

Planned Program:

How Do We Know Our Food is Safe?

By Lynda Lowry



It has been widely described as "among the safest in the world," however, from time to time there are media reports that question this confidence. How do we know that our food is safe? Let's take a tour around the grocery store.

Produce Section

Most of the fruits and vegetables in Manitoba stores are grown in Canada and the US. In both countries, the grower associations have established strict codes of practice for producing fresh fruits and vegetables. They recommend that the water used for irrigation and for washing be tested once or twice a year. Workers should be trained in personal hygiene to ensure proper handwashing. Transportation equipment should be cleaned, rinsed and sanitized regularly. Produce should be handled carefully to minimize cuts and bruises that introduce microorganisms.

Potato processors are very strict about preventing the use of unregistered chemicals and observing days-to-harvest intervals for pesticide applications.

Regardless of origin, all produce is subject to the same rules for inspection by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). In 2001-2003, more than 11,000 samples were tested for chemical residues. Ninety-nine percent of domestic, and the same percentage of imported fruits and vegetables, were in compliance with the Maximum Residue Limits (MRL) set out in the Food and Drug Regulations.

Meat Department

If we continue to walk around the grocery store, we will come to the meat and poultry department.

The major livestock commodity groups - beef, eggs, dairy cattle, pigs and poultry - have developed on-farm safety programs. These efforts reduce the risk of chemical residues, biological concerns and physical hazards in meats and poultry products. In addition to the efforts on the

farm, many beef processing establishments have adopted a HACCP system composed of multiple critical control points to control bacteria.

Government inspectors and veterinarians inspect federally licenced meat processing establishments and storage facilities. This includes animals and poultry awaiting slaughter and carcasses after slaughter (660 million in 2001). Of the 73,000 food samples collected and tested by CFIA for chemical, microbiological and physical hazards, the rate of compliance was 99.7 per cent for red meat and 99.9 per cent for poultry in 2001-2002. The most recent data for imported red meat and poultry indicates that the compliance rate was 98.8 per cent.

Dairy Case

The next step on our grocery store tour is the dairy section. In addition to managing feed, medicine, water and biosecurity, dairy producers must also observe best management practices for producing milk. Sanitation of all equipment for the collection, cooling and storage of milk is part of the licencing process.

In Canada, in 2001-2002, 94 per cent of domestic samples of dairy products tested by the CFIA for health, safety and composition were in compliance. Ninety-four per cent of the imported products met the desired standards.

All eggs purchased in Manitoba stores are from Manitoba farms. Egg laying operations follow an "all in - all out" program. All work areas are kept clean and there is no access by pets. A test for the presence of salmonella enteritis is carried out once during the production cycle.

In 2001-2002, 95.6 per cent of domestic eggs inspected by CFIA were in compliance for safety, quality and marketplace fairness. Non-compliant products were regraded, sent for processing and pasteurized or discarded as appropriate.

Baked Goods

The last section of the store includes the bakery section. When growing crops, producers use

a variety of fertilizers, herbicides, fungicides and insecticides to protect their crops and to achieve high yields. They also use a system of integrated pest management to limit their use of pesticides. The Pest Management Regulatory Agency must register all pesticides before they can be sold and used in Canada.

The Canadian Grain Commission monitors grain for pesticide residues, mycotoxins and trace elements to ensure Canadian grains meet strict safety standards.

Conclusion

Our study of the perimeter of the grocery store looked at the main ingredients for the packaged and processed foods that appear on the shelves in the middle of the store. Food processors also have guidelines for ensuring that the food items they deliver to the marketplace are as safe as when they receive the ingredients.

Farmers share with suppliers of feed and farm chemicals, food processors, inspectors, food regulators, wholesalers, retailers and the food service industry the responsibility for ensuring safe food. It is also up to all consumers to do their part to keep it safe.

This article is a précis of the planned program, "How Do We Know Our Food is Safe?", a package prepared by Lynda Lowry, a Food and Nutrition Specialist with Manitoba Agriculture and Food. It appeared in the Manitoba Women's Institute's provincial newsletter and was reprinted with permission of the author. Although the package was developed for Manitoba, much of the information is relevant for Ontario. The entire package is available at the following website: www.gov.mb.ca/organizations/wil/index.html

Dundas District WI Donates to Food Bank



Representatives from Branches in Dundas District are shown presenting a cheque for \$500 to the Dundas County Food Bank. From left to right are Lucie Durivage - Riverside Heights WI, Florence Hoople - Chesterville WI, Diana Petlick - Chair of Food Bank, Maryke deJong - President, Dundas District WI, Grace MacAulay - Chesterville WI, Isobel Williams (who held a craft/quilt show which was a large contributor to this donation) and Vivian Fawcett - Winchester WI. Missing - Marjorie Thom - Williamsburg WI.

Submitted by Cathy Grove, Dundas, Eastern Area.