



Canadian Food  
Inspection Agency

Agence canadienne  
d'inspection des aliments

# Inspection Modernization

OPTIMIZING CONFIDENCE IN FOOD SAFETY

## Improved Food Inspection Model

The Case for Change



Canada

**DRAFT**  
**The Improved Food Inspection Model:**  
**The Case for Change**

**Purpose of this paper**

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (the CFIA or the Agency) plays a key role in maintaining Canada's food safety system. But the world in which the CFIA operates is changing and the CFIA needs to change with it. Canada has one of the best food inspection systems in the world. The intent of inspection modernization is to build on this strong foundation, and to be flexible and able to adapt to emerging global and scientific trends. This paper outlines the CFIA's current approach to food inspection, the context for a new food inspection approach and the proposed components of an improved food inspection model.

The goals of the model are to standardize the inspection approach and provide for consistent and appropriate oversight across all regulated food commodities. Oversight should be based on risk and focused on prevention of non-compliance, using science and technology.

The improved food inspection model should apply to all food inspection conducted by, or on behalf of, the CFIA. Common components of the improved food inspection model should also be applied to the CFIA's plant and animal health programs, wherever appropriate.

The specific purpose of this paper is to:

- provide an introduction to the development of the improved food inspection model and explain its rationale, and
- invite feedback from stakeholders, including interested Canadians, on the proposed core components of the improved food inspection model.

**Food inspection by the CFIA**

In Canada, food safety and consumer protection begin with a strong legal framework. The CFIA has a mandate to administer or enforce food-related standards and other requirements, found in five separate Acts of Parliament (and their associated Regulations). These include:

- the *Food and Drugs Act*
- the *Canada Agricultural Products Act*
- the *Fish Inspection Act*
- the *Meat Inspection Act*
- the *Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act*

The CFIA verifies industry compliance with these Acts (and Regulations) through activities that include inspecting establishments (such as abattoirs and food processing plants) and testing products. The CFIA also provides industry with the needed certificates, licences, registrations and permits to operate and access markets.

The CFIA promotes industry's use of science-based risk management practices to minimize food safety risks – whether the food they are responsible for processing, manufacturing or distributing, is produced domestically or imported. If a food safety emergency does occur, the CFIA, in partnership with Health Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada, provincial agencies and the food industry, operates an emergency response system. This may include food safety investigations and product recalls.

## **Why change?**

### ***Eight separate food programs***

When the CFIA was created in 1997, it brought together food inspection programs from different federal departments with diverse inspection approaches. While some progress has been made in bringing these programs together since then, the process is still underway. The CFIA currently operates the following eight, separate food inspection programs:

- |                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| • dairy                       | • imported and manufactured food       |
| • egg                         | • maple                                |
| • fish and seafood            | • meat                                 |
| • fresh fruits and vegetables | • processed products (including honey) |

Having eight food programs has resulted in the development and use of different risk management frameworks, inspection methods, and compliance verification and

enforcement approaches. This challenges the CFIA to manage risks consistently across different types of establishments and different foods. It creates situations in which foods of similar risks may be inspected at different frequencies or in different ways. The eight food programs also result in industry having to meet multiple and different requirements that are challenging to address.

## **Current operating environment**

### ***The food landscape is changing***

The way that food is produced and distributed has undergone fundamental changes in recent decades. The food safety landscape has become more complex, driven by widespread changes in methods of food production and processing, coupled with rapid increases in global food trade. These changes have been created by population and income growth in emerging economies and by consumer demands for more diverse and innovative food choices (e.g., ready-to-eat meals). The food processing industry has also become more technologically advanced, significantly increasing the speed and volume of production. At the same time, industry is seeking to remain competitive by developing new products and accessing new markets.

New food safety risks are emerging as a result of globalization and innovation in the food industry; and the ability to detect those risks is improving due to advances in science and technology. Mass distribution networks mean that problems – when they do occur – can quickly become widespread. Recent international incidents of food-borne illness have shown that outbreaks are not necessarily contained within national borders. Food safety regulators rely upon sophisticated technologies (e.g. genetic “fingerprinting”) and integrated surveillance information to prevent or respond to food safety incidents.

Consumers today are demanding more meaningful information about food safety and quality. To meet this demand, some companies are engaging third-party audit bodies to provide greater assurance that their products meet quality and safety requirements. At the same time, regulators are increasingly being asked by the public to demonstrate that food safety oversight systems and approaches are effective. Ultimately, all partners in food safety must remain vigilant and responsive to the changing environment, to keep pace with the increasing speed of commerce and the challenges it brings.

### ***Food safety systems are changing***

Against this backdrop, the science of food safety is advancing and approaches to food safety oversight are changing around the world. The international standard-setting body for food safety, the Codex Alimentarius Commission, promotes the use of a systems-based approach as an effective means of delivering food safety outcomes. A systems-based approach means that those who have the primary responsibility for the safety of the food they produce or sell – that is, food producers, processors and importers – implement preventative programs to identify and control food safety risks.

An example of a systems-based approach is a Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) system. Currently, a HACCP system is mandatory in two of the CFIA's food programs and HACCP principles can be incorporated into preventative controls across all commodities.

Many of Canada's trading partners are moving to more preventative and systems-based approaches to manage risk. For example, the United States has recently introduced a new *Food Safety Modernization Act* which focuses on using preventative controls across the food supply.

Approaches used by regulators have also changed to emphasize industry's responsibility to put in place effective hazard control programs. Government's role is to verify industry's implementation of these programs. Overall, this approach is more rigorous and provides better food safety outcomes by focussing on preventing problems before they occur.

### ***The role of the inspector is changing as well***

The primary role of a food inspector has always been to verify industry's compliance with the requirements of legislation. But how this is done has changed significantly over the past 15 years. Traditional inspection methods that focused on the processing environment and end-product have been supplemented by more sophisticated science and risk-based approaches that rely on systems such as HACCP.

The CFIA is examining the skills and competencies required for a modern food inspection workforce. The food inspectors of today – and tomorrow – will require new skills, a greater understanding of the relevant science and technologies,

continuous training and modern information management tools to do their jobs. Their work remains central to a modern and effective food safety system.

### **How the CFIA is changing**

Recognizing the challenges and opportunities described above, the Government of Canada's 2011 Budget committed \$100 million over five years for the CFIA to modernize its food inspection system. This included new resources to improve:

- inspection delivery,
- training and tools for inspection staff,
- scientific capacity in food laboratories, and
- information management and technology.

As part of this modernization initiative, the Agency has committed to develop an improved food inspection model. The basic goal of the model is to move from delivering eight independent food inspection programs to delivering one food inspection program. The CFIA would like to develop a single approach to food inspection based on common inspection activities supported by standard processes and tools, and based on science and risk. In this way, the Agency would be able to assess and address risk consistently, use existing resources more effectively and level the playing field between food sectors so that similar risks are treated with the same level of rigour.

The CFIA's ongoing activities to renew and modernize legislation, regulation and inspection are all connected. A strong legal framework and a strong flexible regulatory framework that facilitates innovation would strengthen food inspection activities and would raise the bar for food safety. However, the CFIA is committed to improving inspection even within the current environment and is receiving government funding to do so through 2016.

The CFIA is carrying out a number of complementary initiatives that will support the design and development of the improved food inspection model. They include:

Legislative and regulatory reform: Some of Canada's food safety legislation dates back 50 years. Efforts to modernize and simplify that legislation have been underway for some time and continue today. By amending and

consolidating legislative authorities, the Agency will be able to address certain food safety concerns, such as tampering, traceability and import controls, that are not covered by current legislation. From an industry perspective, consolidated food inspection authorities will reduce regulatory burden, improve market access opportunities and enable innovation.

In the fall of 2011, the CFIA also began a systematic review of its regulatory frameworks for food safety, plant health and animal health (see <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/reg/consultation/disce.shtml>). Through a structured and comprehensive review, the CFIA hopes to strengthen its regulatory frameworks to

- reduce overlap and redundancy,
- address gaps, weaknesses and inconsistencies, and
- provide clarity and flexibility to assist regulated parties in fulfilling their obligations.

Canadians and regulated parties will continue to be supported by an effective, efficient and accountable regulatory system that is both science and risk based.

Stakeholder education and compliance promotion: The first step for regulated parties to achieve compliance with food safety regulations is for them to understand their obligations and how best to meet them. This requires outreach to stakeholders that is geared at communicating regulatory requirements and best practices. Both regulators and industry have a role to play in achieving this objective. A discussion paper on stakeholder education and compliance promotion will be developed and shared with stakeholders during a later stage of model development.

Service delivery improvements: The CFIA is making changes to enhance its transparency, accountability and service delivery. These include initiatives to improve training for inspectors, provide inspectors with new tools to keep them informed and connected, modernize user fees and service standards, and put in place a recourse mechanism for certain Agency decisions.

These changes complement the *Statement of Rights and Service* that was recently published to provide regulated parties and other stakeholders with information about their rights and obligations related to Agency activities (see

<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/about-the-cfia/accountability/statement-of-rights-and-service/eng/1326306477874/1326306582012>).

The Agency has launched a new Complaints and Appeals process that provides stakeholders with a centralized way to register complaints and appeals related to service delivery, administrative errors and regulatory decisions (see <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/about-the-cfia/accountability/statement-of-rights-and-service/complaints-comments-and-compliments/eng/1333027171445/1333039662703>).

Modernization of science capacity: Science is critical to the CFIA delivering on its food safety mandate. The CFIA is working to enhance its scientific capacity by:

- developing a strategy for an integrated food laboratory network from different jurisdictions with a mandate for food safety,
- increasing its testing capacity, and
- improving its science facilities and equipment.

## **The improved food inspection model**

The aim of the improved food inspection model is a more effective and efficient food inspection system with clearly defined responsibilities for industry and government. The model should raise the bar and set expectations for food control systems that are developed and maintained by industry with risk-based government oversight. It should also standardize requirements and procedures across all food, based on science and risk. Transparency will be central to achieving the goals of the model.

The improved food inspection model should focus on prevention and incorporate outcome-based requirements and systems-based approaches to verification. This would move inspection from a snapshot approach to compliance verification, to a more systematic approach focussed on verifying the effectiveness of industry's controls in achieving safe and compliant food on an ongoing basis.

The model would help to define consistent inspector competencies that will be used as the basis for developing a core training program. The model has to be supported by consistent procedures and tools, and by a standardized information management

system. Accurate and efficient data analysis would give inspectors and managers access to the information they need for decision-making and facilitate the identification of emerging trends that may impact food safety.

Finally, the improved food inspection model would provide a basis to maintain consumer and trading partner confidence in the effectiveness of Canada’s food inspection system.

***What was heard***

Beginning in December 2011, the CFIA held a series of engagement sessions with unions, internal staff (including frontline staff) and industry stakeholders to initiate dialogue and improve understanding of inspection modernization. Overall, feedback has been positive. For Agency employees, there is clearly an appetite for change and an identified need for a common suite of inspection activities with standardized processes. For the industry, the model should be flexible, clarifying roles and setting outcome-based requirements. Consumer associations have also been engaged on the inspection modernization initiative.

As a result of these discussions, five common components of food inspection were identified and design principles were articulated as a starting point for the development of the improved food inspection model.

<b>Components of the improved food inspection model</b>	<b>What this means for the design of the improved food inspection model</b>
Licensing/registration	<p>The regulator should be able to identify all regulated parties and understand the nature and risk of their regulated activities.</p> <p>Industry is responsible for its products and processes and would demonstrate ongoing compliance with requirements.</p>
CFIA oversight	<p>The level of the CFIA’s oversight should correspond to the level of residual risk which would take into account factors associated with the product/process, the regulated party's controls and compliance history.</p>

Inspection	Standardized inspection and verification approaches across all foods should promote consistent and risk-based application of food safety and other regulatory requirements.
Compliance and enforcement	The CFIA response to non-compliance should be predictable, transparent, graduated and based on risk.
System performance	The overall effectiveness of an inspection system should be validated on an on-going basis through the use of objective performance measures.

### ***Components of the improved food inspection model***

#### Licensing/registration

Knowing who the regulated parties are, what they produce and how they produce it is crucial to determining the required level of oversight and to making risk-based inspection decisions.

The model proposes that industry who import or export food, or operate as manufacturers or processors of food products for trade between provinces would be required to obtain a license/registration to operate.

Through the CFIA’s licensing/registration process, manufacturers and importers would demonstrate their commitment to providing safe and compliant food. A condition for licensing/registration would be the development and implementation of a preventative control plan, suitable to the regulated party’s products and operations. The conditions would depend on the regulated party’s initial risk profile.

#### CFIA oversight

The model proposes that industry be held responsible for designing and implementing preventative control plans for their unique operations. The CFIA would then verify that these plans appropriately prevent, eliminate or reduce hazards to acceptable levels. Residual risk - the risk that remains once these effective preventative controls have been applied as well as compliance history - would determine the required level of inspection oversight by the CFIA (e.g. normal, enhanced or reduced).

## Inspection

In the proposed model, inspection and verification processes would be standardized across food processing establishments and importers. The frequency and scope of the inspection activities would be based on risk level and would be adaptable, as required, to the size and complexity of the regulated parties' operation.

Third-party verification on behalf of the retail sector is becoming more prevalent as a tool to ensure that suppliers meet buyer requirements for safety and quality. Where there is alignment with government requirements, third-party verification could potentially complement Agency inspection. However, the CFIA needs to determine how it may recognize the third-party verifiers and how they may complement the government's inspection activities.

## Compliance and enforcement

The model proposes applying a single compliance and enforcement strategy that is based on the principle that industry is responsible for producing safe food that complies with regulatory requirements. When non-compliance is found, industry would be responsible for taking appropriate action to correct the situation. The model aims to make compliance and enforcement transparent, predictable and appropriate to the level of non-compliance. For critical or repeated non-compliance, licenses to operate may be suspended or revoked.

## System performance

It is important for decision-makers to know whether the inspection system is achieving its objectives. This can be accomplished through a validation process that measures quality of program design and delivery.

In the proposed model, a comprehensive validation process would be an integral component to promote continuous improvement.

The objectives of validation would be to

- assess overall effectiveness of the food inspection system;
- ensure that inspection program is delivered consistently, effectively and efficiently; and
- identify gaps.

Ultimately, knowing where the problems are occurring allows the CFIA to mitigate risks and prevent future food safety challenges.

## **The path forward**

The improved food inspection model is being developed using the ideas and principles outlined in this paper. The CFIA is also taking into consideration the best practices of food inspection organizations in other countries.

The Agency is working towards a model that is focused on prevention and is aligned with the most up-to-date science and risk management approaches. An improved food inspection model would allow the CFIA to standardize its inspection approach and provide for the right coverage across different foods and different risks.

## **Opportunities for input**

The success of the improved food inspection model requires the engagement and support of everyone who has any responsibility for food safety in Canada. The CFIA will continue to create engagement opportunities with interested parties at each stage of the process. This discussion paper is designed to stimulate conversation before consultation begins on the draft improved food inspection model. There will be additional communications in the future and ongoing opportunities for review and feedback.

The CFIA will be consulting stakeholders on the draft improved food inspection model starting in the summer of 2012.

We welcome your input and feedback on the core elements of the improved food inspection model. Please e-mail any questions or comments to the inspection modernization office at [modele-inspection-model@inspection.gc.ca](mailto:modele-inspection-model@inspection.gc.ca).