



NEWS RELEASE

Canada needs to get moving on food traceability headlines discussion at *OnTraceability 2011* Conference

GUELPH, ON – April 11, 2011 –The main event at last week's *OnTraceability 2011* conference in Cambridge, Ontario was a vigorous, interactive discussion about food traceability, between a panel of North America's top agriculture and food traceability experts and a full house reflecting all sectors of the food chain – farmers through to consumers.

Both the panel and audience agreed that time is running out for Canada to create a national food traceability system. Other countries are well ahead of Canada was the general observation. The interactive forum portion of the conference produced a few surprises, including an observation that lack of government funding is not a current restraining force to implementing traceability – some initial public sector investment is needed to get things started; but it is the proven benefits that will cause businesses to invest.

"We intentionally set up this conference to engage as diverse an audience as possible and provide a forum for a much needed dialogue about traceability in Ontario and Canada," said Brian Sterling, CEO of OnTrace. "The level of participation and the quality of ideas and opinions that were expressed, confirmed our instinct that food traceability is an issue that will galvanize the entire food system. Ultimately traceability offers a tremendous opportunity for Canada to significantly raise its level of innovation and competitiveness in agriculture and food."

Speaker highlights:

Dr. David Acheson is the Managing Director of Food Safety at Leavitt Partners and the former Associate Commissioner for Food at the FDA. Dr. Acheson spoke about the new US Food Safety Modernization Act (2011) and how it will change the landscape for agriculture and food in a way that has not been seen since 1938, when the FDA was formed by an Act of Congress.

Dr. Acheson told the audience that producers and processors in the US and Canada will all be impacted by the new law and to get ready. His advice was, "you can get in front of regulations by using traceability to show you have done everything you can in the event of a recall. Do what you can, that's what's important," adding that he viewed traceability, "as an opportunity to clear brands instead of implicating them."

Jamie Kennedy, Canadian chef, food activist and a Member of the Order of Canada, told the audience "traceability is a value-add in the culinary sector and that consumer interest in the source of their food is 'off the charts'. Chef Kennedy commented that 'stories' about where the food comes from resonates deeply with consumers who want to connect with food. Kennedy said he believes traceability helps the consumer to connect back to the food they eat and that the idea of traceability and knowing your foods origin is not a trend but a fundamental shift in mindset. This was an idea that was echoed by other speakers.

Forum highlights:

The afternoon forum, moderated by CTV news journalist *David Imrie*, used an interactive format to engage both panelists and the audience.

The expert panel included: *Dr. David Sparling*, Chair of Agri-Food Innovation and Regulation Chair, Richard Ivey School of Business; *Bruce Saunders*, dairy farmer and Vice Chair of OnTrace; *Eric Biddiscombe*, Senior Director Planning, Produce Business Unit, Loblaw Companies Limited; *Richard Halenda*, Owner, Halenda's Meats, as well as *Jamie Kennedy* and *Dr. Acheson*.

The audience and the panel were in agreement on numerous points:

- Emergency Management is still the current main motivator for food traceability but the value to business is what will eventually drive it.
- Collaboration between industry and government in Canada has been largely lip service and to succeed we must now adopt a 'roll up the sleeves' approach to get things done.
- Businesses in Canada are cautious and waiting to see the case for traceability. This, despite strong testimony from businesses leaders on the panel that managing their businesses with traceability in mind produces excellent return on investment.
- There was a real disconnect between what audience members said as 'consumers' and what they said as 'business' people. For example, when asked as 'consumers', nearly 80% of the audience said that traceability was important for all or most products that they eat. Yet they did not reflect this in their opinion numbers when polled as business people.

David McInnes the President & CEO of the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute closed the conference by putting traceability into a strategic perspective. McInnes described traceability as a 'pan food system management tool'. He commented that a food strategy is needed in Canada; one that encompasses more than just production and distribution, but also reaches into public health and sustainability. McInnes commented that traceability is one factor in a successful Canada food strategy.

OnTraceability is an annual international conference hosted by OnTrace Agri-food Traceability.

ABOUT ONTRACE

OnTrace is the industry-led not-for-profit corporation created to lead food traceability programs and initiatives.

OnTrace's goals are: to deliver traceability solutions that will enable the agriculture and agri-food industry in Ontario to become more innovative and competitive and; to strengthen the capacity of industry and government to respond to emergencies related to agriculture and agri-food welfare and public safety.

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