

# On-Farm Food Safety

## Experiences of the Horticultural Sector on PEI



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# Horticulture on PEI

- **Diverse sector**

- 27 crops, farm sizes, production methods

- **28% of all cultivated land (421,000 acres) is in hort crops**

- 91% (106,000 acres) in potatoes

- 9% (10,500 acres) in all other hort crops

# PEI Horticultural Association

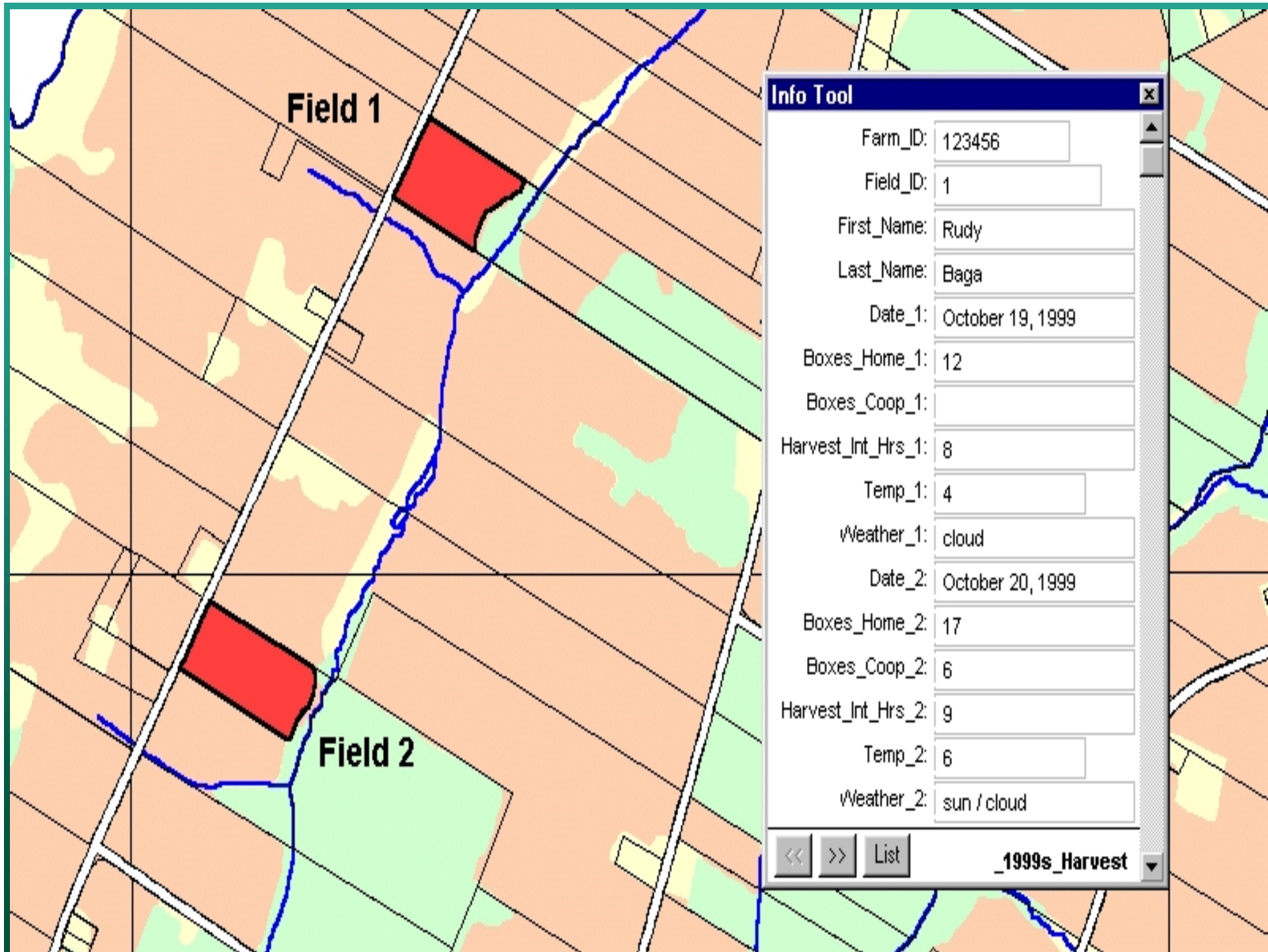
- Individuals, grower associations, grower co-operatives
- Mission: to encourage production and marketing of high-quality horticultural products grown with environmentally sustainable techniques
- Research, crop scouting service, extension projects, lobbying of government



- **1999-2001 Rutabaga Record-keeping and Traceback**
- **2002 OFFS Group Training**
- **2003 Individualized OFFS**
- **Funding from CARD, PEI government, growers, PEI Horticultural Assn**

# 1999 Record-keeping and Traceback

- Part of building a general quality assurance protocol
- Rutabaga, later cabbage and apple
- Production records, especially pesticides
  - Grower input
- Paper trail and computerized traceback to packer / retailer



# Overview of CHC Guidelines

- **Canadian Horticultural Council's On-Farm Food Safety Guidelines for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables**
  - HACCP-based, national, generic, voluntary
  - Help producers and packers develop a food safety program, including documentation
  - Field to shipping point
- **Workbook**
  - Assists growers and packers to assess their operation
  - Results in an “action list”

# 2002 OFFS Group Training

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- Multi-crop and cranberry-specific programs
- 2 ½ days classroom training
  - ½ day follow-up
  - Maximum 12 participants per session
  - 2 full days, 1 week apart
- Up to 3 farm visits
  - Assistance with workbook and records

# 2002 OFFS Group Training

## Benefits

- Good discussions
- Learning from sharing experiences
- Efficient use of resources
- Raised awareness of OFFS in farm community

## Challenges

- Time commitment
- Implementation - individual effort for a non-priority
- Traceback difficult when processor does crop pick-up

# OFFS Implementation

- Flexible and individualized
- Grower sets pace according to resources
- Resource-efficient

Existing programs:

- Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers
- Peak of the Market (Manitoba)

# 2003 OFFS Implementation Components

- Introduction to OFFS - group training in CHC Guidelines
- Design and implementation of food safety plan – regular farm visits



# 2003 OFFS Implementation Components

- Employee training
- Traceback
- Components are independent of each other
- 3 years to complete



# I Know OFFS Is Important, But ...

- ... I'm already doing
  - an Environmental Farm Plan
  - Integrated Pest Management
  - Buffer Zone legislation (protects waterways)
  - the Agricultural Crop Rotation Act
- ... it's just a way of passing the buck
- ... it's just a way to drive the small farmer out of business

# Barriers to Adopting OFFS Practices

- No problems with current practices
- Little market pressure for many growers
  - Processing potatoes an exception
  - No financial benefit
- Lack of resources
  - Time, money, labour
- Lack of formal program recognition
- Age of growers

# Positives of OFFS Program

- Growers do realize the importance of OFFS
  - Practicing it now, but without documentation
- 1 set of regulations for all buyers
- Voluntary, not legislated



# Challenges for the Future

- Further simplify Guidelines for farm use
  - CHC apple and potato pilot Procedural Manuals
- More specificity and precision
- Share cost of implementation
- Verification / recognition plan