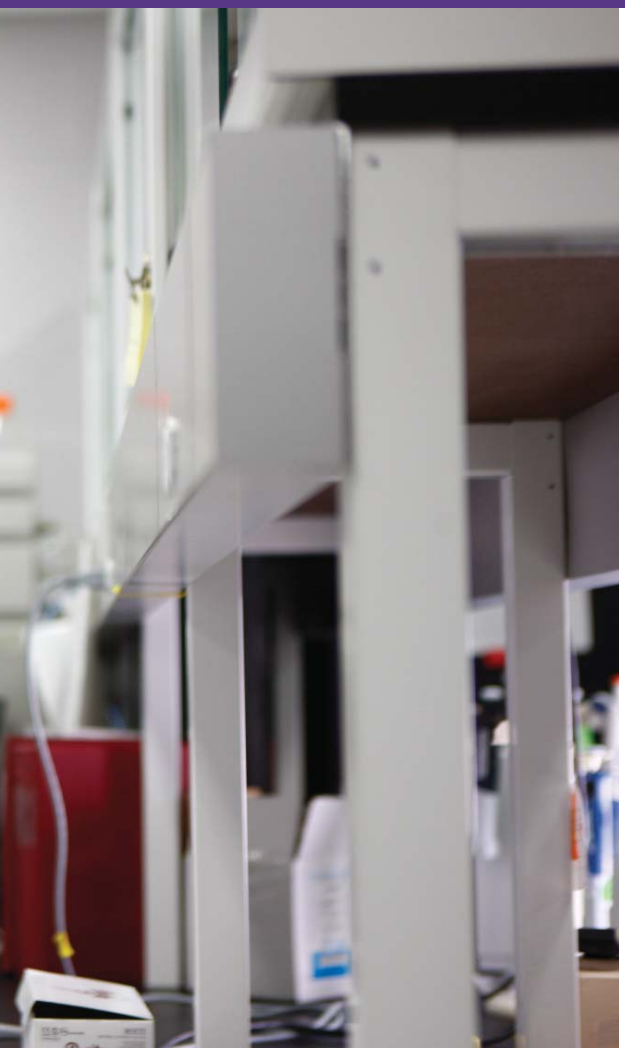
Modern food safety systems have come a long way in protecting consumers, including a significant movement to detect allergens and safeguard people with allergies by providing foods that are free of the major allergen ingredients. A critical element in this movement of the food industry is the ability to test for allergens with accuracy and consistency.



The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is heavily involved in compliance testing of food products, with allergens being a major category of increasing importance. The CFIA not only tests food samples for allergens, but it also evaluates and validates commercial test kits for its own needs and potential use by the food industry.

"The growing market for allergen-free food is an opportunity for industry," says Eric Marceau, Scientific Specialist at the CFIA's Longueuil, Que. Laboratory. "We follow international trends on testing methods and method validation to make sure we use the best science available, so we're ready when novel foods hit the market and prepared for future requests. The end result is that we offer a broad range of testing to ensure food can be consumed safely by people with allergies, especially when allergen-free labels are used."

An important tool for government and industry to safeguard the food supply is the evaluation and validation of food allergen test kits. The CFIA and Health Canada have been evaluating test kits for the major allergens through the Allergen Methods Committee over the last few years. The CFIA's laboratories completed validation of a soy test kit last year.



Eric Marceau, Scientific Specialist at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's Longueuil, Que. Laboratory was on the team that validated a soy allergen test kit last year.

The validation process involves a review of literature, identifying reference material to test the capacity of the kit, conducting a collaborative study to validate the methodology and developing an ongoing quality control procedure. All this work has to be completed before the method can be used by CFIA laboratories.

"The CFIA tries to expand its list of methods for food allergens by participating in collaborative studies every year," says Marceau. The collaborative soy study was conducted with the test kit manufacturer and involved a blind test of samples going to 14 different laboratories to see if the kit met performance requirements.

'Food recalls are conducted as the result of the testing we do. In the end these actions might save some lives and certainly help protect people with allergies.'

The evaluation process then went into depth with a total of 168 samples of infant formula and baby food exchanged between the CFIA's Longueuil, Que. and Burnaby, B.C. Laboratories. An inherent challenge in validating the test kit is to make sure the kit has the capability to detect both the raw protein and the protein after it has been heat processed. Commercial soy flours were selected as "in-house reference materials" for quality control to confirm the kit can detect soy protein, denatured or not, and to ensure the sample test is accurate.

The Allergen Methods Committee shares information from the validation of test kits with the food industry, including making presentations at workshops and symposiums. The work on allergen test kits is part of the agency's ongoing efforts to work with industry and other stakeholders to monitor for the presence of undeclared food allergens and develop tools for food safety systems, such as accurate and dependable testing.

"An important part of our job is to share information, provide scientific advice and answer questions. We gladly exchange information on our methods and validation procedures with anyone who requests it," says Marceau. "CFIA takes all consumer complaints very seriously and continually conducts investigations. Our aim is to provide same-day turnaround for allergen testing, as much as possible. Food recalls are conducted as the result of the testing we do. In the end these actions might save some lives and certainly help protect people with allergies."

CFIA laboratories are currently looking at a mustard allergen kit for the next collaborative study in this area, as mustard has recently been added to the Canadian list of priority food allergens.

Pest Surveys

Protect Plant Life Resources

by Thomas Costea

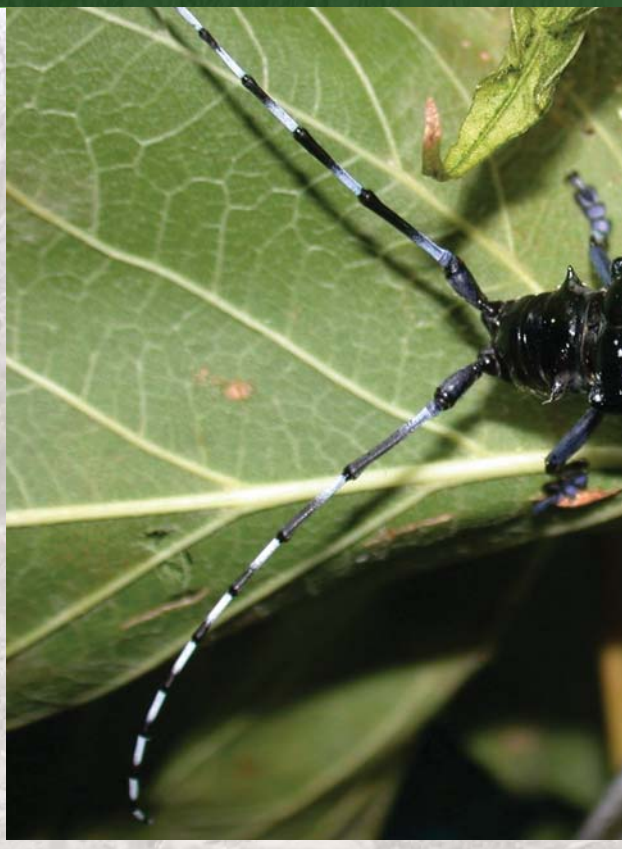
The world of bugs and insects can be fascinating to the casual observer; a pervasive kingdom where you are never more than two metres away from a spider or other microscopic creature. However, for both the domestic and international trade of food crops, horticulture and forestry products, the containment and control of something so ubiquitous is the serious challenge for a significant economic sector.

The protection of cultivated and natural plant life resources from these tiny creatures referred to as pests and diseases is also serious business for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). The Plant Health Surveillance Unit is part of the agency's plant protection program to manage pests and certify the movement of plant life products domestically and internationally.

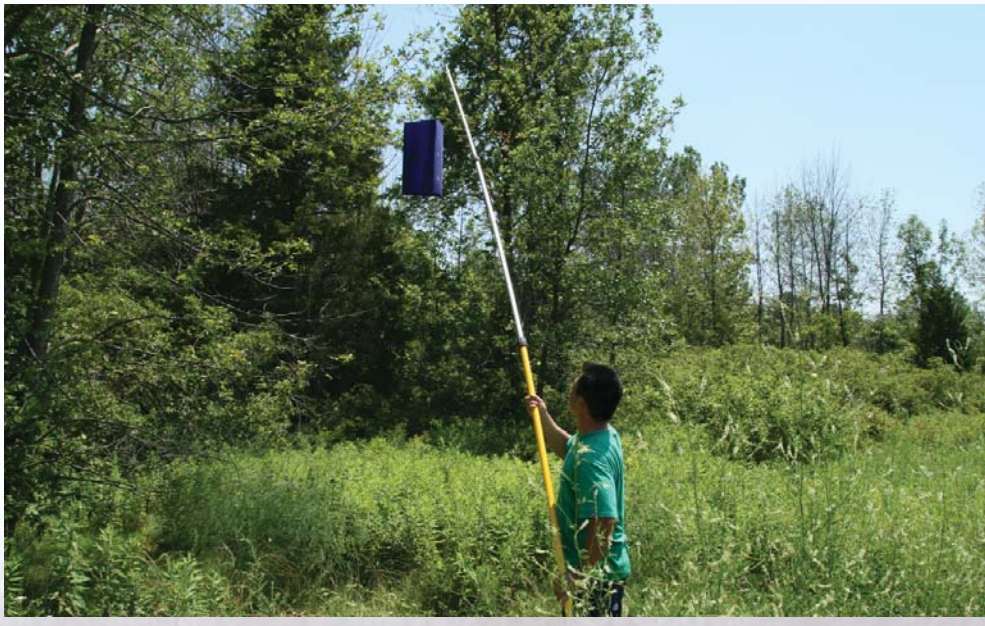
"Our job is to determine if a pest or disease is present in Canada or not, and if it's here, how big is the infestation," says Rob Favrin, the National Manager of CFIA's Plant Health Surveillance Unit. "One of the main goals of the plant health program at CFIA is to limit the movement of pests and diseases with the trade of plants and plant products. We use survey information to help do this by designating pest-free areas that are recognized in bilateral agreements with our trading partners."

A critical tool in the detection and control of infestations are the plant pest surveys conducted by the surveillance unit. The surveys target pests of economic or environmental importance as defined through International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures. These standards are developed by the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), an organization consisting of over 170 member countries and territories worldwide.

Canada works closely with the IPPC through its membership in the North American Plant Protection Organization to develop policy directives and regulate restrictions on imports, exports and the movement of products domestically. The IPPC provides an international framework for plant protection with International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures, which include standards for pest surveillance, import regulations and pest risk analysis, compliance procedures and phytosanitary inspection methodologies, quarantines, exotic pest emergency response and export certification. The CFIA also looks to the Canadian Forest Service and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada for references and research on pest and disease management.

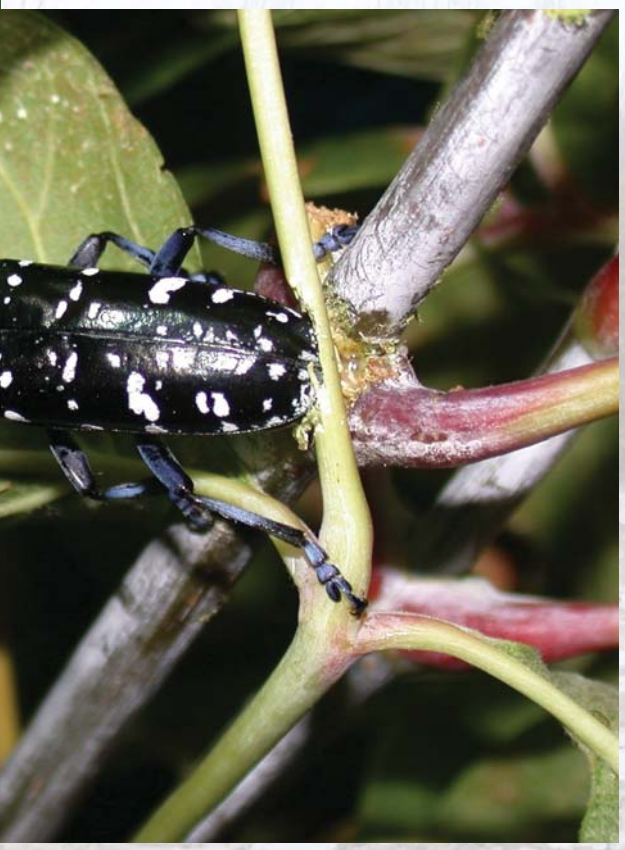


The CFIA regulates a wide diversity of plant life due to the large number of pests and plant hosts ranging in everything from food crops to flowers, trees and soil. The locations of plant surveys are also diverse, including urban and rural forested areas, agricultural land, greenhouses and nurseries. Pathway surveys around high risk locations are also



Canadian Food Inspection Agency Survey Biologist Troy Kimoto places an emerald ash borer insect trap during a plant pest survey.

Asian longhorned beetle; one of the pests monitored by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.



conducted to identify pest risks with the movement of commodities such as the use of wood packaging.

The method used in a survey depends on the type of pest being targeted. It can include collecting plant or soil samples for diseases and nematodes, placing traps for insects and conducting visual inspections for insects, diseases and weeds.

"We are always developing new protocols and perfecting our methodologies, techniques and procedures for our surveys, because the pests are new to the Canadian environment and the detection methods are not always as well established as those used for well known indigenous pests," says Favrin. "The cooperation we receive from industry is also important to gather information on the size and nature of the sector affected. This helps us design sampling programs and support field inspectors in their survey work."

Control, containment and eradication programs are used for non-native species that are not present in Canada or under an official control program. Regulations on the movement of plant life and plant products are enforced to help CFIA certify products for export, control the spread of domestic pests and defend Canada's import policies designed to prevent the introduction of new pests.

"All this work depends on a comprehensive database," says Favrin. "It also allows us to continually improve our methods and techniques, such as refining our reporting procedures. In the next few months we are rolling out a new reporting tool that will help us better analyze our data and make better decisions to inform our programs."

The CFIA conducts surveys for about 15 to 25 plant pests annually at thousands of strategic sites across the country. Most surveys are carried out by CFIA staff, however the agency is increasingly exploring collaborative surveys with external partners such as provinces and municipalities.

Boosting Canada's Meat Sector with Exports

by Alan MacKenzie, Executive Editor of Canadian Meat Business

Alan MacKenzie

Canada's cattle and hog markets took quite a hit in 2010 due to a strong Canadian dollar and high corn prices – and it looks like producers will continue to feel pressure in 2011. Analysts predict grain prices will remain high for at least the first part of the year, particularly with United States corn inventories expected to be at their lowest level since 1996 before this year's harvest.

But according to some market watchers, this could be offset somewhat by strength from export markets.

"Export markets for beef and pork have lost ground due to the recession, but they've been recovering, so to speak," says Kevin Grier, senior market analyst with the George Morris Centre, an Ontario-based agriculture think tank. "The usual suspects have been improving – Pacific Rim countries such as Japan and Korea for pork, Mexico for beef and pork – and there is strength from emerging markets, such as Russia."

He notes, however, that the beef industry still remains challenged by restrictions put in place by several countries after bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) was confirmed in an Alberta animal on May 20, 2003.

By providing scientific and technical advice, and certifying the health of any animals or animal by-products set to leave the country, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is playing an important role in re-establishing and retaining export markets for Canadian beef in the years since the BSE outbreak.

In the last few years key markets such as the U.S., Mexico and Japan – the top three markets for Canadian beef – have re-opened, at least partially. South Korea, Canada's fourth-largest importer of Canadian beef prior to BSE, continues to be a challenge, but other markets continue to release trade barriers. Recent victories for the Canadian beef export industry include Colombia and the Philippines, which according to the Canadian Beef Export Federation (CBEF), are worth about $6 million and $20 million respectively.

In February 2011 Costa Rica opened its borders to Canadian beef as well. Although it is a smaller market for beef, strengthening our relationship with the country is still important. According to a press release from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, bilateral trade of agricultural products with Costa Rica was valued at $244 million as of November 2010.

Another successful benchmark that is due, at least in part, to the efforts of Canada's bilateral relations and negotiations is Japan's agreement not to install temporary bans on Canadian beef every time a BSE case is detected. According to the CBEF, the Japanese market in 2010 was worth approximately $13 million.

Open markets represent great opportunities for Canadian producers, and the CFIA, in its efforts to support the safety of our food products on the global stage, is helping to develop and maintain these markets.

To aid the CFIA in this important role, the Canadian meat sector needs to keep communication with the agency strong. With support from industry the CFIA can ensure trade standards are met and trade can remain strong.

Contributing to the Science and Capacity of Global Monitoring

by Dr. Brian Evans, Chief Food Safety Officer and Chief Veterinary Officer for Canada

Dr. Brian Evans

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) was created in 1997 with a then innovative organizational model for food safety risk management, bringing together resources under one agency. This provided coherent and integrated regulatory inspection for food at the federal level, as well as the animal and plant life resource base which is critical to safe production. Many of our trading partners soon followed with organizations such as Food Standards Australia-New Zealand, the United Kingdom's Food Standards Agency and the European Food Safety Authority.

A number of countries have studied the Canadian model and have come to recognize the benefit, as well as the imperative, of a horizontal risk management approach. This approach addresses the challenges of extended supply chains and globalized sourcing and distribution of ingredients and products with associated new and emergent risk pathways and potential health hazards. Canada and the CFIA continue on this learning journey along with our regulatory counterparts in other countries. We are collectively responding to the protection of consumers and contributing to the development of science-based standards to safeguard the food supply, as well as helping to build the capacity for food and health security.

Building this capacity brings our international relationships into the picture and the partnerships we have developed for surveillance, sharing best practices and retooling legislation to be responsive to new knowledge, technology and innovation. Increasing our coordination and cooperation with other international partners in various areas – including regulation, science, performance indicators and reporting – will assist in improving food safety outcomes.

In addition, it is important to recognize the investments being made on the part of industry and private sector companies to meet their responsibility to produce safe food. These efforts are creating a culture of continuous improvement. Demonstrating better transparency in performance measurement and reporting will not only lead to increased prevention of food safety system failures, but will also target inspection resources and interventions to areas of greater risks.

In truth, we all face the same challenges of maintaining the integrity of the supply chain and ensuring that food, whether imported or domestically produced, adheres to the same standards of safety. This involves many inputs and a wide spectrum of stakeholder groups.

Industry has the primary accountability for producing safe food and is responsible to ensure the effectiveness of their processing systems and controls along the food chain using principles such as Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point and Good Management Practices, while government verifies compliance with health and safety standards through inspections. The CFIA contributes to the use of sound science through its participation in international standard setting organizations. The agency is also nurturing its relationships with academia, the broader scientific community and the private sector in supporting the development and implementation of these standards.

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Stakeholder Engagement

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) continues its ongoing commitment of dialogue with all stakeholders by recently launching a new Consumer Association Roundtable to provide a forum for ongoing dialogue with consumer associations.

The Consumer Association Roundtable will ensure consumers have a voice in the food safety continuum and an opportunity to provide input on a variety of topics related to CFIA priorities, policies, programs and services. The roundtable, chaired by Canada's Chief Food Safety Officer and Chief Veterinary Officer Dr. Brian Evans, has a core membership of consumer associations with national or significant regional representation. Additional representatives, experts and speakers may be invited to provide input as required.

Debbie Vickers

World Leaders
in a Shared Vision for Managing Animal Health Emergencies

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animal health system and developed a shared vision of the requirements for a future system. Fore-CAN's next step is hosting a workshop this February with partners to develop strategy outcome roadmaps across five key capability areas. A symposium – Healthy Animals, Healthy Futures – is planned for May to highlight the proposed alignment of key initiatives that could comprise a roadmap for the animal health system of 2025 and beyond.

"Setting priorities for the strategic outcomes we are looking for allows us to identify gaps in emergency management systems. We can then fill those gaps by aligning new initiatives and capabilities in management systems to address the future challenges we have mapped out," says Dr. Renwick.

"Our aim is to use the shared vision of the future that has arisen from foresight for a convergence of on-the-ground actions that must be taken today to address animal health management into the future. We will establish priorities for the outcomes we need in order to manage future challenges and align them with current key animal health initiatives that may not necessarily be connected."

Fore-CAN is funded by the federal government's Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Explosives Research and Technology Initiative. Project partners include Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Public Health Agency of Canada, Health Canada, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, Canada's veterinary colleges, Dairy Farmers of Canada and TDV Global Inc.

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Furthermore, it is essential that the CFIA takes into account the development of private sector standards used by industry that, although not regulatory, are science-based and are complementary in achieving positive outcomes. Often such private sector standards can have a greater impact on behaviour and outcomes in the supply chain than regulatory frameworks. A visible case in point is the work on animal welfare standards adopted by the retail food industry in North America, pioneered by Dr. David Fraser, Chair of the Animal Welfare Program at the University of British Columbia.

The more performance information and knowledge we have, the more value we add to the job of identifying hazards and allocating our resources where investments in health and safety are necessary. The Global Food Safety Initiative based in Paris, France and funded by some of the world's leading food retailers and manufacturers is intended to build bridges, demonstrate the safety of the food supply chain and help accommodate training opportunities for auditors and verifiers. It is important for industry to have the opportunities to present ideas and innovations through international organizations such as this. It is equally important government recognizes the contributions that such programming may provide to reduce the regulatory burden, which can serve as a disincentive for industry to comply and undermine competitiveness.

Communication and information sharing among trading partners is crucial to monitoring the international supply chain of food, animal and plant life products. The International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN), created under the World Health Organization in support of global food safety monitoring, provides alerts to nations of food recalls and other concerns identified with food products that allow for countries to respond in a rapid and responsible manner.

It is part of our vision and commitment that the collaboration with international organizations, trading partners and industry will provide consumers with timely, valuable and reliable performance information to guide their decision-making and to further improve the safety of food in Canada and for the world.