

Michael Kingdon, Cattle Producer,
Minnedosa Manitoba

Producer Profile

Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives

Wireless technology can help farmers:

- track animals from birth to retailer
- schedule safe dates for treatments and sales
- maximize herd productivity
- save time

Technology can help make better farm management decisions

The same technology that lets you skip a long grocery checkout line by using the self-scanner is helping cattle producer Michael Kingdon manage his herd and meet the highest standards of food safety.

In January, Kingdon, who farms near Minnedosa, began using a new scanner and scale to keep track of his animals' health and growth.

"I mostly used it over the winter," he says, "to keep track of calves."

The scanner reads the radio frequency identification (RFID) tags on each of his animals when he weighs them. It automatically loads the information onto his computer. He also uses it to keep track of inoculations and other treatments.

Kingdon financed the new scanner and scale (costing \$4,500 to \$5,000) with help from the Food Safety Program, for Farms, under Growing Forward, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative. To be eligible for the funding, he successfully implemented and passed the first audit for the Canadian Verified Beef Program (VBP), developed by the Canadian Cattlemen's Association.

As part of the program, all beef cattle are equipped with RFID tags so each animal can be identified from birth through sale to processing and onto the grocery shelf. The tags allow any animal to be traced back to the exact farm it came from. Numbers on ear tags can be read visually, notes Kingdon,

but are harder to read when they are dirty, covered in hair, or when the animal is moving.

Scanning the tags electronically when he brings the animals in for treatment or to be weighed is a faster and easier way to track how his cattle are doing. It also allows him to make fast, informed management decisions.

"It allows better management on a per-hundred weight basis," he says, noting that the software allows him to make quick season-to-season comparisons.

The system helps Kingdon schedule the best time to sell animals as well. By keeping track of inoculation dates, it ensures no animal is sold too close to the date when it received medication. It also provides age verification for the calves.

Kingdon raises about 300 head of cows and calves, about 100 of which are owned by another farmer. The Kingdon operation is a family affair, with two teenaged sons and a daughter helping out the century-old farm that was originally Katharine Kingdon's family farm. The farm typically keeps calves back, weans them in December and feeds them for sale in the winter and spring. In addition to calving about 150 cows in the spring, the Kingdons grow wheat and oil seeds on about 500 acres. ■

Food Safety from Farm to Fork

A vital component in beef production is ensuring beef products meet the highest food-safety standards.

- A team of Canadian industry leaders working with specialists from across the beef industry developed a national on-farm food safety program for beef producers called the Quality Starts Here (QSH), Verified Beef Production (VBP) program.
- It's a producer-led program designed to help implement and verify good production practices on-farm that minimize food safety risks.
- Producers take training workshops on potential, beef safety risks on-farm and implement good production practices that minimize those risks. ■



About The Food Safety Program, for Farms

The Growing Forward **Food Safety Program, for Farms** provides producers funds to set up, implement and monitor food safety, biosecurity and traceability systems on-farm.

Manitoba beef producers can apply for up to \$2,000 in funding to help offset implementation and equipment costs that support the VBP program.

Your Farm. Your Products. Your Plan.

There are many benefits to implementing food safety, biosecurity and traceability programs:

- improves food safety, biosecurity and traceability practices
- improves product quality and consistency
- maintains or increases market access
- demonstrates due diligence which reduces business risk and liability
- reduces the risk of product recalls
- enhances the record-keeping system

Enhanced food safety practices respond to market demands, manage risks and improve the health and well-being of Canadians. ■

For more information on how Growing Forward or other provincial programs can help improve farm profitability, contact your local Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives Growing Opportunities (GO) Office or visit our website at manitoba.ca/agriculture.