



Salmon-Safe in British Columbia Frequently Asked Questions October 2011

The Pacific Salmon Foundation and Fraser Basin Council have teamed up to deliver the Salmon-Safe program in British Columbia.

Salmon-Safe, which has been highly effective in Oregon, Washington State and California, is an eco-certification program that encourages farmers to use agricultural practices that protect Pacific salmon habitat and water quality. Farms are evaluated by independent, professional certifiers. Once certified, farms are designated “Salmon-Safe” and receive a seal of approval to include on product packaging and marketing materials. Since the program’s inception in the United States, 300 farms have been certified as “Salmon-Safe” representing a total of 60,000 acres.

Salmon-Safe piloting in British Columbia took place in 2010/11 with the generous financial support of the RBC Blue Water initiative and Fraser Salmon and Watershed Program, a joint initiative of the Pacific Salmon Foundation and Fraser Basin Council. The pilot included a technical review of existing Salmon-Safe farm standards, which assessed the appropriateness of the standards within the Canadian and B.C. regulatory contexts. The standards were field-tested with 21 farms to assess both the technical and cultural fit of the standards in B.C. To date, 22 farms in British Columbia have achieved Salmon-Safe certification.

1. What does Salmon Safe mean?

Salmon-Safe land management involves conservation practices that benefit the watershed where the farm or other site is located. Land managers can do much to promote healthy landscapes for salmon by planting trees along riparian areas, improving irrigation systems, erosion control, and being good stewards of the land. On a product, the Salmon-Safe logo refers to how the crop is produced, not to the food or beverage product itself.

Salmon-Safe is an independent third-party certification program that helps educate land users, retailers and consumers about the importance of protecting healthy and functioning ecosystems and watersheds that are essential to Pacific salmon.

Participants in the Salmon-Safe program may include a vineyard, organic vegetable farm, cattle ranch or urban developer, but they all share the common concern for sustaining Pacific salmon.

The Salmon-Safe B.C. eco-certification label tells retailers and consumers that the product was produced in a way that helps protect Pacific salmon.

2. What are the origins of Salmon-Safe in B.C.?

The demand for Salmon-Safe in British Columbia came from B.C. farmers and volunteers who work on watershed conservation. During a province-wide gathering of the Fraser Salmon and Watershed Program in 2007, it became clear that farmers and landowners who were already employing practices that protected Pacific salmon habitat needed a mechanism to differentiate their products in local food markets, as well as to encourage other farms to adopt agricultural practices that protect Pacific salmon.

Salmon-Safe was founded by the Oregon-based Pacific Rivers Council in 1997, and has since spun off as a separate non-profit organization that works with farmers and urban land managers throughout the Northwest to promote conservation practices and habitat restoration. The Salmon-Safe program is active in Oregon, Washington, Northern California and now British Columbia.

3. How has Salmon-Safe been received by consumers in the United States?

Salmon-Safe has a high level of market recognition in the Northwest. A 2006 supermarket poll of the Portland area found that Salmon-Safe has the third highest level of food-label recognition, after fair trade and organic labels.

Vanity Fair magazine gives Salmon-Safe a top ranking of "most reliable" food label. Salmon-Safe is rated alongside USDA Organic, Fair Trade Certified and four other leading labels. Salmon-Safe has also been recognized by other publications that include Sierra Magazine, Audubon, and Real Simple. As another measure of Salmon-Safe's rigor, the standards have been incorporated in formal US regional recovery strategies for endangered salmon (including Puget Sound) and also by US EPA as a key implementation strategy of its Columbia River Toxins Reduction Initiative.

4. What is the Salmon-Safe farm certification program?

When a farm is certified, it means the land is managed according to standards that are verified independently. Based on Salmon-Safe's certification process, an operation is considered Salmon-Safe when both its impact upon the aquatic ecosystem is assessed and any negative impacts on water quality and fish habitat are minimized.

The Salmon-Safe farm certification program is focused on management practices in six primary areas: riparian area management, water use management, erosion and sediment control, integrated pest management, animal management, and biodiversity conservation.

Salmon-safe certification includes extensive on-site inspection by qualified inspectors to ensure that growers are meeting the standards which have been set.

5. How does agriculture affect the health of our rivers in B.C.?

Salmon require clean, cool rivers to thrive and spawn. Poorly managed farms can have a major impact on water quality and habitat. For example, erosion and runoff can bring silt into the rivers, covering the spawning gravels where salmon eggs hatch, leaving them exposed and unprotected. Chemicals can wash into the waterways, causing damage to young fish. Excessive irrigation can deplete streams and rivers. The lack of vegetation along stream banks can increase stream temperature, resulting in the absence of habitat structures for salmon as well as other fish and wildlife.

Much of British Columbia's agriculture land, which is the basis of B.C.'s food production, is located in valley bottoms. These agriculture lands surround the rivers, lakes, streams and wetlands, which are the foundations of many B.C.'s most valuable fish habitats. In addition to land pressures, there are also competing interests in water resources. Farmers and farmland have an important role in protecting and preserving fish and wildlife habitat.

6. Why do we need to be concerned about protecting and conserving Pacific salmon?

Pacific salmon are not simply an "iconic symbol" of the past: they must be valued and sustained for their economic, environmental, and cultural significance.

- Economically : Seafood processing and commercial and recreational fishing bring in almost \$2 billion a year in provincial revenue and \$500 million in GDP
- Environmentally: Wild salmon are a "keystone" or "indicator" species, central to plants and animals - from algae, fungi, and mosses to insects, birds, large mammals, and the forest. More than 130 species depend on salmon abundance for survival.
- Culturally: First Nations people relied on salmon for thousands of years. The annual return of Pacific salmon was so important each year that it became central to First Nations religion, culture and way of life.

7. How can farmers help protect salmon?

By following Salmon-Safe standards, farmers help protect stream habitat and water quality by:

- Maintaining a buffer of trees and vegetation along the stream banks
- Controlling erosion by cover cropping bare soil
- Improving passage for migrating fish
- Applying natural methods to control weeds and farm pests
- Using efficient irrigation practices
- Controlling impacts from breeding and caring for farm animals
- Protecting wetlands, woodlands, and other natural areas
- Promoting plant and wildlife diversity on their farms

8. Why is the Salmon-Safe program important for British Columbia?

Because our major river systems coincide with the most productive agricultural valleys, farmers play a critical role in protecting water quality and restoring the once-abundant salmon populations whose decline has become one of the most pressing environmental concerns facing our region.

- Agriculture impacts large tracts of B.C.'s land and waterways. Farms and ranches are in an ideal position to help support the health of natural ecosystems, including Pacific salmon.
- Many B.C. farmers and ranchers are already leaders in environmentally-friendly practices, and Salmon-Safe helps recognize and encourage this leadership.
- All agricultural producers can find advantages in the practices that underlie Salmon-Safe certification (e.g., clean water, land integrity, erosion control and irrigation efficiencies)
- Salmon-Safe farms gain competitive advantage in the marketplace through our public education efforts and the marketing efforts of participating farmers.

9. Why should I buy Salmon-Safe certified products?

When you choose Salmon-Safe certified products, you are using your consumer power to support agricultural practices that protect water quality and help to restore wildlife habitat in salmon watersheds. You are telling that farmer or producer that yes, their environmentally-friendly practices are appreciated and do make a difference.

10. How does Salmon-Safe relate to organic certification?

Salmon-Safe is a complementary “overlay” for organics growers. The standards include additional riparian area management, irrigation water use, and erosion control criteria that are either not covered, or are covered only indirectly, under organic certification. Pest management issues are addressed to the extent that inputs approved under organic management are harmful to aquatic ecosystems.

11. Could a non-organic farm be certified Salmon-Safe?

Yes, they can. Salmon-safe foods may or may not be certified organic. While organic certification is primarily concerned with chemical inputs used in production, Salmon-Safe certification examines the overall effect of the farming system in its watershed. Salmon-safe farms may use synthetic or naturally occurring pesticides and fertilizers that are chosen with consideration for having the least impact on aquatic ecosystems.

12. Who is certified in B.C.?

Twenty-two farms have been certified to date in B.C., in a range of agricultural subsectors. (See Salmon-Safe Certified Farms in B.C.)

13. Where can I buy Salmon-Safe certified products in B.C.?

Products from Salmon-Safe certified farms are available at over 25 farmers markets throughout B.C. (including 16 in the Lower Mainland), at major retailers that include Wholefoods, Capers, and Choices, as well as at a range of specialty shops, on-farm stores. Products can also be purchased through membership with farm-specific Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs.

Please see www.salmonsafe.org for details on where you can buy products from specific farms.

14. Why have FBC/PSF joined forces to deliver the Salmon-Safe Program in B.C.?

- Pacific Salmon Foundation and Fraser Basin Council share a commitment to protecting Pacific salmon and have co-delivered the Fraser Salmon and Watersheds Program since 2006.
- Some of our most inspiring champions and leaders for salmon-habitat stewardship are from the agricultural sector: farmers, ranchers and associations that are dedicated to a stewardship ethic.
- Some of our partners from the agricultural community have expressed the desire for a tool for communicating their high level of environmental best practices in the market.

15. What have we accomplished in BC in to date?

More than 20 farms are Salmon-Safe certified in different sub-sectors of agriculture, including mixed fruit and vegetable, poultry, beef, hops, hazelnuts, and wine grapes. This includes both organic and non-organic farms. Certified farms are primarily located in the lower Fraser Valley and the Okanagan-Similkameen areas.

We have conducted a technical review of the U.S.-based standards, within the context of B.C. regulations. Our recommendations to Farm Standards have been submitted to Salmon-Safe Inc. and will be incorporated into the new 2011 Farm Standards.

16. Who funds the Salmon-Safe work in B.C.?

The Salmon-Safe program in B.C. has been supported by multi-year funding by both the RBC Bluewater Grant and the Fraser Salmon and Watersheds Program.

17. How does Salmon-Safe complement existing certifications, such as MSC and Oceanwise?

Those eco-labels are important because they promote sustainable fisheries, and consumers see them at seafood counters and fish stores. The Salmon-Safe eco-label can be found in other areas of your local grocery store, and signify that the products - meat, fruit, vegetables, or dairy products - were produced on a farm or ranch that operate in a way that helps protect Pacific salmon. It will take time for consumers to learn about the Salmon-Safe eco-label, but we are confident they will appreciate what it represents.

Salmon-Safe is an independent certification program, which means it is not industry driven. Farms are evaluated by independent professional certifiers who are retained by Salmon-Safe to provide an unbiased evaluation.

18. How do Salmon-Safe standards relate to existing government regulations and programs?

Salmon-Safe certification is intended to be complementary to regulatory mandates by inspiring landowners to do more to protect water quality and wildlife. In 2010, a technical review was conducted that found strong alignment between Salmon-Safe standards and both BC/Canadian legislation as well as the BC Environmental Farm Planning (EFP) process. Salmon-Safe provides a market incentive to adopt best management practices, and builds on the EFP by providing additional specifications in areas that include restrictions on chemical inputs on-farm biodiversity.

Questions from farmers:

19. How much does it cost to participate in the program?

During the pilot phase, Salmon-Safe assessments have been available at no cost. In the future, and depending on demand for assessments, there may be a subsidized cost required to cover minimum costs.

20. How can farmers access funds to implement best management practices?

There is provincial funding available to help producers implement best management practices under an Environmental Farm Plan, which may help the farm towards Salmon-Safe certification: http://www.ardcorp.ca/?page_id=14

There is some funding under BC's agriculture environment and wildlife fund, to support some key initiatives: http://www.ardcorp.ca/index.php?page_id=34 .

This initiative is funded in part by:

