

GOOD AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES ENSURE FOOD SAFETY & QUALITY ON THE FARM

Is our food safe to eat?

The farmers in British Columbia are subject to both federal and provincial laws that require them to produce raw food products (of animal and plant origin) that are of the highest quality and are safe for human consumption.

Are there on-farm controls to ensure safe food?

Farmers recognize that they must meet the highest production standards — for both safety and quality — to meet public demand. To do this, farmers use and follow Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs), which are standards built on food safety principles.

Canadian farmer associations, in close collaboration with government and local farmer associations, are dedicated to developing national quality assurance programs using legislation and industry activities to ensure that food remains safe to eat. To implement best practices in their daily operations, farmers use GAP programs like [CanadaGAP](#) and [Integrated Pest Management \(IPM\)](#), which help them monitor crops for chemical (pesticides and antibiotics), physical (glass and metals), and biological (disease-causing bacteria) hazards. In the dairy industry, for example, every farm is inspected and certified to meet food safety standards before milk can be produced for sale.

Within Canada, farmers can take part in the On-Farm Food Safety (OFFS) Program to achieve a world-class level of food safety. OFFS Certification is the first step that farmers can take to ensure the safety of food on its journey to processors, wholesalers, transporters, and retailers prior to reaching consumers.

What happens when food gets recalled?

Despite following best practices, problems can still occur, and the quickest way to solve them is through a recall process. To prepare for just such an emergency, farmers use traceability systems to follow the movement of food (as well as plants and animals) through all points of the production and distribution process between the farm and the consumer. This means that they have applied for a unique [Premises Identification](#) number, which allows them to record all the items that come into their farm and all the food products that go out. By having this information, the food items can be traced along the entire processing and distribution chain, and it enables those in charge of the recall process to remove foods before they cause any harm to consumers. In many cases, foods are recalled before they reach the consumer.

Who is involved in keeping food safe and of high quality?

- Farmers who produce the food, and anyone who harvests crops or feeds animals.
- Service people who support every aspect of the farming, processing, and retail industry, including veterinarians, equipment suppliers, nutritionists (animal and human), feed and fertilizer service representatives, researchers, auditors, etc.
- Drivers who transport the food from the farm to the processors, brokers, and stores.
- Processing plant workers who manufacture the raw food components into products, such as bagged salad, pizza, chocolate milk, or hamburger patties.
- Retailers and restaurant workers who cook and serve food.
- Consumers who practise proper hygiene whenever preparing and serving food.

How can consumers be part of keeping food safe and of high quality?

Once food is purchased, consumers need to continue with the safe food handling practices already followed by the industry. Specifically:

Keep foods cold

- Chill or refrigerate food promptly. All meat, milk products, and perishables should be stored in the refrigerator.
- Avoid leaving perishables exposed to warm temperatures or sunlight.
- Refrigeration temperatures should be below 4°C.

Cleanliness and food handling

- Thoroughly wash hands, utensils, cutting boards, and work surfaces before, during, and after handling raw meat, fish, or poultry.
- Thoroughly wash fresh produce (fruits and vegetables) under running water to remove dirt and residue.
- Scrub produce that has firm surfaces, such as oranges, melons, potatoes, and carrots.
- Cut away any damaged or bruised areas on produce, as bacteria can thrive in these places.

Additional Information

- Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education
<https://www.fightbac.org>
- Agriculture in the Classroom Canada
<https://aitc-canada.ca/en-ca/>
- CanadaGAP
<https://www.canadagap.ca/>
- Global Food Traceability Center
<http://www.ift.org/gftc.aspx>
- Food Safety Magazine
<https://www.foodsafetymagazine.com/enewsletter/the-importance-of-food-traceability/>

Careers

There are many careers connected to on-farm food safety, including:

- Farm manager, owner, herds person, worker
- Quality control officer, supervisor, manager, advisor
- Quality assurance program trainer
- Safety/quality auditor, inspector
- Veterinarian
- Plant, animal, food scientist
- Nutritionist (animal and human)
- Laboratory technician