

## Health Canada

Health Canada's mandate is to help the people of Canada maintain and improve their health. Health Canada's intent is to fulfil this mandate while respecting individual choices and circumstances.

Health Canada aims to take an integrated approach in the management of the risks and benefits to health, related to health products and food by:

- Minimizing health risk factors to Canadians while maximizing the safety provided by the regulatory system for health products and food; and,
- Promoting conditions that enable Canadians to make healthy choices and providing information so that they can make informed decisions about their health.

As it relates to the Food Protection and Defense Subcommittee of the Great Lakes Border Health Initiative, the following are some of Health Canada's responsibilities:

- establishing policies, setting standards and regulations related to food safety and nutrition, and public health;
- administering the provisions of the *Food and Drugs Act* that relate to public health, safety and nutrition, the core federal legislation which regulates the safety and nutritional quality of food sold in Canada;
- providing advice and information to the public, on the safety and nutritional value of food – this includes educational and advisory materials such as information on mercury and fish consumption;
- conducting and investing in research to support strategic, evidence-based decision making in the management of Canada's food system (including the collaboration on research with government partners like CFIA, academia and other stakeholders and the consideration of research generated by others in decision-making);
- conducting health risk assessments with information provided to them through all levels of government, industry, and consumers as well as from analytical results they generate in their research laboratories – this will also include health risk assessments requested during an investigation that spans the U.S. and Canada;
- evaluating and monitoring the safety, quality and effectiveness, setting standards, and promoting the prudent use of veterinary drugs administered to food-producing and companion animals to protect human and animal health and the safety of Canada's food supply;
- providing safe access to pest management tools and strategies, while protecting human health and safety and the environment by minimizing risks associated with pest control products.

In contributing to Health Canada's mandate, and in the context of food safety, Ontario Region maintains capacity in the following areas:

#### Ontario Region Food Laboratories Division

The Food Laboratories Division which is accredited to the ISO/IEC 17025 quality system, develops chemical methods and conducts analysis of food commodities and biological tissues for surveillance and research purposes. The data generated by the Food Laboratories Division contributes to decision making and risk assessment, as well as to the development of food safety standards.

The Food Laboratories Division is currently working on a study to address the levels of environmental contaminants in foods. Specifically, the lab is measuring the levels of legacy persistent organic pollutants such as dioxins, PCBs, PBDEs, furans, perfluorinated chemicals, and flame-retardants levels in fish from the Great Lakes (Lakes Erie, Huron and Superior). This is a cooperative effort with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources who ensure that the fish collected is consistent with sampling of regions where commercial and sport fisheries are open. The fish samples are analyzed to ultra-trace levels using a highly sophisticated instrument, the High Resolution Gas Chromatograph – Mass Spectrometer. As well, the analyses are conducted in a chemical containment facility which is capable of ensuring the integrity of the sample, the safety of the worker and the protection of the environment.

The analytical data generated from this study will directly support the development of risk assessments and risk management mitigation strategies for food safety.