

# Verified Beef

## PRODUCTION

INDUSTRY UPDATE

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Verified Beef Production

## What beef producers need to know about optional VBP audits

*A veteran auditor says many beef producers are likely closer than they think*

Over the past few years Lyle McNichol has met a lot of beef producers in his role as an auditor with the Verified Beef Production (VBP) program. He has audited more than 60 operations in Manitoba and nearby Saskatchewan, ranging from small, 25 cow-operations supported by people who work primarily off the farm, to 30,000 plus head commercial feedlots with professional staff.



Lyle McNichol

He's learned a lot of things from that wide ranging experience with Canada's beef on-farm food safety program, but one thing he has learned above all. Most beef producers who are on the VBP program will likely find that being audited is a lot easier than they might think.

People have the most concern about records, he says. What exactly will be required? They have a Revenue Canada style audit in their minds and it's not usually a pleasant thought.

In reality, a VBP audit is thorough, but nowhere near as complicated. A normal VBP audit is relatively quick, about two to three hours in total. Many take less. It depends on the complexity of the operation, how well organized the records are and how much the producer wants to discuss things, says McNichol.

One of the main areas is records that are thorough and easily understood. McNichol has worked with elaborate electronic record keeping systems to small, hand written ones, and both have done the job. He smiles as he tells of producers with handwritten records who can tell you with pride anything you want to know about any animal on their place.

### VERIFYING VBP VALUE

McNichol believes that VBP is ultimately about being accountable and the audit is the ultimate proof of that. Quite a few people who are involved in VBP are using direct marketing. They want to be able to say they are part of this program and here are the standards we are following.



"There are a lot more people closer to being at an auditable stage than they may realize," he says. "It's pretty simple to test yourself. Go through your records and audit your own drugs. I've gone through places that will have good records, but overlook outdated drugs like an old bottle of medicine their father used to treat a horse."

A lot of programs are coming up that will require this sort of record keeping, he says. That's just one more reason to get involved in VBP and get to the audit stage.

**Full story available on the VBP website [www.verifiedbeef.org](http://www.verifiedbeef.org).**

## Pine Haven Colony builds a reputation for food confidence

*The colony is the first to be registered under the Verified Beef Program*

In many ways Alberta's Pine Haven Colony has an ideal location for marketing. Situated in the beautiful rolling countryside just outside Wetaskiwin, Alta., it is close to several vibrant communities and within easy driving distance of the city of Edmonton.

The Colony is making the most of that opportunity. Today it provides a range of agricultural and food products, many marketed directly to consumers or retailers. That is based on a simple belief that agriculture today needs to provide consumers with confidence in their product.

### VERIFIED PRODUCTION

Where possible, production on the Pine Haven Colony is verified. "Our whole farm is audited: dairy, hogs, poultry, our feedmill and our meat shop," says William Hofer in charge of the colony's feedlot. He believes it just makes sense.

"We sell at farmers markets, at our own store and to other retailers, and we promote our beef as raised to certain standards and that includes feeds, humane animal care and on-farm food safety.

"A large percent of the cattle operations in Canada are already doing this stuff, so why not assure the public we are doing all these things," he says. "We say Canada has the best beef in the world so why not prove to consumers and our export markets that we do with a third party national program?

"If everyone gets on board we should be able to gain more markets."

**Full story available on the VBP website [www.verifiedbeef.org](http://www.verifiedbeef.org).**

### VBP coordinator participates in biosecurity pilot program from CCA

*Process toward new standard aims for flexibility to accommodate different production approaches*

Work toward a national biosecurity standard for Canada's beef industry is underway to help the industry meet rising international expectations for biosecurity that carry trade implications.

The pilot project is delivered by the Canadian Cattlemen's Association and partially funded by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Verified Beef Production (VBP) program coordinators from Ontario and Quebec are assisting with the process. It involves working with industry over the next 12 to 18 months through a process of benchmarking, consultation and development toward a new standard.

"This program is about being proactive and keeping Canada in line with emerging expectations that in particular are very important to our success in export markets," says Dan Ferguson, a Northumberland, Ont., cow-calf producer and VBP coordinator for eastern Ontario. "The approach is to develop a standard that fits with industry practices and helps producers manage. That's why the starting point is to benchmark current practices and build from there. VBP Ontario is participating at the request of our producers to help ensure program protocols are complementary."

### WORKING WITH INDUSTRY

The first step, now underway, is focused on documenting current practices related to biosecurity. The survey will be conducted on a sample population involving producers in all regions, including feedlots and farm or ranch operations of various sizes. The "on farm, in person" survey involves a questionnaire process conducted by knowledgeable provincial interviewers.

### PROTECTING THE HERD

A challenge for the program is developing a standard with flexibility to accommodate the diversity of beef production, including open environments, notes Ferguson. "That will be an important focus at all phases of development."

The key result will be clearer protocols which will position Canada's beef industry as a leader in biosecurity, he says. This is where the world is headed and Canada can benefit from being quick out of the gate. "As we move forward it is important that biosecurity standards are achievable and practical."

### VBP News

*The latest from VBP across Canada*

**People changes.** There is a change to the VBP provincial delivery team in Atlantic Canada.

Justin Lawless takes over VBP Atlantic region coordinator in all four provinces: Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. He grew up on farm in PEI, runs a cow / calf operation at Kinkora, PEI and has a background in farm input sales and as a produce broker. He can be reached at the PEI Cattle Producers office at phone (902) 368-2229 or by email at [vbp@peicattleproducers.com](mailto:vbp@peicattleproducers.com).

**VBP online training proving popular.** The VBP Online Training was launched so that producers could have the experience of the VBP workshop on their own time and terms through a web-based approach. The course has proven popular. More than 380 producers have signed up for the online training and while not all had yet completed the course as this newsletter went to print, that is still a strong indication of the growing interest in VBP across Canada.

### For more information

To get more information on the Verified Beef Production program, visit the website at [www.verifiedbeef.org](http://www.verifiedbeef.org) or contact the VBP office in your area.

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