

Canadian Meat Inspection: An Overview

Why do we inspect meat?

Meat and meat products are inspected to ensure that the meat we eat is safe. Inspection systems look for visible signs of diseased animals and carcasses, and test for pesticides, drug residues and heavy metals.

Meat for export from or import into Canada must be from inspected plants that meet the requirements of the importing country. Canada exports more than \$2 billion of red meats to countries around the world and is recognized for a safe, wholesome product.

Who inspects meat and meat products in Canada?

Federal, provincial and some municipal governments play a role in ensuring that meat is safe for consumers.

Federal

Meat that is transported to other provinces or exported out of the country must be inspected in a federally-registered facility. Inspection is the responsibility of Health Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

Random tests are also conducted for residues of different veterinary drug residues, pesticides and heavy metals. Residue monitoring of beef cattle and meat products indicates that the beef industry has over 99% compliance with standards for residues. While the compliance is very high, monitoring continues and is a vital tool for ensuring the safety of the Canadian food supply.

Provincial

Inspection systems vary according to province. Provincially inspected meat is only distributed within the province of inspection. Depending on the province, meat inspection is the responsibility of the ministry of Health or Agriculture. For more information on meat inspection in your province, contact your provincial government.

Imported meat

Canadian law requires that all imported meat and meat products come only from plants in countries that meet Canada's high standards for meat inspection. Under the Meat Inspection Act, all imported meat is inspected at a registered establishment in Canada before it can be sold to Canadian consumers. Canada only imports meat from countries that CFIA recognizes as having a safe and healthy product.

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What are some of the systems used to ensure safe meat?

Canada's food safety system is based on the International *Codex Alimentarius* General Principles of Food Hygiene. This involves the implementation of hazard analysis and critical control point (HACCP) systems. HACCP is a preventative system aimed at avoiding biological, chemical or physical contamination of products that would pose a safety risk for consumers. In addition to animal and carcass inspection and testing for residues, many federally-registered establishments in Canada have implemented HACCP systems.

How is Canada's meat inspection system evolving?

Consumers are interested in how Canadian food inspection works. Since there are different systems in place in different provinces, government officials have been looking at identifying one set of requirements for meat inspection that is science-based, protects public health, eliminates provincial trade barriers and protects Canada's meat exports. One step toward this goal was the establishment of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) in 1997. The role of the CFIA is to provide information on food regulations and to eliminate overlap and duplication of food inspection at the federal level.