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Chair

Mr. Merv Tweed

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

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• (1205)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC)): Good morning, everyone. Welcome to meeting number 85 of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Before I move to orders of the day, Mr. Lemieux has an opening comment. It does have to do with some committee business. I'll ask him to make a comment. Hopefully we can find agreement.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wanted to mention this at the beginning of the meeting. The opposition had asked for the minister to appear in front of the committee. We have verified his schedule and he would be available next Thursday, June 6. He would be here for the first hour, and in the second hour we would have AAFC and CFIA.

The Chair: If the budgets are presented at the start of the week... we'd have to have a reason to bring the minister to the committee meeting.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: The minister can just come to the meeting. If the opposition has asked for the minister and he's available and it's in the proximity of estimates or supplementaries, we don't have a problem with that.

Is that what you mean?

The Chair: Chad, go ahead.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Chad Mariage): If the government designates a final supply day at some point early next week, we need to have a report in three days prior to that supply day. Let's hypothetically say that the designation is Monday or Tuesday. That means automatically that we no longer have the estimates before the committee.

The committee would have to decide at that point under what study, or if they wanted to create a study, to have the minister appear.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Given that we don't know that information right now, I think we should invite him on the Thursday, as requested by Malcolm.

If the situation should change, then I think the committee can just will it that the minister come. His schedule is available and he would come anyway. I don't see this as being complicated.

The Chair: We're trying to make sure everybody understands the rules and if we have agreement.

Thank you for your patience.

Joining us today as an individual is Professor Tina Widowski from the University of Guelph's Department of Animal and Poultry Science. She is also the Egg Farmers of Canada research chair in poultry welfare.

From the Chicken Farmers of Canada, we have Mike Dugate, executive director, and Steve Leech, national program manager of food safety and animal welfare.

From the Retail Council of Canada, we have David Wilkes, senior vice-president of the grocery division and government relations.

Joining us through video conference from Toronto, also on behalf of the Retail Council of Canada, we have Ms. Heather Mak, manager of sustainability. Welcome.

I have spoken with the people at the table. We're looking for a brief presentation. We'll start with Mike or Steve, and we'll move down the row, and then we'll move to the committee members for questions.

Mr. Dugate, please, and welcome.

• (1210)

Mr. Mike Dugate (Executive Director, Chicken Farmers of Canada): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and committee members.

Thank you for inviting us to talk to you about animal care today. I've provided you with a brief. I'm not going to read through the whole brief. I'll hit some high points—I know we're a little tight on time—and we'll allow some discussion.

Raising healthy birds in a humane way is important to Canadian chicken farmers, as it is to those who purchase chicken for their families. Canadian consumers have demonstrated their interest in being able to purchase high-quality Canadian chicken, and Canada's chicken farmers are proud to raise safe, local, home-grown chicken that consumers are asking for.

Our industry is a significant financial contributor to both rural and urban economies in this country. From farm to plate, we generate jobs in farming, processing, transportation, retail, restaurants, and more, and all of this is done without government subsidies. We have 2,700 chicken farmers across the country and 185 processors. Together, they sustain 56,000 jobs and contribute \$6.5 billion to Canada's GDP. We pay \$1.3 billion in taxes, and we also help our fellow grain farmers by purchasing 2.5 million tonnes of feed a year.

In sum, we're part of Canada's economic solution.

Today, I want to talk about four key areas: our animal care program; how we collaborate as an industry on animal welfare issues; the renewal of government regulations related to animal care; and finally, I'll talk about a couple of recommendations that we will present to the committee for their consideration.

In terms of CFC's animal care program, we implemented the program in 2009, really looking at a five-year implementation period. The key part here is to have a uniform high level of standards across the country. In this regard, the Chicken Farmers of Canada signed an MOU with all 10 provincial boards in July 2012. The reason is that we do all the auditing at a provincial level and we need to make sure that gets done on a consistent basis.

All our farmers are audited annually. I think that's a key part of this program. It may be voluntary at this stage—although we have seven provinces that have made it mandatory so far, and we're working on that further. The key part is we're going to audit and certify farmers, and 80% of our farmers are certified on the program to date. That's a quick uptake, because we've had experience on the food safety side in a similar program.

On the food safety side, in March, Minister Ritz named us as the first sector to have third-party official recognition from CFIA and all federal, provincial, and territorial governments for our program. What we've done is we've combined the auditing structure between our food safety program and our animal care program. We are serious about making sure we put in place not just a program that is there and that hopefully farmers will implement; we're going on farms to audit it.

In terms of the credibility of the program, it's supported not only by our industry partners—the Canadian Poultry and Egg Processors Council, the Further Poultry Processors, the Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association, and the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers—but also by the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association and the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies. We've worked very hard on this program. We've made sure it is something we can be proud of and we're going to continue to push.

As I noted in our submission, there will be stricter stocking densities that will come into effect on December 1 of this year. That is the five-year implementation adjustment for farmers to have new, stricter density requirements.

In terms of industry collaboration, we don't just see animal welfare as an issue on the farm. It goes beyond the farm, right up to processing, so we work with our industry partners. In that regard, we have completed recommended best practices for poultry care from the farm to processing, and that was completed last year. We also support the Canadian Livestock Transport certification program.

• (1215)

I believe you had a chance to hear from the National Farm Animal Care Council earlier this week. We are a founding member of that organization. We think it provides a unique opportunity to have researchers, animal welfare advocates, industry, and government all at the table discussing that. A key part for us is the codes of practice. While some might say they're voluntary codes of practice, they form the backbone. Based on those voluntary codes, we develop the codes in our program, which is auditable. Without that, and without what

I'll call a global approval perspective, we wouldn't be able to do what we do on our farms. That's a key part, those codes of practice.

The latest code that was done was our own, but we're now in the renewal process. Because we were the latest to have it, we're last in line. Some of the funding under the current AgriStability program will run out before we get there, so we think it's important that there's continued funding for these codes of practice in Growing Forward 2.

The last piece in terms of industry collaboration is research. It's an integral part of what we're doing. We want these codes updated because there's new science, there are new innovations that happen, and we want to bring them in and update the codes as we move forward.

I think it's important to know that a key priority in research at the Canadian Poultry Research Council, of which we're a member, is animal welfare. In fact, 45% of our \$6 million Growing Forward 2 research cluster proposal is dedicated to poultry welfare research.

Tina Widowski is going to talk about the Poultry Welfare Centre at Guelph. We see that as a key centre of excellence in where that research takes place. We have very few animal welfare researchers in this country, and I think it's important that the capacity we have is maintained.

I'll go to page 5 on renewal of government regulations.

We raise 600 million chickens a year on our farms, so we have a lot of birds in our care. The transportation mortality is less than 0.3%. I think the key part here is that we think the transportation regulations need to be modified, as does the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. This is something about which there was some consultation back in 2006, and that's the last time our comments were incorporated. As we go forward and look at these again, we want to make sure we have an opportunity to provide new comments—fresh—when they go back and look at this. There's been a lot of science and research that's gone on in the interim, and we think it's important that CFIA hear about that.

One of the things we see right now is a bit of confusion in the current transportation regulations, on-the-ground enforcement. Part of that is that the system has really been done on an individual animal basis. It has really been taken from the red meat sector and applied to poultry. We think we need to approach it as we do everything, from a flock perspective as opposed to an individual bird perspective.

We also think there needs to be room for corrective actions. You have them in the meat regulations, where if something is offside and needs to be corrected, there's a process to take corrective action. Right now, under transport, there's an immediate monetary penalty, rather than saying let's improve the system we have, let's take corrective actions, and let's make sure we have compliance going forward.

I've run through as quickly as I can, Mr. Chairman.

I'll finish up by saying that we look forward to a recognition program for food safety programs, the same as you have on the food safety side. We would like to see the government have that similar type of thing between federal-provincial-territorial governments on the animal care program side. We think that third-party recognition would give credibility to what we're doing on farms.

Second, we think there needs to be financial support to the National Farm Animal Care Council for the codes of practice. That needs to continue in Growing Forward 2.

• (1220)

We believe there needs to be government support for animal care researchers. We're not asking the government to do all the research. We're asking the government to work with us, and make sure they have researchers in place. We're investing in research significantly, and we need to keep doing that.

Lastly, on the transportation regulations, we'd like a full stakeholder consultation to renew from 2006 to today, and we look forward to that.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to talk to you today.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Widowski, welcome.

Dr. Tina Widowski (Professor, Department of Animal and Poultry Science and Egg Farmers of Canada Research Chair in Poultry Welfare, University of Guelph, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Tina Widowski and I'm a professor of animal behaviour and welfare at the University of Guelph.

I know that this week you've heard quite a bit about science-based codes and science-based standards, so today I'd like to give you a little bit about the scientist's perspective and how we go about this process.

For the last 20 years, I've been focusing primarily on the welfare of pigs and poultry. More recently, my research program has focused on the laying hen. I've had the opportunity to sit on three of the scientist committees for the codes of practice. That includes codes for pigs and also poultry—meat birds. Also, I'm chairing the committee for laying hens, which is in progress right now. I'm also on the steering committee for the animal care assessment model. This is the model that's being developed to do on-farm assurances based on the codes of practice.

The concern for farm animal welfare is not new. This has been going on for over 50 years, beginning in the U.K. Today, animal care concerns and farm animal welfare are shaping the way that eggs, meat, and milk are being produced and marketed around the world. I've provided some details on historical development. I'm not going to go through it now, but if you want to look over it, you can get some perspective on how this has been sweeping across the world.

The interest in this issue in Canada is at an all-time high, and I would not expect it to go down anytime soon. Canadian livestock and poultry producers are facing a number of challenges. They have invested, and will continue to invest, in new housing systems, new

practices, and standards of care that will address the concerns of consumers and the broader community.

If we look at the various livestock and poultry sectors, we can identify some of the main areas of concern that people have about modern animal agriculture. The issue that is probably most visible to the general public is that of housing animals in ways that restrict their movement or their behaviour. The close confinement systems that you're probably most familiar with are sow stalls and the conventional battery cages for laying hens. This would include tie stalls for dairy cows and systems in which dairy cows don't have opportunities to graze.

Another issue comes to light once we move into group housing systems—the amount of space we allow them. This concerns many of the livestock sectors. Mr. Dungate referred to this while talking about the standards that the CFC use.

A third issue concerns management practices routinely done on farms that cause pain and distress to animals. These practices occur in a number of livestock sectors and include surgical procedures done without anesthesia or analgesia, as well as transfer and slaughter procedures. These procedures pretty much affect all the livestock and poultry sectors.

All of these are very emotional issues, and all of these are issues that people have different perspectives about. The task for animal welfare scientists like myself is to try to introduce objective measures that will inform ethical decisions about the quality of life for Canada's farm animals. To do this, we use a variety of validated scientific techniques, which I will go over very briefly right now.

One approach is to evaluate the basic health and functioning of animals. We look at their health, disease, and mortality rates. In laboratories, we can look at their stress physiology, which tells you how they are responding to different environments or procedures. We also evaluate the subjective experiences or feelings of animals. We now know from our studies of neurobiology in animals that they share some of the same basic emotions as humans. Some emotions help us survive. We study states of distress like fear, frustration, and pain, as well as states of pleasure like contentment and comfort. We combine behavioural, physiological, and neurobiological measures in order to gauge if, and to what degree, animals experience these states in different housings or when they are subjected to different procedures.

Finally, we identify specific behaviour patterns that animals may be highly motivated to engage in. We identify these, and then we determine how their housing system might affect their behaviour and what we can do to improve conditions.

• (1225)

Some of the most contentious issues, for the general public at least, involve housing systems like conventional cages and sow stalls. We have to remember that these systems were initially developed to provide benefits to the animals, including health and hygiene, to reduce aggression, and to promote individual feeding. They also have economic benefits for producers and consumers.

Research into the subjective experiences and behaviour of the animals does suggest these systems can have some improvements. However, when we get into alternative systems, the behaviour and health of the animal...there are some welfare trade-offs in those systems. By allowing more space and freedom of movement, we also increase opportunities for aggression, injury, and disease. So switching from one system to another is a very complex matter.

Alternative housing systems also require greater capital investment, incur increased costs of production, and can have a higher environmental footprint. It's a very complicated equation.

Canadian animal welfare scientists are working on next-generation group housing systems for sows and enriched housing systems for laying hens. We're working on those that involve real improvements for animal welfare, are ethically acceptable to consumers and the broader community, and are economically feasible for both producers and consumers.

We are also assessing the amount of pain that animals experience—for example, castration of piglets—and working on developing ways to mitigate that pain. A number of workers across Canada are also looking at transportation issues of poultry, pigs, and beef. We are assessing the transport times and distances that Canadian animals experience—they are the longest in the world—and we're also investigating how we can modify trucks and change ventilation systems to improve the comfort of the animals on those trucks.

The work of Canadian animal welfare scientists directly informs public policy. The current process for developing codes, as you've learned, involves scientists. First, we do a very rigorous review of our own work and the work that goes on around the world. We provide the information to the co-development committee. We don't make recommendations; we provide what we know. Then the multi-stakeholder committee takes that scientific information and weighs it against the economic, practical, and all other factors that come into play, to determine the level of the standards that are considered to be acceptable in Canada. It's a public process.

Canada has always been a leader in animal welfare science. We have a strong reputation in this area, and we have some world-class experts working on very tough issues, serving on both national and international policy advisory committees. This includes Agriculture Canada scientists, NSERC, and industrial research chairs. We also have a Canada research chair in animal welfare as well.

Our work is supported by industry grants that are leveraged through both provincial and federal funding programs. The recent cut in AFC has resulted in a loss of some of Canada's top animal welfare scientists, both very established scientists and those that are up and coming. They've contributed significantly to policy development, and this is at a time when there is an increasing demand for science-based animal welfare standards.

Animal welfare research is key to informing the development of evidence-based animal care standards. It's key to informing the evolution of housing systems that actually benefit the animals. Therefore, it's critical that research, industry, and animal welfare policies continue to be supported at both the provincial and federal levels, to keep Canadian producers competitive but also to ensure a

balanced approach to setting animal welfare standards for Canada's farm animals.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to address your committee. I look forward to your questions.

● (1230)

The Chair: Thank you.

I will advise the committee that we've lost the connection here, but I'll ask you to start, Mr. Wilkes.

Mr. David Wilkes (Senior Vice-President, Grocery Division and Government Relations, Retail Council of Canada): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you very much for the opportunity to join you here today to talk about some of the initiatives that the Retail Council has undertaken with respect to animal welfare.

Just briefly about the Retail Council, we are celebrating our 50th anniversary this year. We were formed in 1963 and have been the voice of retail since that time. Our industry touches the daily lives of Canadians in every corner of the country by providing jobs, career opportunities, and investing in the communities we serve. Retail is the second largest employer of Canadians across the country. It's a fact we're very proud of, and we're looking forward to continuing to provide the service you expect, as well as the opportunities that our industry can provide.

Allow me just briefly to talk about the context of some of the work we've recently done. We have been an active participant in various discussions that have been referred to today and that were talked about in your earlier hearings on Tuesday with producer organizations and groups concerning various animal welfare issues. Our role in these discussions is very targeted, if you will, and it is to reflect the expectations of our consumers while working collaboratively with our supply partners.

Expectations have been changing, there's no doubt. International legislation, activist campaigns, actions and commitments that other food service and retailer groups have been making, and a consumer interest in transparency have resulted in a different landscape related to various issues related to animal welfare.

In order to be part of the solution, and I think this is a theme you've heard throughout your discussions and hearings, RCC is also a member of the National Farm Animal Care Council, or NFACC. I won't repeat what others have said, but we view this as a very useful forum to have discussions, to come up with the right approaches, understanding the science, as Tina has said, and also having people around the table where we come up with a code of practice with respect to various sectors, if you will, that really benefits from understanding the demands, the pressures, and the science affecting the whole industry. We're huge supporters of that process and look forward to continuing to be a part of it.

Let me very briefly speak to the commitment we released in April 2013—April of this year—as it relates to alternative housing for sows. I'll just read the commitments we have made and that were published. We made this voluntary commitment on behalf of the RCC grocery members, who represent approximately 85% of the industry. The reason the industry came forward with a commitment was really to send a consistent message or a clear signal, if you will, to the pork industry, that rather than having a patchwork of commitments on alternative housing that would be almost impossible to respect and respond to:

RCC grocery members support the Canadian Pork Council's process to update its Codes of Practice and will work towards sourcing fresh pork products from sows raised in alternative housing practices as defined in the updated Codes by the end of 2022.

To be clear, the emphasis in our commitment is that it's done within the pig code process, and we have not specified what type of alternative housing process because that would really pre-empt and pre-judge the outcome of the code practice. But we wanted to work within that framework.

The members have also committed to dialogue with stakeholders in the pork supply chain, including the Canadian Pork Council, and through our membership and committee participation in the NFACC process. Each company will take this voluntary commitment and work within it. But they will implement the specific business practices in consultation with their vendor and supply partners, as any voluntary commitment must be undertaken in order to take effect.

As indicated, we are supporting the NFACC and the Canadian Pork Council process and the updating of the code of practice, which will be released this Saturday for a public consultation. We understand that the code will proactively deal with a number of issues, some of which Tina had talked about relevant to pig welfare, including sow housing, pig space allowances, social management of sows, pain control, and methods of euthanasia. We will continue to be active participants in that process as it moves to the public consultation stage.

Just yesterday, Mr. Chair, we met with our partners at the Canadian Pork Council to continue the discussions to understand how the commitment the retail industry has made to look for alternative housing methods by 2022 can be met, some of the challenges that industry is under in order to meet those timelines, as well as some of the demands we are facing from our customers and the reasons behind the commitment we've made.

• (1235)

I too look forward to your questions. I look forward to a great debate, but I think the bottom line here is that the Retail Council, on behalf of its members, welcomes this discussion. We are really looking forward to being part of the solution in order to respond to our customers' expectations around animal welfare.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Allen.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses today.

Ms. Widowski, there's a piece in your written presentation—and I recognize time didn't allow you to get to all of it. It's actually the very last paragraph on page 4, which I believe is article 7.1.1 of the OIE "Terrestrial Animal Health Code". Based on the fact that it's in quotation marks, I'm assuming that's the actual article itself. Let me just read it for the record.

Animal welfare means how an animal is coping with the conditions in which it lives. An animal is in a good state of welfare if (as indicated by scientific evidence) it is healthy, comfortable, well nourished, safe, able to express innate behaviour, and if it is not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear, and distress.

Based on that particular piece and 20 years of working in the animal behaviour field—and I don't want to give it a grade, if you will—if you were doing a report card and were making comments in it, in general across the country when it comes to animal welfare, based on that particular article, where do you see us?

Dr. Tina Widowski: Do you mean in Canada as opposed to the rest of the world?

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Yes.

Dr. Tina Widowski: I think it depends on what timeframe we're talking about. Methods of practice in Canada are not that different from those in other places in the world. I think this fact reflects learning as we go. I can't exactly assign a grade to it. It would depend on the exact situation. The early parts of the statement in which we were talking about good health, good hygiene, and nourishment would get an A or an A plus. The more difficult parts of that statement come with innate behaviour as well as states of distress. In those we would have a lower grade, but partly because what we are learning about the animals and their levels of care is changing every day.

We would be on par with other parts of the world certainly with regard to those practices.

Mr. Malcolm Allen: I appreciate that. I went to this because I actually agree. I think that on a farm—and obviously this committee deals with primary producers all the time—it's the first part that they do well at, as you've indicated. There's a tendency to want a period after that statement and nothing else.

I think you're correct in the statement. When I read through it, innate behaviour, for instance...we're not talking about how we rear them—and, quite frankly, without trying to be crass about it, we raise meat animals for slaughter for consumption. That's what we do. There's nothing wrong with that, by the way. It's what we do.

The second part, the behavioural piece of it, is the piece that I think, Mr. Wilkes, you see from your retail members via their customers. In my sense, there is a confusion coming from taking the innate behaviour piece of it and transposing it onto the idea that they're not well cared for. The reality is that animals are well cared for, if we look at the first part of the statement. It's the behavioural part that folks transpose onto that when they say we don't let them do something and therefore they're not well cared for. The reality, in my view, beyond the behaviour piece—and this is my personal opinion—is that the fact that they're safe, well-nourished, and looked after... from that perspective, it's true.

I wonder if you could comment on that, Mr. Wilks, as to whether you see it that way or in some altogether different way.

• (1240)

Mr. David Wilks: I think there are a couple of aspects to your question.

One, I think there certainly is an opportunity for more education, and I think part of the responsibility that everybody who sits at this table and around this room has is to provide education. At the same time, as a retail community, we do have a responsibility, and that's what retailers do every day to respond to customer demand.

With respect to the particular commitment we made around alternative housing, there has been international precedent of the changes. There have been commitments within the Canadian market to make change prior to 2022. I think our responsibility in ensuring that there is that education is also in ensuring a consistent voice, but the answer isn't just moving to one solution. The answer is educating about why certain practices are undertaken in the work that Tina and others do in that area. It's also ensuring that as we work within the code of practice framework that NFACC has established, we do so in a collaborative way, which is the process they undertake and what we're committed to. Part of that collaboration must reside in the areas that I've talked about.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you for your excellent statements. Those were really informative statements, and they aligned nicely with what we heard at our last meeting. You have some really positive messages.

One of them, I think, is that farmers have a vested interest in the welfare of their animals. This is not always apparent in some of the articles we read, where the farmer is sometimes pitted against his or her own animals. That's just not the reality.

The other thing that was particularly interesting, Tina, was your presentation on science, and that science very much has a role to play here; that is, providing scientific data and feedback into the system to establish these standards.

You did raise a point about changes to the department in terms of government scientists, and it's true that the changes in the department will affect some government scientists, but what I can say is that we have tried to focus those changes in areas where industry can take a much stronger leadership role.

I will just give an example, regarding what Mike had said and what we heard from the Egg Farmers of Canada at our last meeting. There are very strong sectors here in Canada. They are part of clusters, or have cluster applications. There's a matching of 50-50 funding. We're still involved, of course, in the funding, but that industry takes the lead is quite appropriate, I think, and that they match government funding is quite appropriate too. Of course, we have other funding initiatives, like NFACC, as well.

So while it's true that government scientists are affected or will be affected by some of these changes, as I say, we have tried to focus

them in areas where industry is well equipped to take on a stronger leadership role.

Let me just ask my first question about that.

Mike, I think you said animal welfare is in the top three priorities, for example, of what a cluster might do. Could you perhaps enlighten us on a few of the initiatives that the cluster would see as high priorities in terms of animal welfare?

Mr. Mike Dungeate: Certainly. In a lot of cases, we would be looking at two real aspects, one on the farm and one from the transport perspective. Those are the two key areas. Part of the challenge for us, from a transport perspective, is with some of the climatic conditions we have—you're on the prairies and you're in the middle of winter. I know that our board in Saskatchewan has invested a significant amount of money for transportation there. How do you make sure those birds are as comfortable transporting at minus 20 or minus 30 degrees as they are at plus 20 or plus 30 degrees, and adjusting for that? That is one key area.

The other part is in the barn, around density levels and feeding systems, and making sure that what we're doing and the science around that.... As Tina noted, it isn't just one factor. What's the density? It's how many for us. On meat birds, the birds roam freely in the barn. So how many drinkers, how many waterers do you have in there? Where are they separated? How do you do that? What's the optimum temperature for those birds to feel comfortable? It's that type of research that we're doing.

• (1245)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Okay.

Let me follow that up with a question for Tina, I guess, who's involved in the science and research aspect of it.

You spoke a bit about outputs. In other words, scientists study from a scientific approach, and they provide data to, for example, a codes of practice organization who would develop codes of practice. But do you also get inputs from the industry?

In other words, would you have an interface with the cluster that would say, well, this is important to us, that is important to us, we'd like to know more about this, and we'd like to more about that, which then has some sort of input over where you and your fellow scientists would orient your research?

Dr. Tina Widowski: Absolutely. There are actually a couple of different areas that we would develop research questions from. Some of it is that the commodity groups generally all develop research priorities and a set of research priorities. Scientists do try to address those to make the research relevant.

Being involved in the code of practice process right now, there are so many things that we wish we had the answers to for science-based standards development. We discover a lot of gaps in the literature at that point as well.

For animal welfare scientists, it's very applied, very near-market. Most of our research is going almost directly into the farms and into recommending codes of practice.

So yes, that is happening.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Valeriote.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): I'd like to thank you all for coming.

I would like to follow up, Tina, on the first question that Pierre asked. That was about research and the government's investment in research. I'll take a little different approach.

We all know that farmers are doing everything they possibly can to keep their animals safe and comfortable, and all the good reasons why. It's all to the benefit of the animals and the farmers, and we've heard that. I know they're doing a great job.

For them to do better, though, for them to keep up to standards, we need research, including research even in the codes of practices that they're expected...even though they're voluntary, they're expected to follow them.

I'm concerned about the close to 700 people—the scientists, the researchers, the biologists—who have been cut from government farms and farm stations and universities. By my estimation, and I'm guessing here, even at \$50,000 a person, at 700 people, that comes to \$35 million. And I'm sure it's more money than that.

I am deeply, deeply concerned that this will compromise and have a huge impact on animal science, animal health, animal husbandry, farmers, and food safety. Frankly, I'm concerned that a lot of these scientists will go south.

Can you be more specific in your response? Can you tell us about some of these people who have been cut, some people we've lost, some good people? Are there some higher-profile researchers out there who've been cut who we're now going to lose? And what will be the impact on the industry?

Dr. Tina Widowski: Yes, I can tell you that a couple of the researchers we're losing, at least from Agriculture Canada, are considered tops in their field. They're very well published, very well internationally recognized, and have contributed a significant amount to the development of the codes of practice, to the new process of the development of the codes of practice. And that, along with research technicians, will decrease the output.

We also have some up-and-coming young scientists, one in the area of poultry welfare, that we have.... That is one area in which we don't have a lot of scientists. That scientist was originally put in place through a research alignment agreement through the University of Guelph and the industry and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to build the capacity in this area, because in Canada we don't have a lot of capacity in it right now.

Because there are all of the feather boards.... I can tell you right now that on the scientists committees now, some of us are serving on multiple committees. I think it's difficult to find enough who have scientific capacity in all of those areas to serve.

So there are a lot of questions, and there will continue to be more questions. We've been building a great deal of momentum in this area, and I know that will affect, at least in the poultry welfare area, our research progress.

● (1250)

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Would you say it's compromising and putting in jeopardy our research capacity?

Dr. Tina Widowski: Yes.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: All right.

I have a question about antibiotics, if I can go on to another subject. They are a natural part of every veterinarian's care, yet an Ontario Medical Association report from March expressed concern that extra-label preventative and/or prophylactic use of antibiotics might have a significant impact on antibiotic resistance in humans and in the animals themselves.

Do you know of measures being adopted voluntarily or by mandate to measure, regulate, and bring us in line with many of our trading partners on this issue?

Dr. Tina Widowski: I'm actually not the best person to answer this question because I don't work in the area of food safety, human health, public health, and that area.

It would probably be best to.... If you ask me about the animals themselves, I could probably tell you what they want to do, but when it comes to the implications, perhaps someone else can take that question.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Okay.

Do any of you...?

Mr. Steve Leech (National Program Manager, Food Safety and Animal Welfare, Chicken Farmers of Canada): Yes. Certainly from the Chicken Farmers of Canada's perspective, antimicrobial use and resistance is a big topic. It's in the media quite a bit, and it's certainly one of our top three critical priorities as an organization to deal with. It's one of the reasons that for just over a year now we've had an integrated industry approach to dealing with antimicrobial use, which involves the producers, hatcheries, veterinarians, farmers, and feed mills so that we're all going in the same direction. A large part of that is to work directly with the Canadian government on several initiatives they have going, both at Health Canada and within the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Within the Public Health Agency of Canada, we focus on surveillance of antimicrobial resistance, at the farm level, at the processing level, and at the retail level, so we're getting appropriate data coming in for analysis and policy making. Just as of this year, we've started an on-farm surveillance program that will monitor antimicrobial use and resistance right at the farm level. That brings us right in step and at the forefront internationally in terms of what's being done across the world.

Within Health Canada, we're certainly working cooperatively with them as they review drug labels, to make sure they are appropriate and that the growth promotion status is taken off those labels. We've been working with them on that as well.

There are quite a few initiatives within the industry to make sure we're on par internationally.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate all of you being here today, and I certainly appreciate your testimony and your answers so far.

I have questions for both Mr. Dungate from the Chicken Farmers and Ms. Widowski, if there's some time.

I want to hear a little bit more, Mr. Dungate, about your animal care program. I know you talked about it a bit in your presentation. You indicated that about 80% of farmers are currently certified under that program and about 95% receive full audits. I think you mentioned that seven different provincial boards have now made the program mandatory.

You did give some information about it, but I wonder if there's a bit more you could tell us as a committee about that program and exactly how the implementation is going. You said that seven provinces have made it mandatory now, so that would obviously indicate a few provinces have not yet signed on. Tell us why that might be and what you're finding the differences are in the provinces where it's mandatory and where it's voluntary.

• (1255)

Mr. Mike Dungate: Thank you very much, Mr. Richards.

It really is a process for us. We started with the on-farm food safety program. In fact, our on-farm food safety program will be mandatory in 10 provinces as of two weeks from now. Nova Scotia was the last province to come on; they have changed their regulations.

I think that's the point. Our boards can't change the regulations themselves. They have to go through provincial legislatures to get regulations changed so as to be able to move the regulations over.

Some of them were able to move food safety and animal care at the same time, and that's why they have gone ahead of others. I would say that the animal care program was probably about seven years behind the food safety program. It's a process in place, and we're confident that we're going to get 10 provinces on board and will move on that basis.

The 80% certified right now reflects the fact that you have to get into an audit cycle. You can't do all the farmers at once or you're going to employ people to audit one year who won't be there to follow on.

We're going through this process. We expect we're going to have full certification within a year from now. We're moving fast. In fact, I think we have gone probably from 50% to 80% in the last 12 months. We're in the process and are moving quickly. We look to be the first commodity on the animal care program, as we were on the on-farm food safety program.

Mr. Blake Richards: I guess it would be fair to say that farmers themselves understand the importance of animal welfare and are committed to it. Certainly you're able, through organizations like yours, to ensure that standards are in place, because farmers voluntarily want to make sure that those kinds of standards exist.

Mr. Mike Dungate: I think the important part is that farmers realize it's important from a societal perspective and from a consumer perspective. If you asked a farmer about the cost, he would say that both the on-farm food safety and the animal care program are adding cost. That is not reflected in the price they are paid. It's an additional cost, but it is, as we put it, a cost of entry into the marketplace today and it reflects the reality that is out there.

If you talk about it from that perspective, they believe it is in their best interest and in the interest of Canadian society overall that they do a good job on this, from both an economic and a societal perspective.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you.

Ms. Widowski, you have talked a bit about some of your research. We heard the other day about some of your research from the egg farmers. They spoke quite highly of the research you're doing on their behalf through that research chair.

Could you tell me a little bit about the program you teach at the University of Guelph? Tell me a little bit about how long it has been in place, how many students have graduated through the program, and where the students end up. What kind of work do they do following their graduation from the program?

Dr. Tina Widowski: We have a centre at the University of Guelph that was established a number of years ago, the Campbell Centre for the Study of Animal Welfare. We have one of the largest programs in North America; it is a combination of people and companion animals—laboratory animals, zoo animals, as well as farm animals. These are across the colleges.

Our faculty are engaged in developing science, not just for food animals, but in other areas in which animal care is a concern—research animals, biomedical applications, for example. We have a veterinary school, so companion animals are there also.

Our graduates will have faculty positions, several in the United States—more often in the States. A number of our students have gone into industry jobs; several are working for various commodity groups, doing research or—

• (1300)

The Chair: I have to stop there, too.

Finish your comment, if you want to. We are out of time.

Are you good? Okay.

With that, I'll thank our guests for being here today. It's always an interesting discussion.

I thank our committee members. Let me advise you that on Tuesday we hope to have the report on the beverage sector to review and finalize. Pay attention, please, to your e-mails, for the report to come to you as quickly as it's completed.

Thank you again. The meeting is adjourned.

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