



## BC's First VBP Registered Ranch – December 2005

The BC-Verified Beef Production Program is very pleased to announce the Bar K Ranch of Prince George as the first in the province to be registered under the BC Verified Beef Production Program. Mark Grafton, manager of Bar K Ranch, believes “Today’s consumer is very health and safety conscious. Here’s a program that verifies our product for just that. It’s a very competitive international market out there and Canada needs to be leading not trying to catch-up. It’s important to realize beef is not the only industry doing this.”

“To make a program like this work on a ranch the size of Bar K”, said Mark, “it is imperative that the staff are behind the program right from the beginning.” To do that Mark involved them right from the start. Cow Boss Ed Wiebe says, “I’m 100% behind the program. I feel it is very important for public perception.” All on the ranch agreed that there was no major changes in what they were doing to be on the program. The only change is in the documenting and verifying of their good management practices. As Ed says, “In a sense it puts a stamp of approval on what we are doing and encourages us to always maintain our record keeping processes.”

On the Bar K, it took about a weeks worth of preparation to get all their record keeping in order, but once this was done they felt it is now simply a matter of maintaining it. Depending upon your set-up, numbers of staff and farm complexity this can vary. For some it may take a day, while on a large ranch like the Bar K it may take longer. However, both Mark and Ed agree, “it is very important to set up your record keeping in such a way so that it is “user friendly”. It is important that it can be maintained on an ongoing basis and not become just a once or twice a year frenzy to catch up.” They are both comfortable that it has been set up for continuing easy maintenance.

Most of the Bar K Ranch cattle are finished in Alberta and, Mark believes it is only a matter of time until some packers will require it and he wanted to be proactive rather than be reactive.

The audit, conducted by the BC-VBP auditor, was much less onerous than either Mark or Ed had anticipated and they were pleasantly surprised as to the ease of the audit

program. Thanks to some organizing ahead of time the whole process went very quickly and easily and was all done in about 2 hours.

This BC-VBP program audit and ranch registration follows a 2 year pilot project that began in December 2004. The program, which still remains a voluntary program, is part of a Canada wide movement across all types of agriculture. On Farm Food Safety programs are now in all the major commodities. The Canadian Cattlemen are the owners of the VBP program and in each province, it is the beef industry, should they choose, who are responsible for implementing the program. In BC, the BC Cattlemen's Association, BC Breeder and Feeders Association and the BC Association of Cattle Feeders are who make up the provincial delivery agent.

Before a producer can become a registered VBP operation there are few steps to take. First, someone from the operation must attend a training workshop to learn about the program. As the program is voluntary a producer can implant all of the program, part of the program or none of it. As Annette Moore, the BC-VBP Program Coordinator says, "It's a persons choice to decide what level of involvement they want. We obviously encourage people to go all the way, but we recognize that trying something new (even though you probably already do most of it) can take time." If a producer wants to be a registered VBP operation, a clear record keeping system must be established for three months for a feedlot and six months for a cow-calf operation. Once a producer feels they're ready, they can request a farm audit. "The audit process sounds scary, but it's really not" says Annette. "We hope to make it a learning experience, to help you evaluate your meat safety risk on your farm. It's not intended to be a "gotcha" but simply an unbiased peek into your everyday process to provide you with some feedback on where your risk can be minimized." As Annette can often be heard to say, "the program is there to help you be proactive in preventing problems and not reactive". A very hard lesson was learned with BSE on what a reactive approach can do. If the industry can help avoid any meat safety risk from escaping past the farm gates – it has helped further the excellent reputation it has."

To date (Oct 2008) 315 producers have attended a workshop and currently 13 others are preparing for a registration audit. If you would like to learn more about the BC-VBP program, find out when the next workshop is scheduled or to arrange an audit contact:

Annette Moore  
BC-Verified Beef Production Program Coordinator  
Quality First in Agriculture Inc.

Toll Free: 1-866-398-2848 ext 2  
Fx: (604) 648-8761  
Ph/Cell: (604) 309-3509

Email: [VBP@cattlemen.bc.ca](mailto:VBP@cattlemen.bc.ca)  
Website: <http://www.cattlemen.bc.ca/vbp.htm>