

PREPARING FOR A BC ON-FARM VERIFICATION AUDIT AND BECOMING A VBP+ OPERATION

Although it may sound ominous, the optional on-farm audit is not and is only a confirmation of how a beef cattle operation is applying the VBP+ program.

The audit is a confidential review of records and practices done on-site to determine if a cattle operation is meeting the minimum requirements of the program. The person who does the audit has a background in beef cattle production, and training in audit procedures. It is an objective “outside eye” on practices related to the “must do” requirements of the program.

Producers who have been audited say such things as:

- “The audit was a far more pleasant, learning experience than I expected.”
- “The auditor was very professional, knowledgeable and efficient.”

Upon successful completion of an on-farm audit, the operation will be VBP+ registered. An audit provides authenticity and credibility for both the VBP+ program and for beef producers.

4 EASY STEPS TO BECOMING A REGISTERED VBP+ OPERATION

All items in bold can be found in the manual as well as through your provincial coordinator and online on the website: <http://verifiedbeefproductionplus.ca>.

STEP 1 – LEARN ABOUT VBP+

Determine if you are ready by reviewing program materials:

- **VBP+ Producer Manual** – paying particular attention to all applicable grey shaded areas.

- Use the handy **VBP+ checklist** in the manual to determine readiness.
- Complete the **Self-Assessment** – this is a pre-registration document that must be completed and handed in to the coordinator prior to the first on-farm audit should you choose to enrol in the program.

It is designed to help you become familiar with the program and assist you in determining if you have any gaps in your practices on-farm before the audit. It also helps the coordinator and auditor better understand your operation before the visit. If there are gaps in understanding on either side, we can ask them beforehand, or if needed, offer further training or assistance before the visit. This saves time and disappointment all around and ensures a more successful outcome for all involved.

- **Records** – review all current records used on your operation and identify any gaps that may occur, and update, improve where necessary. Sample records can be found in the manual and online. Remember though it is the content of the record not the format that is important. How you keep your records is up to you; what is critical is the information is kept, not what it looks like.

The records are a major component of the program though as they help you provide proof of what you do to your buyers. This is both a selling feature and helps you to reduce risk for you and your operation.

Program training is available in a variety of formats (e.g. online, tele-workshop, webinar and regional workshops) and can be arranged through your provincial coordinator or regional cattle association.

Training is a requirement of registration in the program and must be done before you can complete the on-farm audit. Taking training also serves to help you develop your VBP+ program, or to determine if what you have in place meets all the required records (3 months minimum for a feedlot and 6 months for a cow/calf operation) and practices and to determine readiness for the on-farm audit.

STEP 2 - ENROL IN VBP+

You may enrol at any time by simply completing the **Enrolment Package** form, and the **Self-assessment** form found on the VBP+ website or through your coordinator, and submitting both to the same coordinator. To fully understand the self-assessment questions you will find it useful to complete program training first.

Once submitted, the coordinator will contact you to answer any questions and go over the audit process.

STEP 3 - REGISTER IN VBP+ / SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF AN ON-FARM AUDIT

To book an audit simply inform your coordinator of your wish to start this next step if it hasn't already been discussed when you enrolled.

The audit is scheduled at a mutually agreed upon time between you and the auditor and will last approximately 2.5-3 hours depending upon the complexity of your records, practices and overall size of your operation.

The auditor will also contact you to find out how to get to your ranch or feedlot and to discuss any specific concerns you have about the audit or if you have any special biosecurity requests.

It is important to note that all future audits will be based on this on-farm audit date, i.e. it will become your anniversary date and will be the time

your certificate expires every year thereafter. If the 2 months prior to this date tend to be very busy months (e.g. calving, harvesting, branding or processing times) then it is highly recommended you hold off booking your audit until a more suitable time is available.

ON AUDIT DAY

To help the visit go smoothly have your records handy and allow for approximately 2-3 hours for the visit — more if your operation is very large or your records are complex.

During the visit the auditor will ask questions about your practices as they apply to the program and may wish to speak with those who do any particular tasks (e.g. feeding, shipping or medicating). The auditor's questions will be based on the manual provided.

Upon completion of the audit you will receive a copy of the report, and if any items are outstanding a "corrective actions request". **Depending upon the level of risk to your operation, the items identified as needing your attention may be requested to be completed as soon as possible, by a specified date or by the next audit. The time mutually agreed upon becomes critical to your maintaining your VBP+ status (e.g. active or not active) and may become critical to meeting a market's eligibility requirement. If the dates proposed are not possible please inform your coordinator as soon as possible.**

Proof of completion of any corrective action request(s) could be as simple as submitting a sample record for that missing item or task, a description of what was done (by phone or email) or a photo. When completed the proof is provided to either the auditor or the provincial coordinator. The program's goal is to help you meet industry's recognized standards

so you may achieve greater success in the marketplace and reduce your risk.

Copies of the report will be provided to you, the auditor, and maintained in your file with access by the provincial coordinator, the national business manager and national technical program coordinator. All copies remain confidential within this group.

NOW I'M REGISTERED WHAT DO I GET?

As a VBP+ registered operation you are now qualified to receive and use any of the following:

- **VBP+ Program Certificate**
This uniquely numbered certificate is useful for presentation and is proof of registration status for the period designated on the certificate.
- **VBP+ Farm Gate Sign (Optional)**
We are just as proud of your efforts as you are and a (free) approximately 1.5' x 2.5' gate sign will be offered at successful completion of the audit. Additional signs are available at cost of production and shipping.
- **Pocket Record Books (Optional)**
These books fit into a shirt or pants pocket with spaces large enough to print comfortably in. This handy record contains all the required VBP+ records as well as some popular management data and space to write CCIA numbers. Any numbers of books is available on request (as supply allows) and are free.
- **E-Newsletters (Optional)**
Approximately 10 times per year, these are provided to those with email addresses (and said yes to receiving them on the enrolment form) updates/news on all VBP+ related topics, technologies, funding opportunities, etc.

- **Marketing your Cattle Online (Optional)**
Under the 'Registered Producers' section of the national VBP+ website is the VBP+ Auction Market Cattle Sales Listing. Only VBP+ Registered operations can list, 3-months in advance, their cattle auction sale date(s), auction market site of sale, the number of head on offer on sale day and cattle descriptions.

In addition, AgriClear, in an agreement with VBP+, has created a Feeder Cattle Listing for those VBP+ Registered operations signed onto the AgriClear platform. The listing includes images and detailed information on VBP+ cattle offered for sale through AgriClear.

- **Consumer Brochures (Optional)**
Recipe brochures, meat charts and educational information designed for the consumer are available (free) to registered VBP+ registrants as supplies are available.
- **Better insurance or loan packages?**
Some insurers and banks have mentioned that a producer that is registered in the VBP+ program may qualify. Contact your insurer/bank and mention that you are a registered VBP+ operation. If they have any questions about VBP+ (a HACCP-based program) and the audit process have them contact your provincial coordinator.
- **Eligibility in Marketing Programs**
Markets increasingly want proof of practices like what is outlined in the VBP+ program. Two examples are the Canadian Beef Sustainability Acceleration pilot (<http://cbsapilot.ca/>) and the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (<http://crsb.ca/>).
If you're marketing direct it can also help demonstrate to your customers that you are in conformance to sustainable on farm beef production practices.

- Other Ideas?

If you have an idea that will help promote VBP+ and role in it or have an idea on a related management tool that will make VBP+ efforts easier, contact the provincial coordinator. We are always happy to develop new ideas and work with you to achieve success.

rare situation can range in price from approximately \$600 to 800 depending upon the complexity of the records and the operation. Notification and ability to opt out of this audit and the program would occur before the audit was scheduled.

STEP 4 - MAINTAINING REGISTRATION & FEES

To maintain your registration status simply:

- Maintain and update your VBP+ program as necessary – i.e. change or update any SOPs (standard operating procedures), and records, whenever procedures change on your operation.
- Be annually audited. Complete program reviews will not be required every year – some years will be a partial review (e.g. records assessment) while others, only a self-declaration of your commitment is required. Every 9th year an on-farm verification visit, similar to your first on-farm visit will also be done. See the manual for a full description of the audit cycle.
- Registration in the program at the time of printing is \$100 and will be invoiced upon successful completion of the initial on-farm audit and every October thereafter in the year you remain registered.

All audits are currently free in BC, with the possible exception of any on-farm audit where a repeat on-farm visit is required outside of the normal audit cycle (does not include a program determined random on-farm audit – see manual for explanation of this event).

Charging for an audit currently in BC is an exception. Audits if charged in this