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Canada Rolls Out New Policy on Food Safety Private Certification

Report Categories:

Policy and Program Announcements

Approved By:

Teresa McKeivier

Prepared By:

Mihai Lupescu

Report Highlights:

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) announced its new policy toward private certification in the context of food safety. The use of private certification schemes in risk assessment represents another tool available in Canada's new and modernized food inspection environment, allowing the Agency to better channel its oversight activities. It is important for the American food businesses shipping to or operating in Canada to be aware of this new policy development and to take advantage of the benefits of using private certification schemes that have gained CFIA's confidence.

General Information:

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) recently announced its new [policy](#) related to private certification schemes in the context of food safety.

Private certification schemes are voluntary systems that set process and product requirements as well as the means of demonstrating conformity with these requirements. Private certification schemes are a prominent part of the world food supply system and are increasingly being used by the food industry as a means of achieving food safety and other outcomes.

According to CFIA, private certification has been identified as one of several factors that the Agency will consider in its modernized approach to risk-based oversight. While CFIA has always incorporated risk into its approach to food safety oversight, a modernized approach will enable improved risk-management by using private certification data. CFIA will use this information for risk-based planning and prioritization within the regulatory framework, resulting in a more targeted compliance verification.

CFIA points out that private certification is not intended to replace regulatory enforcement authorities; however, it may complement food safety regulatory oversight. CFIA will continue to verify compliance of regulated parties; the type, frequency, and intensity of the CFIA's oversight activities will be proportional to the risks that need to be managed.

This new policy will initially apply to program design and delivery of CFIA's risk-based oversight of domestic and imported food, as it relates to food safety. However, CFIA is committed to expanding the scope to other aspects (such as labelling) and the plant and animal health programs, as applicable.

In implementing its new policy, CFIA will give consideration to four different categories of food safety certification schemes to accommodate the complexity and size of businesses.

Category 1 - CFIA-Assessed Programs:

Any organization/establishment that has completed evaluation by the CFIA for Food Safety Recognition Program (FSRP) is considered to meet CFIA food safety regulatory requirements. No further assessment is required. CFIA will consider certifications to FSRP within its risk-based assessment continuum.

Category 2 - International Private Certification Schemes (Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI)-Recognized Schemes and International Organization for Standardization (ISO) Food Safety Standards);

and

Category 3 - Schemes Certified to Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP):

Certification to a GFSI-recognized food safety scheme, an ISO food safety standard and HACCP are certifications achieved without regulatory oversight. The CFIA has analyzed the oversight or governance structure that exists within industry for the majority of such schemes and has concluded that the accredited certification oversight structure (see Annex 1 of the policy document for details) provides the Agency with the confidence it needs to consider certification results from a GFSI-recognized food safety scheme, an ISO food safety standard and HACCP certification within the Agency's risk-based

assessment continuum.

The CFIA will consider GFSI-recognition, certification to a relevant food safety ISO standard and HACCP certification within its risk-based assessment continuum if the certification has been achieved under an accredited certification oversight structure described in Annex 1 (of the policy document).

Category 4: Other Private Certification Schemes:

Where the oversight requirements for a private certification scheme do not fit one of the categories identified above, CFIA will undertake an assessment of the oversight structure that is in place to establish whether the Agency has confidence in the oversight structure, and by extension, the certification result.

CFIA's new policy formally came into effect in September 2015. However, the implementation of this policy is taking place gradually and it may be linked, but not necessarily so, to the implementation of the future food safety regulations under Canada's Safe Food for Canadians Act. It is expected that a draft of these new food regulations will be published for public comments in the second half of 2016.

It is important for the American food businesses shipping to or operating in Canada to be aware of this new policy development and to take advantage of the benefits of using private certification schemes that have gained CFIA's confidence.