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Canada

Achieving perfection in CanadaGAP

To make the grade in CanadaGap (Good Agricultural Practices), you now have to be perfect. CanadaGAP is a food safety program which is Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) based covering all aspects of production from seed to market.

Raising the mark from 85 per cent to perfection (100%) happened two years ago and is probably the biggest change Greg and Tania MacKenzie have seen since they signed up for the program over a decade ago. The owners of MacKenzie Produce grow a wide variety of crops on their Stratford farm which is certified under CanadaGAP for their main crop – cabbage.

“We are not certified for our other crops. However, we do follow the CanadaGap procedures for all our farm,” Tania noted.

“It is a good program, but it does involve a lot of work,” Greg said. “It is all about documentation. If there is no paper trail, as far as the program is concerned it didn’t happen.”

The information for each field of cabbage is pretty daunting-- when the seed was purchased, when and what fertilizer and other chemicals are applied during the growing season, when a plastic row cover was applied to protect the plants from the elements, and the list goes on for several binders.

“I can go back and tell you exactly what we did on this day ten years ago,” he noted.

“Even things that at first mention might not seem production-related have to be accounted for, like maintenance on a heating unit”, Tania notes. “If it happens on the farm, we have to have a record of it.”

Greg admits the day the auditor visits the farm (the process usually takes four or five hours) is “pretty stressful” even if he is confident in the farm’s recordkeeping. It is all too easy to miss something and “there is no margin for error.”



Greg MacKenzie checks some lettuce grown on his farm in Stratford. MacKenzie Produce has been following the CanadaGap protocols for over ten years.



Joanne Driscoll of the PEI Horticultural Council displays the log book producers using CanadaGap must follow.

The job was even harder when COVID entered the picture. Even when there were only two people working in the warehouse, work had to stop twice a day and the pair had to completely sanitize the entire operation. They also had to close the warehouse to the public and document any visitors to the warehouse.

As well, the program requires participants to work through a potential workplace scenario to ensure they can respond effectively to an emergency. Tania noted one example was a cutting knife accidentally falling into a bin. Greg said their response was to double down on inspections in an attempt to make sure the knife didn’t leave the farm.

While much of the documentation can be used for other verification programs like food safety, Greg said adaptations are often required. Tania notes the audit usually occurs at a busy time for the farm in July or August, when MacKenzie Produce is busy not only with cabbage but with other crops like strawberries.

The CanadaGAP program was developed by the Canadian Horticultural Council, now known as the Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada, and the general manager of the P.E.I. Horticultural Council spends a great deal of her time helping growers meet the requirements of the national program.

With funding from the federal and provincial governments under the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, Joanne Driscoll has been holding both online and in-person, sessions and meeting

one-on-one with producers on the farm to help them meet the program requirements and make sure they are ready for the audit.

With several binders full of material, it is probably no surprise that every section will not apply to every operation. "For example, use of row covers or manure."

"I have been involved in food safety for about 15 years and what I have seen is that many producers are already following many of the practices but you don't get your marks unless you are recording it," Driscoll said. "If you don't write it down, it never happened as far as the auditor is concerned."