



Agri-News

March 1, 2010

On-Farm Food Safety Program Promotes High Industry Standards

Alberta producers can now apply for the Growing Forward On-Farm Food Safety (OFFS) grant to help them begin implementing or further enhance food safety practices in their agriculture operations.

“The OFFS producer grant program, delivered by Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, offers financial support to help Alberta producers implement industry-developed, commodity-specific, national on-farm food safety programs,” says Betty Vladicka, OFFS program manager with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. “Some of the activities eligible for financial support include the development of record keeping systems, minor building modifications, equipment purchasing, lab testing, educational workshops and on-farm certification audits.”

Producer projects supported by this first-come-first-served program are on a cost-shared basis. Grants cover 70 per cent of eligible expenses for approved activities, and producers cover 30 per cent; up to a maximum of \$5,000 per applicant.

Food safety, a priority for Alberta’s agriculture industry and a consumer expectation, starts with the primary producer. Whether producers are raising turkeys or strawberries, good production practices to effectively control potential contamination, along with a system of recording, documenting and verifying those practices is highly valued throughout the agriculture value-chain. By adopting good production practices, producers are able to meet market demands, improve their competitiveness and help create a more sustainable and successful agriculture industry.

The OFFS program is a grant program targeting Alberta producers, horticultural packers and honey producer-graders actively engaged in a crop or livestock operation with a market

value of production exceeding \$10,000 annually. Total program funding available over the four-year term of the grant program is \$2.8 million.

The grants may be applied to any of the 19 nationally recognized industry-led, commodity-specific, on-farm food safety programs. To participate in the grant program,

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applicants must submit a work plan and budget that outlines how their on-farm food safety program will be implemented or improved.

The OFFS program strengthens Alberta's agriculture and food industry, which contributes to the province's economy and rural development.

For more information on Growing Forward, how to apply for a required Growing Forward registration number, the OFFS producer program (including program terms and conditions) and work plan applications, visit www.growingforward.alberta.ca or call 310-FARM (3276) to connect with an on-farm food safety specialist.

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Forage Analysis and Determining Feed Quality in Dry Years

Many areas of Western Canada have come through a dry summer, and, in some areas of Alberta and Saskatchewan, weather conditions have reduced perennial and annual forage production by 75 per cent. This means that forage costs have increased dramatically from the previous year, and farmers are trying to optimize the use of their feed resources.

"Mixing feeds is one way producers can stretch their feed supply," says Barry Yaremcio, beef and forage specialist, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. "To do this efficiently, feed testing each forage type and grain is required. With tight economic times in the cow calf sector, many producers have turned to the Near Infrared Red Spectroscopy (NIRS) system for analysis instead of wet chemistry. This change reduces costs by approximately \$40 per forage sample submitted, and turn-around time is significantly reduced when NIRS is used."

In dry years, plants mature more rapidly than in a normal year. A lack of moisture restricts total plant growth and the amount of starch or sugar deposited. Dry conditions restricts the plants' ability to get calcium and other nutrients out of the soil,

thus mineral content in plants is also reduced. Also, acid detergent fibre and neutral detergent fibre levels increase more rapidly in the plants than in a year with normal moisture, which further reduces overall energy content in the forage.

"When producers are dealing with production problems associated with dry conditions, feed testing is essential, which is what makes NIRS so attractive," says Yaremcio. "NIRS measures the nutrient content of forages and grains by the amount of light that is absorbed or reflected off the sample. Light energy absorbed by the hydrogen-containing bonds in the feed is measured by the machine and the scan results are related through statistical correlation and calibration equations, to predict the nutritional content of the feed."

To develop calibration curves for the NIRS system, reference samples are analyzed by wet chemistry. These reference samples are from a wide range of locations, different stages of plant maturity and environmental conditions. The accuracy of NIRS predictions depends on the calibration curves developed from the reference samples. NIRS results for protein, acid detergent fibre (ADF) and neutral detergent fibre (NDF) of forages are used widely in North America for ration-balancing purposes.

When testing feed, a note of caution must be acknowledged. Measuring mineral composition (calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, potassium, and sodium) by NIRS is less precise and more problematic than wet chemistry. These nutrients do not absorb light in the near infrared spectrum unless they are bound in a molecule which contains a hydrogen bond. Unlike CP and ADF, NIRS is not recognized as an official method for determining the mineral content in forages by the Association of Official Analytical Chemists (AOAC).

Test results for calcium, phosphorus and magnesium must be considered carefully before values are used for ration balancing purposes.

To illustrate methodology can impact test results, portions from the same sample of a barley greenfeed grown under drought conditions was analyzed by both NIRS and wet chemistry. Results are in the table below. Reported concentrations for calcium, phosphorus and magnesium were considerably different between wet chemistry and NIRS while the potassium and sodium results are identical (see chart below).

Reported concentrations differ between wet chemistry and NIRS

Nutrient	Protein	ADF	NDF	Calcium	Phosphorus	Magnesium	Potassium	Sodium
NIRS	13.80	28.38	50.88	0.45	0.38	0.23	0.98	0.02
Wet Chemistry	13.82	25.57	48.60	0.16	0.20	0.12	0.96	0.02

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If a cow calf producer was to provide this barley greenfeed as the sole feed after calving using the NIRS results, a lactating cow would require 113 grams (4 ounces) of limestone per head per day to maintain a 2:1 calcium to phosphorus ratio. Phosphorus and magnesium levels appear to be sufficient when using Cowbytes to balance the ration.

When the wet chemistry results are used, feeding the same ration, on a per head per day basis, 50 grams (1.75 ounces) of a 2:1 mineral is needed to increase the phosphorus content in the ration, along with an additional 95 grams (3.3 ounces) of limestone to have a 2:1 calcium to phosphorus ratio. Magnesium is deficient and 23 grams (0.8 ounces) of magnesium oxide is required per head per day.

“Calcium and phosphorus are the two most important macro minerals in a beef ration,” says Yaremcio. “If the amounts of calcium and phosphorus are not in the proper ratio with calcium being deficient; weight gains can be reduced in growing animals. For mature cows fed a calcium deficient ration you may experience the following conditions: milk fever or downer cows; reduced milk production; winter tetany; stillborn calves; and, retained placentas. Calcium can be mobilized from the cows’ bones which can cause osteoporosis.

“If phosphorus is deficient in the ration, feed intake can be reduced resulting in lower milk yield in cows and growth rates in calves. Additional cow concerns are silent heats, longer times to start cycling and low conception rates in cows. A phosphorus deficiency related production problem will be noticed quicker than a calcium deficiency. To prevent tetany problems, 23 grams (0.8 ounces) of magnesium oxide is also required per head per day.”

There can be large discrepancies in feed test results among the analytical systems. Depending on which results are being used, the supplementation program required can be considerably different and have impact on the long term performance of the cow herd. Consult with a nutritionist, or extension agent, to obtain a second opinion of what is required to provide a balanced supplementation program.

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The Economics of Sugar Beet Production

Over 250 sugar beet growers produce beets on contract with Lantic Inc. (Rogers Sugar Ltd.) in southern Alberta. Sugar beets grow well in a more temperate climate such as the Canadian prairies and beet production is well suited for the irrigated land in southern Alberta.

Recognized as a significant Alberta crop, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development has been extensively monitoring the costs and returns of livestock and crop production in the province since the 1960s. These studies are an important tool for assisting producers in their cropping decisions. The monitoring of sugar beet production costs and returns in the province has been on-going since the 1970s. The most recent information, ***The Economics of Sugar Beet Production in Alberta 2008***, cost and return study results, has recently been published and has also been made available online on Alberta Agriculture’s website at www.agriculture.alberta.ca/

“Sugar beet production in southern Alberta is a significant contributor of farm cash receipts ranging from \$30 to 39 million depending on area planted, yield and price,” says Nabi Chaudhary, senior crop economist with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. “Farm cash receipts for the 2008 beet crop amounted to just under \$18 million, almost half from previous years.

“From 1980 to 2007 area planted to beets has ranged from a low of 27,830 acres in 2003 to over 44,700 acres in 1999. However, area planted to 2008 beet crop decreased by almost 47 per cent from 34,067 acres in 2007 to 18,200 acres due to large carry over of sugar produced during the last few years. Area planted to 2008 beet crop was the lowest ever in sugar beet production in Alberta. In 2009, area planted to sugar beets increased by about 64 per cent, somewhat closer to the years prior to 2008. However, the 2009 sugar beet crop did suffer a huge set back due to early winter as almost 6,700 acres (almost 23 per cent of beets planted) could not be harvested and had to be left in the ground.”

The crop is planted in the spring and harvested in September and October. Sugar beets are stock-piled at receiving stations close to the processing plant, and must be processed as quickly as possible, before warmer temperatures in the spring.

“Like sugar beets, other irrigated crops such as potatoes, beans, sunflowers and other processing vegetables are grown on contract,” says Chaudhary. “These crops are in direct competition with sugar beets for the limited irrigated land in southern Alberta. Sugar beets are grown on a four-year mandatory crop rotation to minimize soil borne diseases.”

Copies of ***The Economics of Sugar Beet Production in Alberta 2008*** can be requested by calling the Alberta Ag-Info Centre at 310-FARM (3276). The study can also be viewed and downloaded from Alberta Agriculture’s website at www.agriculture.alberta.ca and entering *Sugar Beet Production* in the search field.

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Province Reduces Regulatory Costs for Cattle Producers

To help reduce regulatory burden on producers, the Alberta government is reviewing the existing regulatory process to identify barriers that add unnecessary costs and reduce competitiveness for our agricultural industry.

As a first step in this review, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development will provide a grant of \$25,000 to Livestock Identification Services to cover the cost of livestock inspection for Alberta beef producers who graze their cattle in Saskatchewan or British Columbia. This initiative will reduce trade barriers between provinces, lower production costs, and ease the regulatory burden for producers.

“Cattle producers are telling me that there are layers of unnecessary government rules and regulations that prevent our industry from achieving our overall goals of achieving a profitable beef industry,” said Agriculture and Rural Development Minister Jack Hayden. “Providing this \$25,000 grant is one small step of many that we need to take to reduce the regulatory burden for our producers.”

The grant will cover inspection costs of cattle that temporarily move into Saskatchewan or British Columbia for the 2010 grazing season which starts in April. Traditionally, about 25,000 head of cattle move between the provinces for seasonal grazing.

The Alberta government is working to be one of the most competitive jurisdictions in the world and has a clear plan for strong economic recovery. An important part of The Way Forward is making sure Alberta’s industries remain globally competitive. For more information on the plan visit Alberta.ca.

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Alberta Government numbers are toll-free in Alberta by dialling 310-0000 first

Get Out of the City and Experience Summer on the Farm!

This summer, break away from the norm and gain meaningful experience working outdoors on a sustainable farm in Alberta.

“The Alberta Sustainable Apprenticeship Program 2010 (ASAAP) offers participants unique farm experiences with over a dozen small-scale, family farms to choose from,” says Becky Lipton, program founder and coordinator. “Apprentices can gain first-hand knowledge about growing vegetables, raising organic livestock, selling farm product at farmers markets, alternative farming practices and business planning.

“These working farms need hard workers who are enthusiastic and curious about agriculture. A great deal of farming knowledge is not required – but you must be willing to learn quickly and take on new challenges. For those who may come from a different farming background, this program offers a chance to learn about new techniques and approaches.”

For participants, such as one apprentice from 2009, their experience inspired them to envision a future career in agriculture, “I would like to eventually start my own farm and feel that my four-month apprenticeship gave me a great foundation. I can’t think of too many other programs that allow a city-dweller like me, who had no prior experience, to get out there and learn to farm.”

Interested young Albertans are encouraged to apply now for a meaningful farm-work experience. Apprenticeships generally run from May to September. No two farms are alike and each offers different experiences, living arrangements and work expectations. Visit www.startfarming.ca to learn more about ASAAPs host farms and to apply.

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Agri-News Briefs

Visit Ag Expo 2010

Alberta producers are invited to come discuss “Farming Greener” with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development staff at Ag Expo & The North American Seed Fair in Lethbridge on March 3 to 5, 2010. The Alberta Agriculture booth will highlight a variety of topics through the show. Representatives from the Ag Tech Centre and Ag Research Center will be available to discuss irrigation, green farm energy, nutrient management, and water quality topics. Models of the Power House, water quality and water sampling equipment will be available for producers to view while at the booth. Producers will also have an opportunity to speak with Alberta Agriculture staff about Growing Forward programs and information on Alberta Agriculture’s website, Ropin’ the Web, as well as talking to Ag-Info Centre specialists who will be happy to discuss and answer crop related questions. Producers unable to stop by at Ag Expo 2010, can visit the website at www.agriculture.alberta.ca or connect with an Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development staff member by calling 310-FARM (3276).

Cattleman’s Day 2010

Gateway Research Organization (GRO) is hosting **Cattleman’s Day 2010** in Westlock on March 10, 2010. The event features a Ranching for Profit workshop that deals with putting profit back into ranching, one business at a time, and improving the bottom line. As well as the workshop, Cattleman’s Day will feature a traceability speaker from Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. Registration fee is \$40 per farm unit for GRO members and \$50 per farm unit for non-members. Early registration by March 8, 2010, is appreciated. To register, call 780-349-4546.

Organic Producers AGM

The 2010 annual general meeting of the Peace Region Organic Producers Association (PROPA) is being held at the Demmit Hall, west of Grande Prairie, on March 20, 2010 (note – this is a change of date from previous announcements). The 2:00 p.m. meeting will be followed by a pot luck supper and an evening of music. Those musically inclined are invited to bring their instruments and participate in the evening’s entertainment. The PROPA is an active cross-border organic association with members from both the BC Peace and the Alberta Peace region. For more information, contact Jerry Kitt at 780-356-2239 or Ted Buchan at 780-351-2115.

Dairy Classic Championship Show

The Calgary Stampede Dairy Classic is being held in Calgary on March 18 to 20, 2010. The event features the Explosion heifer sale and a Holstein show. Again in 2010, the Dairy Classic Committee is proud to offer Youth Dairy Cattle Judging Workshop, sponsored by BFL Canada. This enhanced youth judging workshop, open to all youth, is a great chance for participants to improve their judging skills before the 2010 multi-judging competitions begin. Participants will have the opportunity to learn about functional conformation of dairy cattle from expert Dr. Gordon Atkins. Participants will also have the opportunity to judge a class of top quality dairy cows, a class of dairy heifers and learn how to give reasons with instruction from some of the best dairy people and judges in the industry. The clinic takes place in the Agriculture Building at Stampede Park. The cost is \$10 and includes beef-on-a-bun. A special price of \$5 is available for parents and chaperones. One parking pass per vehicle will be issued at no additional charge. Registration forms are available at www.stampedeagriculture.com

For further information, contact Debbie Lee, chair of the Dairy Cattle Committee at 403-669-0421 or Tracey Foster, Agriculture Event Coordinator at, 403-261-0127.