CPMA ACDFL

DATE: January 27, 2014

Re: Accreditation of Third-Party Auditors/Certification Bodies to Conduct Food Safety Audits and to Issue Certifications
Docket No. FDA-2011-N-0146

The Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed regulation for the Accreditation of Third-Party Auditors/Certification Bodies to Conduct Food Safety Audits and to Issue Certifications and we wish to thank the FDA for extending the deadline for the comment period.

Based in Ottawa, Ontario, the Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA) is a not-for-profit organization that represents over 800 companies, both domestic and international, that are active in the marketing of fresh fruits and fresh vegetables in Canada. Our members include representation from all sectors of the fresh produce industry from the farm gate to the dinner plate. CPMA's vision is to enable and lead the produce industry by enhancing the market and facilitating trade of fresh fruits and vegetables for its members.

At CPMA we recognize that foodborne illness does not differentiate between small, medium or large operations. We are only as good as our weakest link and we must keep this in mind when applying exemptions for food safety. Safety is everyone's responsibility; the rule should equally apply to all applicable operations, regardless of size, source or growing methodology.

Additionally, every effort must be made by the USFDA to work with other jurisdictions to align regulations and policy with common outcomes in mind.

Comments

CPMA supports the implementation of a third-party auditor rule as a way to assist FDA in recognizing the food safety efforts of exporters of fresh produce to the United States. Third party audits are a common occurrence in the fresh produce business, and provide business-to-business reassurance to retail, processing and food service buyers.

It is recognized that the FDA cannot logistically carry out audits for every company selling produce to U.S. buyers. The lack of staff and other issues necessitate the accreditation of third parties to perform audits.

There are a number of food safety schemes that have been developed privately by a food industry, or developed by third parties and adopted by industry on a voluntary basis. CanadaGAP is one example. It has been rigorously reviewed for technical soundness by the Government of Canada's Food Safety Recognition Program and by the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI). Will FDA give consideration to the recognition of such schemes where they meet the objectives of the proposed rule, and if so, what would be criteria to assess and recognize such schemes?

CPMA notes that many of the goals of the proposed rule can be met by adhering to internationally accepted best practices. For example, use of internationally recognized conformity assessment standards/bodies and accreditation arrangements/bodies, e.g., the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) and the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC), could help promote international consistency and alignment, and may facilitate implementation of the rule.

CPMA looks forward to the development of draft model accreditation standards by the FDA, and would encourage alignment with international standards/best practices where they meet the intended objective.

Definitions
A number of terms are used in the proposed rule, e.g., audit, accreditation, certification, CPMA suggests that definitions be aligned to the extent feasible with international standards and across rules to promote consistency and common understanding of terminology.

Group Certification
[FDA is seeking comments on whether to allow groups meeting NOP criteria (i.e., having multiple sites operating under a single management system and whose farms are "uniform in most ways," to be issued (group) food certifications, facility certifications, or both.]

CPMA feels that group certification is a useful tool, particularly where there may not be a sufficient number of qualified certification bodies to conduct audits for specific sectors, and that the group as a whole should be certified under its single management system.

§ 1.610(a) Eligibility for recognition?
[The FDA invites comments relating to the use of an accreditation body's status as a signatory to an IAF-MLA as the sole criterion for recognition or as a factor weighing in favor of an application for recognition under the accredited third- party audits and certification program].

CPMA would suggest that an accreditation body's status as a signatory to the IAF MLA is an important factor weighing in favour of an application for recognition, as it would help leverage available international expertise and resources.