



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2006AL0008-000360
April 3, 2006

Ministry of Agriculture and Lands
Ministry of Health

FUNDING SUPPORTS FOOD SAFETY, MEAT PROCESSING INDUSTRY

PRINCE GEORGE – Government is providing support for meat processors to help with the transition to the Ministry of Health’s Meat Inspection Regulation, Minister of Agriculture and Lands Pat Bell announced today.

In addition to extending the implementation date by one year to Sept. 30, 2007, \$5 million in funding is being provided to help industry meet requirements for a uniform meat inspection system that will ensure food safety and ongoing public confidence in the food supply.

“British Columbians must be able to rely on all commercial outlets to provide safe and inspected meat products,” said Bell. “This move will help ensure livestock producers across the province will have access to small slaughter facilities, which is so important to small farms with an existing base of loyal customers.”

The Meat Inspection Regulation provides provincewide standards for inspection and processing of all animals slaughtered for sale. As part of the Food Safety Act, the regulation fosters ongoing public confidence in food safety and the food supply and protects public health. The regulation requires that all of the meat offered for sale is inspected to ensure it is safe.

“I am very pleased to see us moving to a standard of protection that means B.C. consumers can continue to have access to and confidence in a safe and nutritious food supply,” said Dr. Perry Kendall, Provincial Health Officer.

Industry has indicated over the last several months that there were some concerns about the financial effects of the regulation’s original implementation timeline. Government has responded with the extension and the funding to help industry upgrade or build livestock slaughter facilities. The Ministry of Health will also extend the current policy of no inspection fees until 2012.

Plants that have already upgraded to the new provincial licensing standards can apply for funding for eligible program purposes retroactive to July 23, 2004.

“We commend those processors who have already completed upgrades to their facilities,” added Bell. “They are leaders and will be eligible for the retroactive funding component of the program.”

The B.C. Food Processors Association (BCFPA) has agreed to deliver the Meat Transition Assistance Program to help slaughter facilities comply with the regulation. The Investment Agriculture Foundation of B.C. will hold the funds and provide financial administration services for the program. Individual processors can apply for the funding through the BCFPA. Regions will also be encouraged to look at innovative or collaborative solutions, such as small-scale or mobile facilities, to meet local needs.

“BCFPA is pleased to see the government’s response in advancing a program that addresses some of the challenges facing the meat industry,” said Gay Hahn, chair of the B.C. Food Processors Association. “BCFPA supports the intent of the regulation as an appropriate framework to protect public health and to enhance the competitiveness of the meat industry in B.C. We look forward to continuing to work with industry and government to develop the details of the program and ensure that it meets everyone’s needs.”

The Meat Inspection Regulation does not apply to the slaughter of meat by an animal’s owner for personal consumption. For more information on the Meat Inspection Regulation, see www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/protect/meat_inspection.html.

2 backgrounder(s) attached.

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BACKGROUND

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MEAT TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Meat Transition Assistance Program (MTAP) will provide \$5 million to help B.C.'s new and existing slaughterhouses meet the standards under the Ministry of Health's Meat Inspection Regulation by Sept. 30, 2007, the new date for provincewide enforcement.

The program has been introduced to increase livestock slaughter capacity throughout B.C. by ensuring there are sufficient licensed facilities to provide livestock producers reasonable access to slaughter services.

With funding provided by the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands will work closely with the B.C. Food Processors Association (BCFPA) to deliver the financial assistance program and the Meat Inspection Enhancement Strategy (MIES) action plan administered through BCFPA.

Out of the \$5 million, \$4 million will be available for delivering the Meat Transition Assistance Program and \$1 million to continue and enhance ongoing delivery of the Meat Industry Enhancement Strategy.

Funding

MTAP includes \$3 million to help unlicensed slaughter plants upgrade to provincial standards and for development of new provincially licensed plants. Funding for construction and equipment costs will be provided on a 50/50 cost-shared basis to a maximum of \$50,000 per plant.

\$1 million will be available to help communities identify local solutions and develop projects that will create regional slaughter capacity. The MIES team will be active in working with communities interested in pursuing this option.

Funding will cover such costs as:

- Plant plans and blueprints, construction and equipment expenses, construction materials, required systems, and health and safety requirements.
- Consulting costs including development of programs for maintenance, sanitation, pest control, training, labelling, traceability, and process control.
- Some expenses for business planning, including market and feasibility studies.

Expenses which may be covered in any other available provincial or federal grant program are ineligible.

Eligibility

Applicants for individual plant assistance must be an operator of a slaughter plant that will be licensed under the new Meat Inspection Regulation.

For community solution funding, an application may come from a facility operator, local government or a significant community stakeholder. Funding will be given only to an operator of a slaughter plant that is or will be licensed in B.C. and will be serving the community.

Application Deadline

The closing date for applications for individual assistance funding is Sept. 30, 2006.

Applications for community solutions funding will be accepted after Sept. 30, 2006 until termination of the program on Sept. 30, 2007. However, letters of intent will be accepted any time before the opening date for applications. BCFPA will be responsible for delivery of the program.

For additional information on the program and how to apply, see the Meat Inspection Enhancement Strategy website at <http://www.bcfpa.ca/mies.html>.

MIES Action Plan

A further \$1 million will be directed through BCFPA to continue and enhance the MIES program to encourage community solutions, assist with options for mobile abattoirs, help new or existing unlicensed facilities obtain provincial licensing, and aid communication and general facilitation activities to increase provincially-licensed slaughter capacity in all B.C. communities.

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MEAT INSPECTION REGULATION

The B.C. Meat Inspection Regulation (MIR 2004) was enacted as part of the Food Safety Act in 2004. The application of the regulation provincewide is being extended to Sept. 30, 2007.

The regulation provides consumers with the assurance that all meat and meat products are properly inspected for safety. It is estimated that 95 per cent of the meat sold in B.C. is inspected. The remaining five per cent is processed through non-licensed plants and unregulated farm slaughter.

In the past, provincial legislation did not require the licensing of all slaughter facilities or inspection of meat and meat products across the province. Provincial licensing and inspection requirements would only be applied at the request of local governments, resulting in a patchwork of inconsistent standards.

How Is Meat Currently Inspected?

The Province of B.C. inspects meat produced in the province which is strictly for domestic sale. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is responsible for inspecting meat entering B.C. from other provinces or countries and meat produced for export from B.C. and processed in federally licensed slaughter facilities.

There are an estimated 50 unlicensed meat processing plants located throughout the province that form part of the regional agriculture economy. They primarily provide custom slaughter services of livestock to rural communities. There are also a number of farms that slaughter and sell meat at the farm gate.

The old provincial Meat Inspection Act set out lengthy regulations that were antiquated and overly prescriptive. Over the years, the way in which standards were applied did not change, despite advances in the way food is processed. The regulations were often a barrier to the food industry as it tried to keep up with modern practices; they were also difficult to enforce.

Modernizing the System – Protecting Our Food and Health

Once fully implemented, the Meat Inspection Regulation will strengthen the system and ensure uniform animal health and inspection standards are in place across the province.

The regulation includes:

- Mandatory inspection before and after slaughter of all food animals, if the meat will be for sale.
- Consistent slaughterhouse construction and operation standards. While providing for consistency, these standards incorporate an outcome-based approach that allows flexibility in how the standards can be achieved. This flexibility allows diverse needs to be addressed, including those of small-scale producers and processors.

Benefits from licensed meat inspection facilities include food safety protection, mandatory animal health assessment, and opportunities for surveillance and enforcement of certain animal welfare standards. This includes:

- Mandatory animal health assessment (before and after slaughter).
- Trace-back potential to farms, and early warning system for emerging disease such as Mad Cow Disease (BSE).
- Assessment of animals conducted for infections, pathologies and antimicrobial residues.
- Required licensing for slaughterhouses, which must meet design, construction and equipment standards.
- Further credibility of the food animal industry, placing licensed plants in a favourable domestic marketing position.
- Humane treatment standards/compliance; inspectors often present to observe transport conditions, inspectors present during slaughter of animals.

With a modern meat inspection system in place across the province, the meat and livestock industry will enjoy greater certainty, consumer confidence and growth opportunities. During the expanded transition period, the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, the Ministry of Health and the B.C. Food Processors Association (BCFPA) through its MIES (Meat Inspection Enhancement Strategy) program will continue to work with industry on a regional basis to facilitate adjustment to the new requirements.

The regulation does not apply to meat slaughtered at home for personal use and game cut and wrapped for personal use.

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