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Chair

Mr. Pat Finnigan

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.)): Welcome, everyone, to this special meeting today. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), this is a briefing on the porcine epidemic diarrhea, commonly known as PED, situation in Canada.

I want to thank our guests for being with us on short notice today. Also, I'd like to welcome a few new members to the committee. We have Mr. Larry Maguire replacing Mr. Shipley, and also Mr. Ted Falk replacing—

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): I'm just here.

The Chair: Okay, that's fine. It's good that you're here.

With us here this morning we have, from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Mr. Harpreet Kochhar, chief veterinary officer for Canada and acting vice-president of operations; and Ms. Barbara Jordan, acting vice-president, policy and programs branch. Welcome to both of you.

We will add to this first panel, the Manitoba Pork Council, with Mr. Andrew Dickson, general manager. Welcome, Mr. Dickson, to our committee meeting.

We will start. I will ask if you could keep it to five minutes, because I've had a lot of requests for questions. If you can keep it to five minutes with opening statements, I'll be lenient. I don't know who wants to start.

Mr. Kochhar, thank you.

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar (Chief Veterinary Officer for Canada and Acting Vice-President, Operations, Canadian Food Inspection Agency): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, everyone.

My name is Dr. Harpreet Kochhar. I am the acting vice-president of operations at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and chief veterinary officer for Canada, as well as the delegate for Canada to the World Organisation for Animal Health.

[Translation]

I am happy to have the opportunity to participate in this study, and I would like to explain the CFIA's role with respect to porcine epidemic diarrhea.

The CFIA is a science-based regulatory agency dedicated to safeguarding plants, animals and food. Our work promotes the health

and well-being of Canada's people, environment and economy. Its main priority is the health and safety of Canadians.

[English]

First of all, let me assure you that Canada's animal health and food safety system remains among the best in the world. Porcine epidemic diarrhea is not a food safety risk. It does not pose a threat to human health. However, it is a disease that can limit pork production. This is because PED, as it is commonly called, can cause a significant number of deaths in very young piglets.

PED is not a federally reportable disease or federally regulated disease in Canada. However, this disease is regulated in some provinces such as Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, and Ontario, and suspected cases of PED are reported to provincial authorities.

PED is typically transmitted from one infected pig to another. In addition to direct contact with sick animals, the PED virus can be spread through people's clothing, boots, equipment, and other items contaminated with feces of infected animals. That is why any item that comes into contact with a sick animal should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.

The first case of PED in Canada on a swine farm was confirmed by the CFIA on January 24, 2014, in Ontario. Since then, PED has also been reported in Manitoba, Quebec and Prince Edward Island. Following that initial detection of PED in Canada, the CFIA has engaged and worked collaboratively with provincial and industry stakeholders to provide technical, diagnostic, and scientific support when needed or requested.

Mr. Chairman, there's a vaccine for the PED virus. To help industry respond to the threat posed by PED, the CFIA began issuing permits to allow veterinarians to import this vaccine for use in Canadian herds in 2014. Swine producers who are interested in vaccinating their herds should contact their veterinarians, because this vaccine is available. Under the leadership of the chief veterinary officer of Canada—my office—the CFIA regularly engages and works collaboratively with our provincial counterparts and industry stakeholders to facilitate a coordinated approach to this disease.

Mr. Chairman, four new cases of PED have been reported in Ontario in 2017. This brings the total to 103 cases in Ontario since the initial PED outbreak in 2014. In Manitoba there have been a total of 27 PED cases—the count is still out—since the initial outbreak in 2014, with 18 of them being reported this year.

As in the past, Manitoba's Department of Agriculture is the lead organization for the response to the most recent cases of PED in that province and is being supported by the pork industry. To address the current cases, Manitoba Agriculture and the Manitoba Pork Council are following the normal PED response protocol. The CFIA does play an active supporting role. The agency is monitoring the situation closely and communicating with Manitoba's chief veterinary officer.

The CFIA, Mr. Chairman, is also responsible for technical negotiations and for answering queries from any international trade partners with respect to PED so that we can maintain our market access. The CFIA currently requires pig transport trucks returning from a specific type of location in the United States to be cleaned and disinfected before entering Canada. This requirement reduces the risk of pig diseases being brought into Canada, including PED, which is widespread in the U.S.

• (1110)

[Translation]

It is important to note that, at this time, there is no confirmed link between the current PED cases in Manitoba and trucks coming back from the U.S. We understand that Manitoba continues its investigation into potential sources of infection.

[English]

Adequate biosecurity measures remain the first and best line of defence for pork producers to prevent introduction and spread of the PED virus. The CFIA will continue to assist with any monitoring, diagnostic and technical support, as needed.

[Translation]

We are also looking towards the future. We want to ensure we have very effective and efficient transportation protocols in place to protect livestock.

We have initiated discussions around transportation protocols to protect Canadian animals with a particular focus on truck washing.

[English]

Officials of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency will be sitting down with their provincial counterparts over the coming months to explore potential solutions related to washing trucks that cross the border.

[Translation]

Thank you again for this opportunity to provide insight into the CFIA's role regarding porcine epidemic diarrhea.

[English]

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Kochhar.

That is the statement from the CFIA.

Mr. Dickson, perhaps you could give us an opening statement.

Mr. Andrew Dickson (General Manager, Manitoba Pork Council): I shared a copy of my presentation with the clerk earlier and I welcome this opportunity to address the committee. We

appreciate the time and effort you're taking to meet with us and talk about this very serious disease.

I'm not going to go through all the details in my paper, but I'll try to highlight some things.

I want to emphasize what the CFIA just said here and to the media, and so on. PEDv is a disease of animals. It does not spread to human beings. It's not a food issue. We don't want people thinking they shouldn't be eating their pork chops, and so on. This is basically a disease, in the worst case, of baby pigs. Unfortunately, the mortality rate is between 80% and 100%. Essentially, the animals die of dehydration after very bad diarrhea.

The herd in Canada is essentially naive. That means there's no natural immunity to this. We don't have any antibiotics or treatment systems. The animals essentially die, and we have to deal with sick animals. Most of the older animals will recover. We're able to bring animals to the point of non-shedding, and so on, so they can be marketed.

Manitoba is the gateway to the west. We have about 340,000 sows in the province. We produce about 8 million pigs. We ship about 3 million or so to the United States and send the finished pigs—these are the big pigs—to processing plants in Manitoba. They're a big employer in the province, accounting for about 13,000 jobs, and so on. It's a critical industry.

The other thing is that we're connected directly, because of integration—it's a modern industry—with Saskatchewan and Alberta. When you think about it as a western Canada issue, we now have half the Canadian herd potentially affected by this disease. Because we ship so many weanlings to the United States, we're highly integrated into the U.S. pig production system. This disease has now become endemic in the United States.

We also differ from other parts of the country in that our barns are much larger than what you'll find in Ontario and Quebec, especially Ontario. We have 80 barns that house 80% of our sows. These are big operations. That has all kinds of implications for how we manage this disease, because it means there are large numbers of animals moving at any one moment in time between large operations.

We have a three-site system. We essentially have sow barns, nursery barns, and finisher barns. The three-site system was designed to try to minimize the amount of disease.

In 2013 this disease became endemic in the United States, or spread very rapidly. They had 300 cases a week, that sort of thing. They lost about 10 million pigs. No one really knows the real number. It had a major impact on their production and changed the market price. There was a shortage of pigs.

In Manitoba, prior to that we had engaged in a very in-depth upgrading of the biosecurity on our farms. We did extensive training with all producers and upgraded all our facilities on farms. There was special assistance from the federal government and the province through support programs to make this happen. Our industry, in turn, also upgraded things, like our wash stations, and so on. We have commercial-size livestock trailer washing operations, which are way ahead of any standard in North America.

Our board, when it saw this disease arrive, decided that we would aggressively prevent and eradicate any disease of this type entering into Manitoba. We've been very aggressive. We had 10 cases from 2014 to 2016 and were able to contain them. Nine of those cases have now been cleaned up, and one is almost at the point of being cleaned up.

Unfortunately, in 2017, since the beginning of May... As of this morning we have two more cases, and we're up to about 22 cases now. These are all large operations. We're talking about 5,000 sows, large-scale nurseries with a capacity of 20,000, and so on.

In the paper I've described the measures we have taken. They're not pleasant; they're very hard on staff. We are running into problems in being able to contain this disease, to eradicate it, and to prevent it. There are specialized crews doing the washing. There are specialized crews doing the manure application because of the disease. In terms of the cases we now have, these 22, we're talking about 60 million gallons of liquid manure that is going to be diseased and that we have to dispose of and put on our farmland as fertilizer. We have to make sure that doesn't spread to other barns.

When you think about it, a thimble full of this disease could infect all the herd in western Canada. So we have some issues here that we have to deal with. Fortunately, in nature, the disease will degrade. If we can just get some breaks, some time here to let the barns settle down, the pigs will become non-shedding and we can get on top of this.

• (1115)

Regarding this trailer thing with the U.S., we have about 100 trailers a week go through the Emerson port of entry hauling pigs to the United States.

In 2014, we had a special pilot project to try to have those trailers that were going into the United States tagged at the border on their return and to go to these new, modern wash stations where we could probably clean and disinfect these things and prevent any contamination from the U.S. getting into the trailers.

What I want to portray here is that these trailers are like a little piece of Canada that goes across the border onto a U.S. farm. The pigs are chased out through a ramp into the feeder operation, and the doors are closed. We deliberately make sure there's no contamination of diseases from the United States getting into the trailer. We want to preserve that trailer—still a little piece of Canada—bring it across the border and clean it up in Canada, where we're able to contain the disease.

The disease is endemic in the United States. It's in all these wash stations. There is no certification process in the United States. We've met with their state veterinarians, and there is no regulation of their wash stations, and so on.

We, in Manitoba, can do that. We have the regulatory authority to enter into a trusted trucker program. We can certify these stations.

We're hoping that we can work something out with CFIA, as announced here. I want to emphasize that we're the gateway to western Canada. The other provinces, Saskatchewan and Alberta, are incredibly nervous about what's happening here. I was in Edmonton on Monday meeting with their councils, giving them an update of what's happening, and they're looking to us to try to get this thing contained and eradicated.

The Chair: Mr. Dickson, if you could conclude, there will be lots of questions, and you can probably....

Mr. Andrew Dickson: In the end, we need some assistance from the CFIA to beef up our CVO's office, in terms of staff and technical help.

We need some financial help with producers for the cleanup. We're looking at \$200,000 per operation to try to clean these things up. We would appreciate some help from some level of government on this thing, especially for the crews that we need for the washing and the manure application.

Then there's some long-term stuff about how we get assembly yards out of these areas, how we provide some financial assistance to producers in the long term to recover financially from their operations, and whether there could be some flexibility in the regulations.

The key one I want to go back to is this. Can we do something about the trucker program, just to try to prevent the disease from coming into Canada? We're offering it as a model for the rest of the country.

The Chair: Thank you so much for your opening remarks.

We'll start a round of questions with Mr. Anderson for six minutes.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Chair, I'm going to share my time with Mr. Maguire.

I first want to acknowledge that the committee has worked well together. There have been a couple of issues that have arisen, and we brought them forward. I just want to recognize that we've gotten a great response from the committee members and a willingness to be able to hear about these on TV.

We got a response from the government because of our hearings. With this hearing, we got a response from the minister even before we had the hearing. We hope there will be some more content once we move forward here.

I'd like to welcome Mr. Maguire and Mr. Falk to our side of the committee today. Both of them have a very personal interest in this, so I'll give my time to Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Anderson, and thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing this emergency meeting to be held. I appreciate the members' indulgence on this. This is a very important issue, not just in Manitoba specifically, as it's in southeast Manitoba right now, but for Canada.

Fortunately, we've been able to contain it in the other areas of Canada where it has come up before, and we need to be able to move quickly, if we can, to do whatever we can on this. I appreciate the CFIA and Manitoba Pork Council's being here this morning to make presentations.

Thank you very much.

There was one area, Mr. Kochhar, that I was wondering about. You mentioned that there was no tie to the American situation with the trucks coming back into Canada, that there was no science, no proof of that causing the present disease. What then do you think has caused this present situation that we're in?

• (1120)

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Mr. Chairman, in response to that, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, there are multiple factors that can cause the disease to happen. One of them would be the transport trucks. Others are animal movement, breach in biosecurity, human movement, and equipment movement, so there are multiple ways to transmit this.

There has not been any specific line of inquiry that points to any a specific aspect or line for how the disease got in or how it has been prevailing in Manitoba. What we are trying to do, as I mentioned, is to help the Manitoba government through the CVO's office.

My office is working very much in connection with them, and we've offered technical support. We are actually testing the feed samples and the other samples. We are also providing them with experts in epidemiology who are assisting them to find out. This is one of those situations where you will have to look at all the different pieces and try to piece them together to see what exactly it could have been. Was it a breach in biosecurity or, as mentioned, could it have been from a trailer program?

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thank you very much.

You mentioned a number of things that it could be. Eliminating one of them would be very helpful. To my understanding, we should reinstate the Manitoba protocol with regard to truck washing—sealed in Manitoba, and washed at the earliest convenience in Manitoba.

I like the analogy used by Mr. Dickson with regard to the little chunk of Canada that goes down to the States, unloads the pigs, and comes back. It's very clear that we can control this. From my understanding, there are no regulations on American truck washing on that side, and we're washing in a contaminated country.

Why don't we bring those trucks back into Canada sealed and wash them locally at the nearest area? I wonder if you could both reply to that. Continue the protocol until we at least.... Maybe it's one thing we could eliminate. I ask for your indulgence on that.

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Mr. Chairman, if I may.

First and foremost, one of the things we were given was an exemption from the health of animals regulations for an interim period so that we could evaluate the washing of the trucks in the U.S. Is it ineffective or perpetuating the disease? The science tells us this virus is very fragile. If exposed to 60°C, it will lose its ability to be infectious.

Washing the truck with warm or hot water and using a disinfectant would absolutely make sure there is very little if any virus. There is never going to be zero risk, Mr. Chair, but we would substantially reduce the amount of any contamination there.

That protocol was instituted as an exemption. We re-evaluated it, shared the science, and in October 2015 we said that we would slowly be taking it to the point where we could enforce it in six months' time. In May 2016, we completely eliminated it.

If you look at the current enrolment, I don't think anything stood out. We're still doing some EPI or epidemiological analysis on whether there is any connection between the transport truck wash and the disease appearing in Manitoba.

Until now, that has been the case.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): How quickly could we implement that again if we needed to put it back in place?

Ms. Barbara Jordan (Acting Vice-President, Policy and Programs Branch, Canadian Food Inspection Agency): We could do it very quickly. The regulations for cleaning and disinfection at the border are there so that we can reduce risk as much as possible at the first available opportunity. That's the purpose of the regulation that requires transporters to present clean trucks at the border.

We can move quickly to change that, but we would want to make sure that such a change wouldn't be reducing our risk management.

• (1125)

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Do you need the minister's signature to do that?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Jordan.

Thank you, Mr. Maguire. Unfortunately, you are out of time.

Mr. Longfield, you have six minutes.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to Mr. Maguire for bringing this to our attention and for coming here to represent his constituents in Manitoba. I'm a former Manitoban myself; I moved to Ontario about 25 years ago, so I have a bit of a Manitoba and an Ontario focus.

Is OMAFRA dealing with the outbreak in Ontario, where the numbers have been higher? Is there some learning from Ontario being applied to Manitoba? What's CFIA's role in trying to look at the different provincial approaches being taken to this disease?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Mr. Chairman, Ontario has a total of around 103 cases, but only four cases in 2017. They very much have been managing this disease through OMAFRA and the Ontario pork industry. They have been utilizing very strict biosecurity protocols, which are industry-led. National biosecurity standards and guidelines have been developed, and they have been effectively using them to control and eradicate the disease. I would say that around 80% to 90% of the farms that were initially impacted by this are now free of the PED virus. There is learning.

The Council of Chief Veterinary Officers, which I am a member of as chief veterinary officer for Canada, shares this learning in making sure that it is appropriately extrapolated in another provincial context.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you.

If there is learning, the CFIA doesn't have jurisdiction over the provincial implementation. You can just provide the information, and then it's a provincial matter after that. Am I understanding that right?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Mr. Chairman, this is a perfectly good example where we continue to mention that it is not a federally reportable and notifiable disease. Provinces are at the forefront, along with the pork industry. To manage that, we will always stay very closely connected and provide our support in whatever shape and form is required from us.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thanks.

Mr. Dickson, in terms of Maple Leaf in Brandon—and Maple Leaf has operations in Ontario—what role has that company played in the consultations that are going on?

Mr. Andrew Dickson: Maple Leaf also runs farms in Manitoba, so it is a major player in the industry. They sit on our board of directors, and we consult all the time. It's an integrated industry. We meet as an industry. You'll hear from HyLife today about how they are trying to get on top of this disease. Maple Leaf is the same way. It's one of these “But for the grace of God, they don't have a whole pile of barns infected yet.” They are very worried about the impact. This loss of baby pigs at some point is going to affect the processing capacity of the plant in Brandon, and the same applies to the plants in.... OlyWest has plants in Alberta. They are worried about where this will show up at some point, if we start losing baby pigs.

My understanding is that in Ontario—and I may be unclear on this—when they report a case, it tends to be a number of barns. One case can be two or three barns, or a single barn, depending on the type of system. In Manitoba, we report every barn as a separate case on its own, because essentially they're very large.

The other thing I should point out is the structure of the industry in Ontario. They've gone to this three-site system, but a lot of barns are still farrow-to-nursery, farrow-to-finish, and so on, so the number of movements within their system is actually reduced. They don't have the same infrastructure in place for truck washing and so on that

we've built in western Canada. They have a different approach to these things.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Two things come to my mind. We had a situation with cows with bovine tuberculosis in Alberta last year, and our committee reacted to that quickly, so we are taking the same approach to this. The second thing in my mind is that this could be a trade issue; we think about cows and hoof-and-mouth disease.

Would this become a trade barrier, where we'd stop shipping pigs to the States, and therefore affect the Canadian pork producers?

• (1130)

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Mr. Chairman, this is one of those diseases that are also endemic to Europe, Asia, and the United States. When we initially got this disease in 2014, almost 95% of our breeder pigs and semen component were actually halted. We have regained all the markets after demonstrating that our biosecurity standards are very high and the industry is very dedicated and committed to this, as well as after a lot of negotiations on this. We have been able to maintain those markets based on that. Since it is not a food safety concern or a human health concern, it does not actually qualify for that at this point, where the trade would be affected.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Finally, do you feel that we are on top of this situation? What stage of managing the crisis are we at?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Mr. Chairman, in terms of the way it has gone into the south of the country and into the United States, this disease is endemic. The best way, in my professional opinion only, is to manage it and try to slowly eradicate it, but it will need a lot of effort in terms of folks working together, maintaining biosecurity, and not getting to the point where there is any breach or any other transmissible measure that can affect the pork population.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kochhar and Mr. Longfield.

Now we go to Madame Brousseau, for six minutes.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brousseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for their insight and expertise on this important issue. I am happy that, as a committee, we are looking at this promptly, before we break for summer.

I was just wondering if you could clarify this, Mr. Kochhar. PED is not reportable immediately, and it is not a notifiable disease in Canada under CFIA. Is that because it is not a disease that affects human health?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Whether diseases are reportable or not depends on multiple factors. These include whether it causes a lot of economic losses, or whether it is zoonotic, or a disease that could create a lot of impact on the general survivability of the industry and Canadians.

Then there is a list of reportable diseases dictated by the World Organisation for Animal Health, OIE, which binds us. Canada, being one of the 181 members, is basically obligated to report and also to take actions.

However, in terms of the reportable diseases specific to the provinces, the provinces may actually use it for statistical purposes or for management purposes. Federally reportable diseases might be different from the provincially reportable diseases.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Under the OIE, PED is not a reportable—

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: PED is not reportable.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: We know that in May 2016, the CFIA halted the emergency truck-washing protocol, and we know that this protocol was in place to force American swine transport trucks to be disinfected in Canada.

This protocol was removed. We've talked a little about the differences between our process for washing trucks in Canada versus what they do in the States.

How does it work to have a new protocol put in place? I think we're at the point where it might be important to go ahead and implement this protocol rapidly. What is the process? Does the minister have to direct the protocol?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Mr. Chairman, as was mentioned earlier by the minister, he has actually instructed the officials at the CFIA to work closely with the Manitoba government and the industry to start that conversation to move forward on certain aspects of the program, which would allow a similar kind of measure to what was in place earlier.

Barbara, would you like to add something on that?

• (1135)

Ms. Barbara Jordan: I would just like to make a comment on the protocol when it was in place. The emergency protocol that was put in place was the result of a specific issue around a couple of specific entry points for transporters. The question at hand was the use of recycled water. My colleague already referred to that.

Among the concerns that were raised, one was the real concern whether our regulations in place at the border were in fact having an unanticipated outcome of perhaps even spreading the virus. By having a scientist look into that, we were able to conclude that that was not the case. So we are in a situation now where we have regulations in place that are really trying to manage the disease at the earliest point in the chain.

Can we make a change quickly? Yes. I think we want to identify and understand the issues at hand and make a science-based decision about what changes need to be made.

I don't want to leave the group with the impression that we're reverting to a protocol that was there before for a different reason. I just wanted to be clear on that.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Dickson, I am wondering if I could get your comments on that, and some kinds of recommendations. It's important that we're having this meeting, but I'm hoping that at the end we can make recommendations to the minister and government on how to maybe improve the situation and act.

Mr. Andrew Dickson: I was directly involved in setting up this trusted trucker pilot project. We're not arguing the science of whether the water were heated to 60°C and disinfectants were used and so on. The problem is this. The reality in the United States is that when a

trucker arrives at a wash station, he hasn't a clue whether it's 60°C or 20°C, and whether he's using the right amount of disinfectant. Your truck is beside other trailers, and you have no idea what standard they've ordered.

I know anecdotally from talking to people in Des Moines, Iowa, that trucks roll in, do a firehose thing, blast the manure all over the place, and drive right out. At the same station we're taking trailers to supposedly get 60°C water and so on.

There's nobody in charge of this thing. It's left up to the washing industry in the United States to do this. This is not appropriate, guys. We need to do a better job at this. The only way of doing so is to have inspectors at wash stations in Canada, where we control the process and do this properly. That is the scientific approach.

We had CFIA and their officials come out last summer to visit our stations and so on to see what was going on. Our council is more than prepared to help manage this thing. We can put regulations in place governing these wash stations. But what we're saying is that it should not just be for Manitoba. We would like to see this as an option available to other provinces as well. Not just in Manitoba, but Ontario could do it if they wanted, or Quebec, or Saskatchewan, or Alberta.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dickson.

Thank you, Madame Brosseau.

Monsieur Drouin, you have six minutes.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I, too, would like to thank Mr. Maguire and Mr. Anderson for bringing this to our committee. I think it's important.

Mr. Dickson, our committee has just finished studying non-tariff trade barriers, and we're talking about harmonizing some of our regulations. As we go into NAFTA negotiations, would you be somewhat afraid that the United States would replicate something over in the States for us, just in terms of if you want an extra washing station.... I assume that you did this in 2014 and that it proved to be a system that worked.

Mr. Andrew Dickson: What we did was the trailers, and this only applies to trailers that go to farms in the United States. Trailers that go to slaughtering plants only have to be scraped. They don't have to be cleaned and disinfected, but it has to be a good scraping job. Most commercial operations wash them when they come back to Manitoba anyway. For the ones that go to the farms, we decided that the U.S. was not going to do any regulation. We've talked to the state veterinarians. They're not going to do anything about it, and that's just their approach on things. They have a different way of managing disease in the United States than we do.

Our issue is that we don't want these diseases coming into our herds, because it hurts our productivity per sow, which is our competitive advantage over the United States. Iowa has the lowest cost production system in the world, with 45 million pigs—more than Canada's total production—in one state alone. We send baby pigs there because they import 30 million into that one state alone. We are directly integrated in that, so we have to have some sort of control over what comes back across the border.

Ontario does the same thing. It ships finished pigs into the United States for slaughter, and it also sends baby pigs into the United States.

● (1140)

Mr. Francis Drouin: I assume that in the United States with PED they just assume the loss when that happens. If you're saying it's a productivity issue, they just accept the loss.

Mr. Andrew Dickson: Well, things are changing. The big operations in the United States realize that you can control this—they see what Manitoba and Canada have done—so they're starting to build their own wash stations and their own systems. However, we're talking about operations that have 220,000 sows. Smithfield has one-point-something million sows, more than Canada's total production. I haven't seen this for sure, but apparently Smithfield is thinking about trying to get this disease out of its herd. To try to clean this thing up on its farms, it will have its own wash stations, trucks, and veterinarians. It will minimize movements and so on, contain the disease, eradicate it, and prevent it from coming back to the Smithfield operations.

The U.S. is starting to move, slowly but surely, in the direction we're trying to go.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Okay.

Ms. Jordan, just at the end of Mr. Maguire's questioning you were saying that you don't want to replace.... You seemed to be hinting that if we provide the extra washing stations in Canada, there are already regulations in place, but you were going to finish your sentence....

Ms. Barbara Jordan: What I was trying to say was that we have requirements that transporters be presented clean at the border. We are committed to sitting down and having discussions with the province of Manitoba and with the industry about how we can ensure that what we have in place now is as efficient and effective as it can be in terms of managing risk. We had, a couple of years ago, a scenario that was raised with us where there were questions raised. We did make some changes in a very rapid manner to investigate that and to confirm the validity of the requirement to present clean at the border. When we were able to do that, we removed the temporary scenario. If there are other issues, we are absolutely happy to talk about them and to engage on them. We'll work together, but what we want to do as we work together is make sure we have the protections in place.

When we're talking about the protections for animal health, we're talking about PED. However, we're also talking about other very serious diseases that are present in the United States and in other countries, such as Mexico. We want to ensure we are very effectively managing these diseases. As folks around the table know, these diseases can be very costly if they get into Canada. PED is in Canada, but there are serious diseases that are in the U.S. and Mexico that aren't here yet, and we want to really make sure...before we effect changes—

Mr. Francis Drouin: How do we verify at the border that the trailers are actually clean? Mr. Dickson is saying that the practices in the United States are not the same as ours. Effectively, yes, they are required to show up clean, but are they actually clean? How do we inspect that?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Under the authority of Health of Animals Act and the regulations, the Canadian border services officers are the first line who are actually trained. They have been given all the tools to visually inspect those trailers that are coming in.

They have to be visually clean. The definition of visually clean also means that there is no dung, dirt, or any organic material, either hanging out or dripping. Also, during the winter months, for example, scraping it clearly clean and making sure that there has been disinfection or washing done would be very visible. They are, in a way, our designated inspection staff at the border and they make sure that these trucks are coming back clean.

Should there be any situation where the trucks are not clean or trailers are not disinfected according to their judgment, they can either refer to CFIA, and CFIA will show up and actually have that evaluation, or they can turn the trailer back so it can get cleaned before returning.

● (1145)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Kochhar.

We now have Ms. Lockhart for six minutes.

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart (Fundy Royal, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair; and thank you to each of you for being here today.

Mr. Dickson, you've heard some details now on where CFIA is looking to go. What's your opinion? Are these the proper steps to be taking at this point? Are there any other recommendations that you would make?

Mr. Andrew Dickson: We've had numerous discussions with CFIA, and we will continue to have numerous discussions with CFIA until we can come up with some way of trying to resolve this matter.

I should point out that the trailers visibly look clean. That doesn't mean they've done a swab and checked for disease, and so on. They're not required to do that. In Manitoba, all the people I deal with—and they're mostly in industry—rewash the trailers. We can't trust them.

Doctors, at one point, in the Victorian age, never washed their hands. Do you know what I mean? They did operations after dealing with cadavers. Well, the hands looked clean but it wasn't a very good idea.

It's the same problem with the trailer. We actually bring them to wash stations and have them properly washed with heated water, clean water, and properly disinfected by staff who've been trained in how to clean these things.

I'm sure we can work out something with CFIA. There are challenges with the act itself. The regulations have challenges with them. We fully recognize that. However, I'm sure we can work something out.

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart: I appreciate that. It certainly wasn't my intention to pit one against the other. That's not productive. What I was getting at is, are we on the right track and are conversations happening on an ongoing basis? I think you've clarified that for us.

In your statement, Dr. Kochhar, you had said that CFIA would continue to assist with monitoring, diagnostic, and technical support as needed. What does that mean? What are the steps to do that?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Thank you. Perhaps I might give a bit of precision on that.

One is the aspect of looking at what kind of expertise is needed. In these very complex investigations, we need to piece together all the information. Veterinary epidemiologists and those who can look at the surveillance and do the modelling, those kinds of expertise, do exist in CFIA. We have offered that to the Manitoba government. The provincial chief veterinary office has been in contact with us and we are doing that.

The second part is the diagnostic. There are confirmatory tests available should we need to test any swabs for the PED virus. We continue to offer our laboratory support right there in Winnipeg, Manitoba. So we can provide that. Secondly, one of the lines of inquiry has been, earlier, if you go back in the media, in Ontario, that it was linked to feed: spray-dried plasma. Manitoba has also made a request to us for some help in terms of the diagnostic on that particular aspect of the feed testing. We have procured the samples and are processing them in other laboratories. It's a very precise test. There's a component on which we have the capacity, capability, and expertise, and we are providing that.

We have a very open offer to Manitoba Agriculture, as well as the office of the chief veterinary officer of Manitoba, that in any situation where they need our veterinarians' advice, our inspection advice, or any other diagnostic advice, we would be available. We will certainly be available 24-7 to help them out with that.

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart: Okay, thank you.

I'm not sure who mentioned it and in what testimony, but there also were cases in Prince Edward Island. Is that correct? What resources are available in Prince Edward Island to deal with this?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Mr. Chairman, there was only case in Prince Edward Island, and that was in 2014. Since then no new case of PED has been found in P.E.I. The original farm has gotten to the point where it can test negative at this time.

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart: Okay, thank you.

I'm skipping back and forth. Sorry about that.

You had mentioned that lab support was available for testing. Is it timely? What's the turnaround? If it were requested, how quickly would it be available?

• (1150)

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: We have a very good relationship, and there is also a Canadian Animal Health Laboratories Network, which our provincial counterparts are part of. For running just the diagnostic test for PED, you don't have to utilize CFIA laboratories. There are multiple other laboratories that can do it. But for any precision testing, or if the volume is too much, if we can provide help, it is exactly what we said: 24-7, we will be able to provide that support any time it is needed.

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lockhart.

Now we have Mr. Anderson for six minutes.

Mr. David Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Is the crux of this the location of the washing stations? The industry wants them further from the border in convenient locations. CFIA is insisting that this needs to be done. Before you cross the border, the trailer needs to be determined as clean. Is that the crux of this whole thing? Looking from outside there seems to be a simple solution, but tell me about this. I'm giving you a chance to clear the air here on this whole issue.

Mr. Andrew Dickson: To us, the issue is that the U.S. wash stations are not regulated. We have no real idea as to whether they can provide the proper—

Mr. David Anderson: I understand that. What do you want? What is the solution?

Mr. Andrew Dickson: What we would like to do is have these trailers sealed at the border, so that when they come back they're not washed and cleaned in the United States, but washed and cleaned in Canada at certified wash stations that we inspect with veterinarians.

Mr. David Anderson: How far do you expect those stations to be from the border?

Mr. Andrew Dickson: We are in the process of writing a regulation to control that, and it would be the closest wash station to the point of entry. There will be minimum hours and stuff like this. They have to be there. They must only go there, not to any farms and so. There will be severe penalties if they diverge from that.

Mr. David Anderson: Okay. Is the CFIA's concern about this the fact that you're not going to be able to supervise this thoroughly enough to make sure this is done 100% of the time? What is your reason for saying this is an unreasonable proposition?

Ms. Barbara Jordan: I would say that we're very interested in hearing about the program and engaging.

Mr. David Anderson: You've heard about it. This is three years old. What is stopping this from happening this summer?

Ms. Barbara Jordan: We're engaged in discussions with the industry and the provinces now, as we speak.

Mr. David Anderson: Okay. I just looked at the numbers. You had four cases in 2014 in Manitoba, and one in 2015. You introduced the protocol. It pretty well shut the cases down. There were five cases in 2016 after the protocol change. Now we have 22 in 2017. I hear Dr. Kochhar saying that we can't tie this directly or definitively to trailers, but as Mr. Maguire pointed out, why not eliminate one of the things that actually seems to be the likely factor here? We have 17 or more facilities now that are contaminated. What are the commonalities there? It's probably pretty easy to figure that out. Among their personnel, transport, and loading facilities, probably only two of those might come into play. I don't understand why people can't sort this out. Whether you have to move those facilities closer to the border and build one there, or if you have to make the accommodation.... We have GPS. We have all kinds of ways of tracking people if we need to do that these days. Why can't this be done to protect this industry, because it's going to be a huge loss?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Mr. Chairman, if I may, let me also clarify this. Right after we actually instituted the interim protocol, there were still around eight cases after that particular protocol and until it was removed. So there were in-between cases, too. During the time of the removal between May 2016 and May 2017, there weren't any cases. Perhaps you'll kindly let me indulge in a bit of a professional opinion or expertise on that one. This is a virus that survives much more in the winter months. It is very confusing for other scientists, and other veterinarians to look at it in such a way, that in hotter temperatures.... I already mentioned that it's a fragile virus; it is in May. So there isn't a direct connection, Mr. Chairman, that we can actually allude to in the transport, as well as in the cases that are appearing, in that respect.

Mr. David Anderson: However, you've spent part of our day telling us how you need to get this eliminated in Canada, and the Americans are moving towards doing that. Obviously, there are some ways we can do that. I don't understand, given the discussion, why we're going in the wrong direction here, and why an industry is being put more and more in jeopardy rather than finding a quick solution to this.

I'm glad that yesterday the minister said that now we'll at least talk, but we need to do something more than that. If that comes out of this committee calling a hearing, that's good, but we need some solutions quickly. This is escalating rapidly, and if that means forcing people to get those trailers to a facility and washing them twice, I don't care, but you need to do some things here, between you, to protect this industry.

• (1155)

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Mr. Chairman, as my colleague, Barbara, pointed out, we are in active discussions with Manitoba Agriculture, as well as with industry.

We already have a cross-border working group with industry and all the provincial chief veterinarians and other organizations to look at this problem through a wider lens. We remain committed to working with industry and with Manitoba Agriculture to find an amicable solution to this.

Mr. David Anderson: Can you tell me about vaccine? You said that since 2014 veterinarians have been allowed to import this vaccine. I understand it's in very limited supply. Can you tell us a little about that?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Mr. Chairman, this vaccine was actually given emergency approval. Normally the procedure is that we evaluate the vaccine for its safety, efficacy, and efficiency; however, given the intensity of the situation, the veterinary biologics from CFIA received interim emergency approval.

It is available to the veterinarians and the farmers who choose to use it. It is dependent upon when an order is put in and the manufacturer provides you with it.

Since it has only been given emergency approval, it is not available generally in the market, but as soon as there is a demand for it, the supplier has assured us that they will be able to provide it.

The Chair: I want to thank the panel. That was a very informative discussion on this.

I want to thank Mr. Dickson, Ms. Jordan, and Dr. Kochhar for being here today.

Before you leave, Mr. Maloney, I want to apologize. You didn't make much noise and I never thanked you for being here, so thanks for being here.

Now I'll welcome Mr.—

Mr. Raj Grewal (Brampton East, Lib.): You can call me Minister Bains or Minister Sajjan.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: We shall break for a couple of minutes just to change the panel, and then come back for our second hour.

Thank you.

• (1155)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1205)

The Chair: Welcome again.

We're going to get into our second hour of witnesses on the PED epidemic diarrhea situation in Canada. Today, with us, by video conference, Mr. Greg Douglas, vice-president, animal care, of Maple Leaf Foods Inc. Welcome, Mr. Douglas.

We also have Mr. Quintin Pearce, general manager, from P. Quintaine & Son. Welcome, Mr. Quintin.

We have Mr. Claude Vielfaure, president of HyLife Limited. Welcome, Mr. Vielfaure.

And we have Mr. Bill Rempel, chief operating officer with Steve's Livestock Transport.

Welcome to all of you. We will allow about five minutes for opening statements, if you wish, and then we'll have questions.

We can start with the video, Mr. Douglas, if you want to give your opening statement.

Mr. Greg Douglas (Vice-President, Animal Care, Maple Leaf Foods Inc.): Sure, I can start.

Again, my name is Greg Douglas. I'm the vice-president of animal care with Maple Leaf Foods. I was also the chief veterinarian for Ontario during the 2014 PED situation, when we were the first province in Canada to have PED. I was also the chief veterinarian of Saskatchewan during the H1N1 crisis in 2009.

Maple Leaf is the largest animal protein company in Canada, and we have a significant pork presence in western Canada. In Manitoba, we have over 200 barns. Annually, we own 1.5 million pigs, and we process close to 4 million pigs in Canada. Biosecurity, animal health, food security, our economic health, and our trade status are very important to Maple Leaf.

What I have seen in this situation, as a former chief veterinary officer who worked closely with the CFIA and the office of the chief veterinary officer for Canada is a lack of collaboration, communication, and transparency in dealing with this outbreak. We've seen that information isn't being transmitted quickly. The federal government isn't as engaged as they should be. It was encouraging to hear Dr. Harpreet talk about providing epidemiological support, some testing support, and some biosecurity resources, but more is required.

This disease, PED, is eligible to be a regulated disease in Canada by most measures. The OIE has suggested that both Canada and the U.S. must report PED to the world authorities, and other countries that we deal with ask about our PED status. So, in fact, the notion that it's merely a provincially regulated disease isn't necessarily a very good argument.

I was encouraged to hear Andrew Dickson's comments. I think what we're seeing in Manitoba is a situation where producers aren't being attentive to biosecurity, to cleaning and disinfection, and to being proactive before they're spreading the disease and moving animals. The only way we can get ahead of this is the same way we did in Ontario. We often had town halls, communications between producers, and provided them all kinds of support with biosecurity, information, and technical support at the farms. We worked closely with our processors to stream healthy animals through to the processing system. It will be critical that we work together.

Vaccines have not been shown to be efficacious quite yet. There are some that might be in the pipeline shortly, and I'm glad to hear Dr. Kochhar talk about their availability. It will be critical in the coming months that we work together, that more resources be available both at the human level and maybe the monetary level, and that people be more engaged than they have been if we're going to get ahead of this disease. As Mr. Dickson suggested, a lot is at stake going into fall and winter of 2017 with our partners in Saskatchewan and Alberta, and also across the country.

We were successful in Ontario because we worked together. We didn't understand the complete situation coming from the U.S., but we worked with our producers. Our producers were engaged, they made good decisions, and they were responsible. Until that happens in Manitoba, we'll continue to be frustrated.

I think that's all I have to say for now.

•(1210)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Douglas.

Now we'll go to Mr. Pearce, for five minutes.

Mr. Quintin Pearce (General Manager, P. Quintaine & Son Ltd.): Good afternoon. My name is Quintin Pearce. I am the general manager of P. Quintaine & Son Ltd. We are livestock order buyers that procure sows and boars from western Canada.

We are a Canadian family-owned business that has been operating since 1968. We have a buying station in Red Deer, Alberta, and two buying stations in Manitoba. We have grown our business from a small, single-person operation to the largest Canadian buyer of cull sows and boars in Canada.

From our assembly yards to truck fleet, safe, humane handling and transportation is at the highest level of importance. Biosecurity and biocontainment have become a very important part of our business. Gone are the days when sows and boars were raised in outdoor pens. The swine industry has consolidated and become a concentrated and efficient industry. As with any living thing, large concentrations of animals will result in easier transmission of disease. This is managed by good veterinary staff, and engaged and educated barn staff, with proven processes. This results in a production system that provides high-quality pork to Canada and the world at a reasonable cost.

We are very concerned about the recent outbreaks of the PEDv virus. PEDv is of great concern and has the potential to affect domestic and export sales. It is a huge impact on the infected farms and businesses that we work with. We have and will continue to work with all levels of government to lessen the viral load that is currently in the infected areas, and we will do what is required to keep the virus out of western Canada.

As we export our purchased sows and boars to the United States, we have opted to continue to wash and disinfect, in approved washing facilities, at our own cost, all equipment returning to Canada. We are audited routinely by federal, provincial, and third-party U.S. packer-approved auditors. We have worked with all levels of government and have received funding from Growing Forward to enhance our biosecurity and biocontainment levels.

I am asking the audience gathered here to work together, as I am working with all levels of government, veterinarian, and regulatory bodies. We can and should learn from those who have been previously infected. Collaboration is key, and time is of the essence.

•(1215)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Pearce.

Now, Mr. Vielfaure.

Mr. Claude Vielfaure (President, HyLife Limited): Mr. Chair and committee members, thank you for giving us the time to present today.

My name is Claude Vielfaure. I am president of HyLife.

HyLife was founded in 1994 as a joint venture of two families and has quickly grown to become Canada's leading pork producer, producing 1.9 million hogs annually in Canada and the United States. We have live production facilities in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and North Dakota.

HyLife is a global exporter of pork products worldwide, with the head office in La Broquerie, Manitoba. HyLife also has international offices in Japan, China, Mexico, and the United States. We own a processing facility that processes 1.7 million hogs a year. We currently employ 1,900 people across Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and across the company.

Our operations are vertically structured to encompass all facets of hog production, including wash facilities and baking bays, which we've invested \$1.5 million into in the last two years because of PED and in trying to get better biosecurity.

We have feed mill facilities. We have transportation fleets for movement of feed and livestock. We have a construction company, a manure management company that applies manure according to government regulations, and a manufacturing and distribution centre for farm supplies.

You have had some education already on PED, but certainly our production system is three-site production. We have maternities; the piglets are born there. We move them to a nursery site, which is a second site. Then we move them to a finishing site, which is where we raise them to market hogs. Certainly, PED affects all sites and creates lots of virus shedding that reinfects barns in the area, which has been a huge concern of ours. It causes mortality in piglets, as we've heard today.

One important thing to say again is that PED cannot be transmitted to humans or contaminate the human food supply. Let's be clear on that.

As of yesterday, when I had done my presentation, we had 28 outbreaks. Unfortunately, there were two more last night and probably two more were confirmed this morning, so we're at 32.

HyLife has been affected severely by PED in the last month. We have three sow sites, including 7,000 sows; nursery sites, with 25,000 spaces; and finishing sites of 40,000 spaces. So we have 72,000 spaces and 11 sites that have been affected in the last month. It's been a struggle.

Regarding biosecurity challenges, in the past we have been able to control PED outbreaks at our sites. We had one last year. We were very successful in quickly eradicating the disease. However, this year the virus is spreading faster and is more widespread, which has created a lot of virus shedding and has impacted surrounding sites at an alarming rate.

Although we are maintaining strong biosecurity protocols, in most instances, we believe the virus is being spread not by direct link to pig movements, but by air. There have been signs that show the virus does now spread by air. We've actually put some fences between some sites to see. When the wind was blowing, we swabbed the fence and saw that the fence was contaminated with PED. The only way that could have happened was by air. Unfortunately, that's hard to control.

In terms of containment strategies, extra measures are currently being taken to try to contain the spread of the disease by dedicating personnel and equipment to positive sites, for example, livestock trucks and feed trucks. This has caused a lot of challenges within the company to ensure that we have enough equipment dedicated to positive sites to prevent the spread of the disease.

We have enhanced communication strategies to all staff throughout our organization to elevate the biosecurity protocols to educate our staff and to express the associated risks with the disease.

We've had great support from the chief veterinary office in Manitoba. They are putting five-kilometre buffer zones around the sites that become positive. They do weekly testing, and we are on top of all the positive sites as soon as we can be.

In terms of future concerns and challenges, there are supply chain disruptions for us, as we're a vertically integrated company. The spread of PED has caused a significant gap in our production, which will impact hog supply to our HyLife Foods processing facility. As of yesterday, we believe that we've lost 21,000 pigs already to PED, and that will have a direct impact on marketing our pork to our customers. Gaps in production as a result of PED present competitive disadvantages and challenges to our domestic and international customers as far as being able to supply them with pork is concerned.

As for our asks, there is the trusted trucker program to seal the trailers at the U.S. border before the trailers come into Manitoba.

I have a clarification on washing and so on. You can wash a trailer to different levels. You can wash a trailer and it's still half-dirty. You can wash a trailer so that it's very clean.

• (1220)

Our company in Manitoba—but I know a lot of companies in the United States will talk about this too—does a third-party audit of the trailers. Once they are cleaned, washed, and disinfected, we do some swabbing. Then we have a third party come to look to make sure that the washing has been done properly. That's very important. I'm sure that's not being done in the U.S. at most facilities, and it's a real concern.

Washing the trailers at the border is not only for PED; it's for future diseases, for the future of the industry. There are a lot of diseases in the U.S. There are different strains of common pig diseases that we don't want to bring across the border.

The Chair: Could you conclude shortly, please?

Mr. Claude Vielfaure: Okay, I'll just wrap up.

The second thing is to continue to support the CVO office. They have been very helpful. They are running out of resources and testing, and we need continued support of them.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vielfaure.

Mr. Rempel, you have five minutes.

Mr. Bill Rempel (Chief Operating Officer, Steve's Livestock Transport): Mr. Chairman and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to present here the challenges we are facing with PED in Manitoba, and the fear that lies in the rest of western Canada because we're so integrated.

My name is Bill Rempel, and I'm with Steve's Livestock Transport. We are a for-hire livestock transporter. We operate 130 trucks that are on the road on any given day. We have about 400 employees. Eighty per cent of our cargo is hogs. About 70% of that originates out of the Manitoba area, a lot of it in the southeast area. We have terminals in southeastern Manitoba in Blumenort, right where the hot zone is; in western Manitoba in Brandon; and in central Alberta in Red Deer. The majority of our transport is in western Canada, but we go into the United States as well.

The current challenge we are facing as a transporter is severe, and it seems to be growing by the day. There are definitely some concerns in our organization as far as the different effects it's having. One of them that hasn't been talked about a lot is the emotional toll it takes on people. Even though we're not directly involved in hog production, we are very impacted by this challenge. With every farm that breaks, there are new zones declared, which means there are logistical challenges and changes for us and for where our trucks move. There is heightened biosecurity and scrutiny on our people who are doing the work every day.

The toll and the challenge have been particularly on our logistics staff, our drivers, and our wash employees. A lot of effort is going into route planning. We have had several cases where our trucks are literally sitting at a farm waiting for directions from the different parties, from the CVO, with regard to what route they'll take to leave from there.

There is a lot of work and there are a lot of slowdowns happening. A lot of people are working seven days a week to try to make sure we stay on top of this. People are getting tired. When there needs to be this level of heightened awareness and biosecurity that people need to stay on top of, it concerns us.

The other challenge we run into is an equipment shortage. We've made the decision to isolate where trailers go and to use specific trailers for high-risk sites. They don't go out of that area; they can only be used there. That affects our efficiencies and utilization of equipment. We can't use those trailers in other areas, so that's created an equipment shortage with regard to trailers.

Since the outbreak, cleaning, disinfecting, and mechanical drying of trailers has significantly expanded. As I referred to before, there are different levels of cleaning. It's been ramped up significantly, and the frequency has gone up to the point where, today, our wash facility in Blumenort, Manitoba, is at capacity. We're operating four shifts. We run seven days a week, 24 hours a day, and we're running at capacity.

As a reference, generally, on average, it takes about three hours for two people to go through the C and D process for a trailer. It's a lengthy timeframe. All the extra work that goes into this, along with

the reduced utilization, has created some limitations, and it is having a financial impact on our organization as well.

What we have done as an organization so far is segregate the trailers from high-risk sites. We limit where our trucks go. We are in western Canada, so we have a terminal in Alberta. Trucks there would haul animals back and forth. We've limited where they're allowed to go. Obviously, we've reviewed and updated our biosecurity protocols. We continually adjust and limit routes, and we are looking at how we can expand our washing facility.

Since 2013 when the PED virus was first detected in North America, we—and the industry as a whole—have invested heavily to protect ourselves from the PED virus. We have spent millions to expand washing. We designed thermal-assisted drying, which is high heat drying. We bring the temperature of the trailers to 165°F to 170°F. Research has shown that if we keep it there for a minimum of 12 minutes, it will kill the virus.

There is a lot that has gone into that. We haven't sat idly by and hoped for the best. We've been very active, and the industry has been very active in trying to control the spread of the virus.

• (1225)

I appreciate your taking the time to hear us. The ask on our part, and certainly what could help us, would be to implement the trusted trucker program. That would do three things for us.

First, it would reduce the risk. Today, we are washing in the U.S., so when those trailers hit the border they're clean, but the industry is washing them again, so we are going through the complete process again on the Canadian side. That tells you that the wash in the U.S. isn't trusted. The industry doesn't trust it, so we are doing it twice. We strongly feel that it would reduce the risk.

Second, it would free up equipment—instead of going out of route, washing the trailers in the U.S., bringing them back, and washing them again.

It would certainly reduce the risk, improve our utilization of the equipment, and reduce costs.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll get right into our question round.

Mr. Anderson, you have six minutes.

Mr. David Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to share with Mr. Falk.

I just want to touch on one question about the trucking and the cleaning. Is a compromise solution a high-tech cleaning facility at the Emerson border crossing? Do you support that? I guess this is for the three gentlemen at the table. Is that a compromise solution that would assist here and do some of these things, like reducing risk, reducing costs, and freeing up the equipment and opportunity? The truck and transportation companies—

Mr. Bill Rempel: It's certainly an option. We are about an hour from the border, just over an hour from where there is a facility today that is audited and inspected, and also where the clean trailers are tested.

Mr. David Anderson: HyLife, what would be your position on something like that?

Mr. Claude Vielfaure: When we sell pigs to the U.S., we use third party trucking. Internally, when we move our pigs within Manitoba and Saskatchewan, we use our own trucks, so our truck and wash base is centrally located for that transfer.

Mr. David Anderson: You have your own cleaning facility that you're happy with.

Mr. Claude Vielfaure: Yes, but that's not trucks coming back from the U.S.

Mr. David Anderson: I have one other question, and then I'll turn it over to Mr. Falk.

What is the CFIA concerned about with the trusted trucker program? What are you failing to negotiate with them on that issue? Is it an issue of trust—trucks come across the border and we have to know that this is happening? What is the issue there?

Mr. Bill Rempel: The requirement today is that it be clean when it arrives back at the border. That's the requirement the way it is stated today; otherwise, we wouldn't be allowed to return into Canada.

Mr. David Anderson: Okay.

Go ahead.

Mr. Ted Falk: Thank you, Mr. Anderson.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me to participate in the discussion here this morning, at this committee. I thank all the committee members for attending and for agreeing to an emergency meeting.

Thank you to our witnesses, as well.

I was very happy to hear Dr. Kochhar state earlier—and I think it's important that Canadians know this—that it is not a food safety or a public health issue. This is an issue for the pork industry that affects our production. That's the issue we are dealing with, and not an issue of food safety.

I want to go over the protocol a bit.

Mr. Vielfaure, Mr. Rempel, and Mr. Pearce, all three of them, have facilities in my riding, and I am familiar with them. Actually, after Mr. Vielfaure's dad was done being an MLA in the province, he helped the boys, and there was the odd time or two, when I was in the industry, when his dad delivered piglets to my facilities, so I have some experience in the industry as well, having been a producer in the past.

We have very strict biosecurity standards in our industry in Manitoba, and that's something that you guys are always working to improve. My understanding is that when you take a load of piglets to the United States, you drop them off at a facility, at a farm, that is presumably virus-free. Your preference is to do what we did in the past, under the special trusted truck protocol: come to the border,

seal those trailers, and take them directly to a certified washing station, where they are hot-washed, disinfected, and high-heat dried.

The protocol was changed in December. We had that protocol implemented in 2014, when we had an outbreak. It seems to have addressed that situation, and now, after that protocol was relaxed and changed, we have a flare-up of PED again.

The problem is this. When you deliver these pigs to a site in the States, your only point of contact is the rear gate of that trailer, and that's minimal contact. Then you drive straight back to the border, you get sealed, and you come back into Canada. When you are being forced to go to a truck wash facility in the United States that is not certified or regulated, they use a firehose approach without high heat; all they do is sprinkle it and rinse it out so it looks clean and satisfies the requirements at the border. As a result, you've really exposed yourself not only to recycled water, which is a common practice down there, but also to a site where all kinds of trailers come from industry and Iowa. We heard before, from the chief veterinary officer, that there is much more of an epidemic of PED in the United States. You've been on a site where there is contamination already, so all kinds of parts of that truck now get infected.

Is that the issue that we're talking about?

• (1230)

Mr. Bill Rempel: Yes.

Mr. Claude Vielfaure: Correct. You got it right on.

Mr. Ted Falk: Your request is actually very simple: you would like this trusted truck and trailer protocol to be reinstated.

Mr. Claude Vielfaure: Yes.

Mr. Bill Rempel: Correct.

Mr. Ted Falk: As an industry, you have other issues with slowing down the contamination in the province or the spread of a disease, but you believe that since that protocol changed...

Well, the evidence shows that there has been an increase. The scientific evidence isn't there to make a direct linkage, but the data is there.

Mr. Claude Vielfaure: That's right. I think there are two components to it. There's the trusted trucker program, keeping the disease out of the province. That's important. However, it's not always absolute. If something does come in—and I'm talking about other diseases, too—then we can control it. With this reportable PED, the chief veterinary officer has been very helpful in doing that with us.

Mr. Ted Falk: In addition to that, you're asking for assistance from the government and resources to clean up some of the contaminated sites. I think Mr. Dickson said there's 20 million gallons of manure that needs to be disposed of, and that will need to be done before October.

Mr. Claude Vielfaure: That's right. It's a strain on equipment. We have just the amount of equipment to do all the work. Once you have positive sites, you want to dedicate that equipment to those positive sites only, so they're not being used as efficiently as we could. Bringing it to negative sites would just spread the disease.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vielfaure; and thank you, Mr. Falk.

Now we'll go to Mr. Longfield for six minutes.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I thought I was next after Mr. Peschisolido.

What I'm hearing is that the airborne disease is something new. Trailers haven't been confirmed yet as a source of disease.

Mr. Claude Vielfaure: Definitely, if they're not cleaned properly, trailers are probably the number one way to transfer disease. Live pigs are going into trailers, and if there were infected pigs in the trailer before that, the chances of them getting infected if it's not washed perfectly is very high.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: The sealing at the border is one of the things I had wondered about from the previous testimony. Let's say somebody drops off some pigs at one of the stations in the States. Maybe the trailer is used to shuttle some pigs between other operations, which we would never know about, and could be contaminated in some different ways, with different diseases. However, at some point we need to seal those trailers.

Should they be sealed at drop off, or should they be sealed at the border?

Mr. Bill Rempel: We, as transporters, are not allowed to carry freight in the U.S. We can't go from point of loading and unloading. That's against the regulations in the U.S. We're not allowed to do that.

That is an option, but I think there's a control point at the border. I think that's why that was so effective.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I was trying to get to that control point and thinking that if the high contamination is with piglets in the States, then we have to somehow isolate that as well. That's done just by regulations at this point.

Mr. Bill Rempel: Right.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Maple Leaf, thank you for joining us. In terms of management of this, with smaller operators, are there some variables there that we need to look at in terms of size of operations? Is there anything that Maple Leaf has been working on with CFIA to try to solve the problem?

•(1235)

Mr. Greg Douglas: Not at this point. We have been concentrating on our own barns and enhancing our own biosecurity in the five buffer zones.

When I was in Ontario with OMAFRA, we did have biosecurity support from CFIA. They came to help us with the smaller producers that we had in Ontario. You raise a really good point that CFIA has biosecurity expertise that they could bring to bear in Manitoba to help smaller producers with cleaning and disinfection, with the nuances of biosecurity, such that they could help keep the larger system clean.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you. What form would that take? Would it mean some people from Ontario coming to Manitoba from CFIA, people who have had experience, or some people from Maple Leaf? Is there some type of partnership opportunity there?

Mr. Greg Douglas: CFIA has the resources. When they deal with federally reportable diseases, such as avian influenza or chronic

wasting disease in western Canada, they actually come into a farm and they will work with the producer on cleaning and disinfection.

CFIA has them in Ontario, but they have them throughout Canada. Certainly there are resources in British Columbia that could be brought into Manitoba to help these producers.

It's not just a matter of helping them; it's controlling and providing the right solvents for producers to use and how to use them. It's highly technical. Companies such as Maple Leaf and HyLife do it all day long in their plants and on their farms, but smaller producers just don't have that. They're getting frustrated and they need help; they need some communication.

They know who to call. The chief veterinarian in Manitoba has done a great job, and I'll be talking to her probably in the next hour. However, the federal government has to re-engage on animal health with the farming community and with processors.

I know you've heard us speak about it before, that in terms of animal health broadly, whether it's FMD or classical swine fever, all these diseases are really important and CFIA has to take a bigger and more present role.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Very good. Thank you.

We did look at the transport of animals in a previous study, and this probably fits within that whole thing, in terms of the range of transport and some of the regulations around that, and animal care during transport.

Mr. Greg Douglas: It does, yes. We have looked at that before.

In Manitoba, we have a very engaged industry. It's a larger industry. Being responsible, we have resources that are dedicated to making sure that animals are transported humanely, but part of that is also making sure that they're transported with the best biosecurity possible. Working with producers is an ongoing issue for both the industry and governments.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Terrific.

Going back to the panel here, on the number of outbreaks, do we have a sense of the size of the operations? Does the size of operations matter? Are they being found in some particular styles of operations versus others? Are there any correlations there?

Mr. Claude Vielfaure: There's no real correlation between size and disease. It can hit any pig. It could be two pigs in a facility or 10,000 pigs in a facility. But the amount of shedding of the virus once that facility gets sick is obviously a lot more when there are a lot more animals. The virus becomes airborne and there's lots of virus to infect surrounding sites.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Since 2014, we haven't been looking at airborne transmission and at other ways of transmitting—

Mr. Claude Vielfaure: There's been science in the U.S. showing that the virus will carry over 10 miles in perfect conditions.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: The University of Guelph is in my riding. Is it involved in any of that type of research, or could it be?

Mr. Claude Vielfaure: I'm not aware of that at the University of Guelph.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Great. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vielfaure, and Mr. Longfield.

Madame Brosseau, you have six minutes.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Thank you, Chair.

I would just say that it's kind of concerning. We had Mr. Kochhar from CFIA, and he talked about PED being transmitted from one pig to another through direct contact with sick animals.

Claude, you were talking about work that is being done in the States and tests that you have done on-site around airborne transmission. That was not in the discussions that we had on the last panel. That's kind of alarming.

I know that Mr. Longfield brought it up. Is there work being done on that? You're doing the work. You're investing. I guess it would be a recommendation for the government to better understand how this is transmitted.

I wanted to talk a bit about vaccines. How do they work?

I know the CFIA said that with emergency approval we're allowing these vaccines to come in; all you have to do is to call your vet, and then they place an order.

Where are these vaccines coming from? Are they effective? How much does it cost? I just want to get a better understanding.

• (1240)

Mr. Claude Vielfaure: My understanding about the vaccines is that they will not prevent the disease from coming into your herd; that's for sure. There will still be clinical signs. I believe that the mortality will be very close to the same. The only thing it will reduce is the amount of shedding. Maybe Greg from Maple Leaf will have a better idea of this vaccine, which is not commercially used yet.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Greg, could you comment, please?

Mr. Greg Douglas: Sure.

There are two vaccines available that Dr. Kochhar mentioned, but neither one of them is overly efficacious. As Claude mentioned, they may reduce shedding but they won't reduce disease, and they haven't been broadly used because producers have been trying to eliminate as opposed to control PEDv.

That being said—and your question is a good one—VIDO does have a vaccine being produced in Europe right now that might be useful in the coming months. The timeframe is unknown.

When Dr. Kochhar mentioned that they will fast-track access to a new vaccine, that might be something on the horizon. But again, while VIDO looked at it from a practical or a scientific perspective, the commercial application is yet to be seen in Canadian herds. There is hope that it could really help in terms of being protective, but right now, the measures of biosecurity, elimination, and cleaning and disinfection are really all we have. They're not very good, given the fact that we should have some vaccine options available the way we do for other diseases.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: The first case of PED in Canada in swine form was confirmed by the CFIA on January 24, 2014. It is now June 15, 2017.

In your presentation, you alluded to what may be a lack of collaboration and transparency at the CFIA, and the fact that the federal government may not have been as engaged as it should be. When CFIA was before us in the first panel, I asked about PED being a disease that is monitored federally, and Mr. Kochhar spoke about the OIE, the World Organisation for Animal Health.

Could you talk about the importance of federal leadership in this? Right now, we're talking about Manitoba, but it was in Ontario, and it has been in Quebec. I think there needs to be more federal leadership. I know that the minister spoke out yesterday and said that he was going to work with CFIA and that more would be done and more talk. I was just wondering if you could elaborate a bit more on what you experienced in Ontario and what you're seeing right now.

Mr. Greg Douglas: Yes, I could speak at length. I remember that day very well in January 2014. It was actually the University of Guelph animal health laboratory that confirmed the presence of the disease in Ontario, and then we went to work with our industry. We had prepared beforehand with our industry because we saw the situation evolving in the United States.

Harpreet is a friend of mine, but unfortunately CFIA wasn't an ongoing partner in those early days. Eventually, they came onboard with some biosecurity help, and then when we started to realize that there was definitely a feed component, they helped us with some degree of testing. It wasn't until the OIE asked the United States to report on their PED situation and Canadians followed suit that the CFIA really did engage at the farm at the provincial level.

In response to your question—I know it's a windy answer—I don't think the CFIA has a strong animal health presence. I think they need to re-engage in emerging diseases. We made it an immediately notifiable disease with our lab and our veterinarians in Ontario, as did Quebec, Manitoba, and Alberta; and it does stand the test of being a federally regulated disease, reportable, notifiable. What box you want to put it in can be a matter of debate. But on an emerging situation in Canada that's affecting more provinces, that can affect producers across the country, affect the economy, communities, animals, the federal government has a mandate; and it needs to be accountable to its mandate. If that sounds strong, a lot of my chief veterinary friends across Canada would share my sentiment.

• (1245)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC)): Thank you very much, Madame Brosseau.

Mr. Peschisolido, for six minutes, please.

Mr. Joe Peschisolido (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): Mr. Vice-Chair, thank you.

I'd like to welcome our guests to the committee.

Mr. Douglas, I'd like to follow up on your views on the role of the federal government. Obviously, this disease is in a variety of places in North America. You really didn't care what you called it, but the CFIA should be playing a much stronger role. Can you elaborate on the specific things that you think CFIA should be doing?

Mr. Greg Douglas: That's a good question.

In previous years we had significant disease outbreaks once a decade. Now they are coming more and more frequently—whether it's PED or BSE. I was very involved in BSE in the early 2000s, H1N1, avian influenza, a whole host of them. Ebola was a threat to us a few years ago, and SARS. Animal health in Canada is a constant threat. At the federal level it is really, in my mind, hard to fathom where it sits. Right now CFIA reports to Health Canada, and animal health seems to be orphaned there since they aren't reporting as directly to Ag Canada.

I know they're working on a strategy. It's an interesting document. It says what we've already known for many years, but operationally the CFIA seems to be absent in responding to these clear and present dangers around the world. I think it is time. The PED situation in Manitoba really highlights the fact that there needs to be a constant federal presence. I'm not saying they have to be the primary leader, but their role has to be collaborative with all levels of government. Municipalities have a role in disposal. The industry has a strong role to play, but the federal government needs to re-engage on animal health, and this particular situation is just one of a list of situations that we're seeing.

Right now we're seeing a renewed outbreak of rabies in southwestern Ontario, and that used to be a federal disease. The federal government was there front and centre, and they are taking a backseat now to provincial authorities, which is sad because that particular disease does affect human health. PED does not, but it still will have a strong effect on the communities that are affected by it, and in Manitoba for sure right now.

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: Mr. Douglas, when you said there was a lack of communication, a lack of transparency, were you referring to the communication between CFIA and the provincial counterparts, or CFIA and stakeholders?

Mr. Greg Douglas: All communications. When you talk about managing a disease outbreak, whether it's BSE or avian influenza, everybody needs to know what's happening in the situation all the time so that they can make good, responsible decisions, including testing information, such as which premises are infected and which equipment is cleaned or not cleaned. Transparency is absolutely critical for everybody in the system so that they can all contribute to the solution.

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: Mr. Pearce, you mentioned earlier that you and your company were doing everything possible to keep the disease out of western Canada. Can you elaborate a little on that and how CFIA and the federal government could be helpful to you in doing that?

Mr. Quintin Pearce: First of all, although the regulations changed back to where we didn't have to wash all the equipment when it returned from the United States, whether we're required to do it or not, it's on our dime and we have to do it. We wouldn't have any customers if we didn't do that.

We've also engaged the provincial government especially, and industry people, in helping us. We're buying stations; we're assembly yards. People come to our facility. All of their animals have different health statuses. We are going to get a bug in our station, no matter what. Whether it's clean or not, the next day it could be dirty again.

The biggest thing we're concentrating on is developing proper procedures to biocontain, to keep that bug in our station. When we procure the livestock, we're buying them and moving them as quickly as possible. Basically, if I buy your animals today, tomorrow I want them on a truck and to be harvested the next day, so if they do come into something, they're not shedding it out the back end.

• (1250)

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: Okay.

Mr. Vielfaure, you mentioned that you have operations in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, North Dakota, and overseas in Japan, China, and Korea perhaps.

Mr. Claude Vielfaure: We're overseas in Japan, China, and Mexico, but with live production only in China.

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: I'd like to take this opportunity to ask or why there is no longer a hog industry in my neck of the woods. I represent the riding of Steveston—East Richmond, and I was told that historically, up until the Korean War, the largest hog industry in western Canada was not only in B.C., but off Sea Island. Is there a possibility of re-creating a hog industry there?

I'll preface that by saying something else. My big concern about what's going on now is that hog production has a good brand. I have quite a large group of Canadians particularly of Chinese background and Japanese background, and they want to have Canadian pork.

Is there a possibility of re-creating a hog industry in B.C.; and what can be done to make sure that the Canadian brand does not get damaged by what's going on right now?

Mr. Claude Vielfaure: First of all, for the hog industry, obviously economics will make a big difference in where you produce pigs and feed. Lots of land and processing plants will help you decide where you're going to build your barns. That's possibly counter to B.C.; maybe it's not as accessible there.

Secondly, we have an excellent Canadian brand of pork throughout the world. We market a lot of pork into Japan. We've branded it HyLife pork. It's looked upon very favourably. With lots of land and a good, very clean image of Canada, pork has been very good overseas.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Peschisolido.

That will wrap up our testimony. I want to thank all of you for helping us bring attention to this very important matter that, in a way, threatens the pork industry.

Thank you, Mr. Pearce, Mr. Vielfaure, and Mr. Rempel for being here with us today.

We have another few minutes to decide how we're going to proceed with the recommendations we've heard today. We will suspend to get the room cleared.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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