



A. Background to the Program's Development

The Canadian Quality Assurance (CQA®) program for pig producers arose as the result of a Canada-wide effort when, late in 1995, a technical team was established to look at the potential for the development of a quality assurance program. Marketers recognized that today's customers needed more than general statements about pork production; they needed to equal or better the assurances other countries were willing to provide to ensure pork's safety. In order to remain competitive, Canadian hog producers had to have a way to provide the assurances that their markets demanded.

Early on, the committee determined that the program would be developed on the concept of HACCP, an acronym that stands for Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point — an internationally recognized approach to food safety. The focus of HACCP is on prevention.

Quality assurance programs, based on HACCP principles, can be put in place on any type of agricultural operation. The key objectives are to:

1. Understand problem areas or hazards on the farm;
2. Understand practices that will minimize or eliminate these hazards; and

3. Develop an effective plan.

The first step is to understand problem areas or hazards on the farm. The CQA® committee looked at three different types of hazards that could affect food safety: physical, chemical and biological. Physical hazards include things such as broken needles. This particular problem can easily be controlled through the proper use of needles and syringes, while adequately restraining the animal. Chemical hazards could include such things as unacceptable levels of medications or pesticides. These, too, can be easily controlled through careful use. Biological hazards include pathogens such as *Salmonella*, *E. coli* and *Yersinia*, which are the most significant hazards in terms of potential impact on human health. Not enough is known about how to control them, particularly at the farm level.

The second step is to understand the practices that will minimize or eliminate these hazards. Basically, there are two types of hazards: those that can be controlled during the production phase, at specific times and places, and those that can be controlled before production. The first type would include things such as

broken needles. The second type can be thought of as pre-requisites to good production. These include good sanitation and appropriate purchasing programs. Both types are covered in the CQA® program.

The third step is the plan. At this point, let's stop talking generalities and start talking about the plan as it applies to your farm. The plan provides documentation to show what you intend to do on your farm. Records then provide proof that you are doing what you said you would do.

CQA® provides you with the skeleton of the plan. If you can answer all the questions in the Assessment Form, you will have effectively built your own personalized plan. If you can't, you will need to refer to this Producer Manual for more guidance. You may find that the guidelines provided do not match your operation's specific needs. However, as long as you can demonstrate that you understand and control the hazards in your operation to the satisfaction of an accredited program validator, then you are following the program.



The World Health Organization (WHO) has set out seven principles to be followed when developing a HACCP plan:

1. **Conduct a hazard analysis.**
Let's look at broken needles — a rare but possible event — as an example.
2. **Identify the Critical Control Points (CCPs).** These are points or places in the production process where steps can be taken to prevent or eliminate hazards. With the broken needle example, the critical control point is when injecting.
3. **Establish limits that must be met to ensure that each CCP is under control.** In the broken needle example, the limit is zero. You want no broken needles.
4. **Establish regularly scheduled observations or tests to monitor each CCP.**
Continuing on with the broken needle example, the first step is simply to

- check for bent or broken needles as injections are given. You might review records to determine the number of pigs injected per pack of needles. You might find that changing needles after injecting a specific number of pigs reduces struggle. Establishing that bent needles, straightened for reuse, break more easily, may prompt a policy against straightening bent needles.
5. **Establish what corrective action will be done if monitoring indicates a problem.**
In this example, corrective action would be to identify the pig and work with the processor in the event that a broken needle is not removable on the farm.
 6. **Verify that all CCPs in the system — in other words the HACCP program — work correctly.** In our example, the needle CCP is only one component of

- a larger plan. In addition to the needle CCP, your plan may have CCPs for medicated feed, medicated water and staff training.
7. **Establish effective record keeping procedures that document the HACCP system.** This is what CQA® is all about. By the time you finish answering and working through the questions, you will be able to say what you plan to do and prove that you are doing it well enough to be recognized.

The Canadian Pork Council wishes to take this opportunity to thank the members of the technical team — without their dedication and enthusiasm, this program would not have been realized.