

How VBP Plus can help retailers continue to source beef in Canada.

April 28, 2016

The social media scene was ablaze yesterday with backlash from the recent announcement from the restaurant giant Earls. They are moving to sourcing 100% of their beef from operations that are certified by the Certified Humane program. This is a decision that their management made, probably after much internet searching. The issue is that they cannot source enough from that particular program in Canada so are moving to sourcing from Kansas. Another example of yet another retailer trying to prove to their customer that they are doing the right thing. Was it the right way to do it? Probably not for Canadian producers. And yet, more and more retailers are trying to prove to their customers that they are doing the right thing. For the most part it doesn't mean that they take the word of the producer that they are doing the right thing. Most of the time it means that production practices need to be verified or audited through an accredited program. Consumers trust that and retailers can use it.

We, as Canadian producers, know that we do the right things when it comes to issues like Animal Care, Food Safety, Biosecurity and Environmental Stewardship. It's now time to take the next step and prove what we do right, before an onerous and expensive program is forced upon us. When it comes right down to it, most programs are looking at the same things and for the most part people are already doing them. That's where the Verified Beef Production Plus program comes in.

The VBP Plus program has its beginnings as an On-Farm Food Safety (OFFS) program, currently the Verified Beef Production program (VBP), the only OFFS program for beef producers reviewed by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. The program is industry-led and national in scope, under the Canadian Cattlemen's Association (CCA) umbrella. It is not spearheaded by government nor by special interest groups. The program is by producers and for producers and yet there are industry stakeholders, retailers and special interest groups at the plate so that everyone's interests are taken into account. Shortly, very shortly, the VBP program will be rolling out new modules in Animal Care, Biosecurity and Environmental Stewardship; all areas that are developing as concerning for consumers. When a producer is third-party verified or audited in these four modules, their production practices are validated and the program speaks for itself and for the producer.

The goal of the VBP Plus program is not to add to an already strenuous workload for producers. Because we are producers too, we have developed a program with teeth (for the retailer) but not prescriptive (for the producer). The point is to capture what you are already doing right. There may be a small tweaking of records to help producers to prove what they do right, but it is a small price to pay to not have to decry a new retailer every month because they have turned to a source that provides that information.

Keep watching our website, if you aren't already fully registered (audited) on the current VBP program, soon there will be an opportunity for you to be able to contribute to a verified beef stream that consumers can have confidence in, with one low-cost audit. We, as an industry, are working hard to ensure that this program will meet the needs our retailers want, it is now up to producers to get verified so that our retailers have enough product to source.

By: Shannon Argent, Provincial Coordinator, AB Verified Beef Production