

BRITISH COLUMBIA FOOD QUALITY & SAFETY INITIATIVE

**For Immediate Release
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B.C. AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY'S FOOD QUALITY & SAFETY INITIATIVE FINISHES FIRST YEAR WITH LOTS ON THE GO

VICTORIA, BC – British Columbia agriculture industry's Food Quality and Safety Initiative, designed to enhance the quality and safety of B.C. food products, has now completed its first year of activities.

The initiative, a five year program, helps fund industry projects that advance the B.C. agri-food industry's Food Quality and Safety Strategic Plan. Since launching its first substantive project on January 1, 2005, the initiative has supported six major projects, collectively valued at nearly \$1.8 million, and made a significant contribution to the enhancement of food quality and safety in British Columbia.

“The projects that have been approved so far will improve our ability to better serve the market with safe, high quality foods,” explains Roland Baumann, chair of the Food Quality and Safety advisory committee, which directs the initiative. “Research indicates that consumers, while confident about the quality and safety of the food supply, are becoming more discriminating and increasingly interested in quality and safety issues.”

The committee is actively seeking new project applications. “We'd like to see more proposals in 2006; in fact, we'd like to see as many as possible,” says Baumann. “The existing projects are significant undertakings that will deliver – or already are delivering – major benefits to the agri-food industry. More projects of this calibre will enhance the industry's reputation and increase public confidence in the foods we eat.”

The Food Quality and Safety Initiative makes funds available to industry associations, cooperatives, agencies, commodity groups and groups of firms that are interested in leading projects that promote and enhance food quality and safety, and in so doing, deliver a broad benefit to the agri-food industry.

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Funding provided by:



It is funded by the Investment Agriculture Foundation of British Columbia through the Agri-Food Futures Fund. A total of \$1.748 million is available to the industry through investments made by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands. Funds are available on a cost-shared basis, with the Foundation contributing up to 50 per cent of a project's cost.

The first major project to have received initiative funding was the Verified Beef Production Program, an initiative of the B.C. Cattlemen's Association to enhance on-farm food safety in the beef industry, consistent with guidelines established at the national level. The initiative contributed \$54,000 to the project's \$150,000 total budget. One year later, the project has exceeded expectations.

"Our original goal was to train 250 people and have eight to ten applicants for registration as a VBP (Verified Beef Producer)," says Annette Moore, coordinator of the program. "We've now trained 315 producers, have five registered producers, two scheduled for audits, and six preparing for an audit."

Other projects underway include:

- A study of pesticide use and residues in cherry production for the Creston chapter of the Okanagan Kootenay Cherry Growers Association,
- The development of on-farm food safety programs for hatching egg producers through the BC Broiler Hatching Egg Commission,
- The implementation of a Good Agricultural Practices (GAP)-based, on-farm food safety program for B.C. blueberry, raspberry and strawberry growers, and
- A two-phase HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points) facilitation project that will enable BC slaughterhouses to meet federal registration requirements in the aftermath of the 2003 mad cow (BSE) crisis.

Each project extends into 2006 with the berry growers' project continuing until 2008.

For further information, please visit www.iafbc.ca/fqs/ or contact:

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BRITISH COLUMBIA FOOD QUALITY & SAFETY INITIATIVE FACT SHEET

- The B.C. Food Quality and Safety Initiative is a five-year program to raise consumer and market confidence in B.C. food products by enhancing food safety and product quality.
- The initiative makes \$1.748 million in cost-shared funding available to industry associations, co-operatives, agencies, commodity groups and groups of firms that apply for funding to support projects that enhance the quality and safety of B.C. food products.
- Funding can be applied to a wide range of activities including: enhancing awareness of food quality and safety among producers and processors; developing and delivering education and skill development programs; establishing and implementing standards programs; and assessing food safety risks.
- The five-year funding commitment is made available through the Agri-Food Futures Fund, and is administered by the Investment Agriculture Foundation of B.C.
- The initiative is guided by the *Food Quality & Safety Strategic Plan (2003)*, which outlines the long-term direction and priorities for enhancing food quality and safety in B.C.'s agri-food industry.
- The plan identifies numerous strategies and actions to promote the enhancement of food quality and safety in British Columbia, namely:
 - Education and awareness
 - Recognized safety standards
 - Risk assessment and management of food safety
 - Implementation of recognized safety programs
 - Formation of alliances within the food safety sector.
- The Food Quality and Safety Advisory Committee leads the implementation of the strategic plan. The committee consists of representatives from a wide range of industry sectors and from the federal and provincial governments (ex-officio).
- Project applications are reviewed and approved or rejected for funding by the advisory committee. Applications should be submitted to the committee by the last day of the following months: February, April, June, September and December.
- Interested parties can receive assistance in preparing their applications at www.iafbc.ca/fqs/ or by contacting the initiative administrator at (250) 356-1839.

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