

Food Safety Sentinel

ISSUE NO. 6

Quarterly newsletter for Alberta Agriculture's provincially licensed meat facility operators

Food Safety Culture: 5 simple things you can do everyday

We have been hearing more and more about the importance of a strong food safety culture, but what does this mean? Food safety culture is rooted in people's behaviors and attitudes. To strengthen your organization's food safety culture means to share how you think, feel, and act as a team towards food safety. Here are 5 simple tips to help:

1. **Commitment.** A strong food safety culture needs visible commitment by all levels of management. This means showing commitment by leading by example, sharing food safety information with staff, following good personal hygiene practices, and answering questions staff may have about food safety. What can you do to show your commitment to food safety?
2. **Communicate.** The way you communicate food safety in your organization should be clear and understood by all staff. Have open conversations with staff about food safety. Other examples may include showing food safety videos, distributing a food safety newsletter and displaying hand-washing posters or signs. Communicating food safety in multiple ways will increase the chances that the food safety message will get through.
3. **Focus on the customer.** The behaviour and actions of staff and management in an organization will effect the safety of the customers. Each of us has a responsibility to protect the safety of consumers, increase confidence in the food industry and comply with food safety regulations.
4. **Motivate.** Staff will be more motivated when they understand "why" they are doing something. Motivation to do things the right way has to come from each staff member, therefore training and educating are key elements to positive change.
5. **Measure.** Food safety can be measured to verify that a strong food safety culture is present in your organization. Examples of measuring food safety may include water activity (a_w), pH, time/temp, and swabbing for pathogens, also observing good personal hygiene and ensuring sanitation procedures are being followed.

For more information on ways to communicate food safety, resources can be found by visiting www.agriculture.alberta.ca/foodsafety, or contact an Alberta Agriculture and Forestry Food Safety Specialist by calling 310-FARM.

Did you know?

Hand-washing may be the most important behavior that can reduce the spread of foodborne disease.

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Special Note: Poultry Inspection Modernization (PIM) information sessions were held in the 4 regions. Information packages will be sent out to those who were unable to attend. If you have any questions about PIM, please contact Murray Yaschuk at 780-644-3019.

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Meet the new Director of the Safe Food Branch: Dr. Natisha Stashko

Natisha joined Alberta Agriculture 5 years ago as a Food Safety Surveillance Scientist in the Safe Food Branch, and then moved into the Agri-Food Laboratories Branch to manage the Biology Section. Prior to that, she worked as a research scientist/lab manager at the University of Alberta and a Quality System and Process Specialist in the food processing industry.

The Safe Food Branch provides extension activities and services, as well as funding through Growing Forward 2 Food Safety Systems programs, to enhance processing and production systems related to food safety. Natisha is excited to join the Safe Food Branch again, this time leading the food safety policy and extension activities within the Food Safety Division. Natisha can be reached by email at natisha.stashko@gov.ab.ca and by phone at 780-644-2372 (dial 310-0000 for toll-free access in Alberta).

Microbiological Baseline Survey on Beef Carcasses: Project Update

Alberta Agriculture and Forestry's Food Safety Division (FSD) has finalized the method of how the swabbing of beef carcasses will be performed in provincially licensed abattoirs.

The FSD will be swabbing and testing for Shiga-toxin producing *Escherichia coli* O157:H7, *Salmonella* spp., and other generic microorganisms on beef carcasses in Alberta's provincially licensed abattoirs.

The purpose of this project is to:

- determine the numbers and types of pathogens (baseline) on beef carcasses processed at provincially licensed abattoirs, and
- to help with ongoing food safety surveillance.

For more information on this project, please contact Saida Essendoubi at saida.essendoubi@gov.ab.ca or call 780-644-1464 (dial 310-0000 for toll-free access in Alberta).

Feed Withdrawal Reduces Carcass Contamination in Broilers

Proper feed withdrawal before slaughter in broilers is found to greatly reduce carcass contamination. If contamination does occur, processors must trim the birds, resulting in yield losses, increased labour costs, and in some cases, the whole carcass must be discarded.

Understanding the eating patterns of birds and how their digestive tract reacts to time off-feed will give the producer a better idea of how to withdraw feed.

A snapshot of feed withdrawal times:

8—12 hours (first window)

- The intestine is empty of feed and flat, therefore less likely to be nicked, cut or torn when body cavity opener and vent cutter cut into carcass.

13+ hours

- Intestinal lining strength begins to decline, triggering the gall bladder to release bile and backward movement of material is carried to crop during processing.

15-17 hours

- The intestine is rounded and filled with gas causing gas to bubble out if intestine is nicked.

18 hours (start of second window)

- The intestinal lining is starting to rebuild and it is flattened again with little gas production. Contamination is lower than "between the windows". If the bird doesn't receive feed in the next several hours, the intestinal lining strength will begin to slough (break down) again.

For more information on eating patterns and feed withdrawal in broiler chickens, please visit Poultry Health Services at www.poultryhealth.ca



Food Safety Systems Processor Program is accepting applications to help food processors invest in new or improved food safety systems and production practices.

For more information, visit www.growingforward.alberta.ca