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# Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

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Chair: Michael Coteau





## Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

Thursday, November 6, 2025

• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Michael Coteau (Scarborough—Woburn, Lib.):**  
Good afternoon. I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 13 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

Before we continue, I would ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines written on the cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters. You will also notice a QR code on the card that links to a short awareness video.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of participants. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking, or until a member asks you a direct question. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic. Please mute yourself when you are not speaking. For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation—floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel. All comments should be addressed directly through the chair.

For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can. We appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, September 18, the committee is resuming its study of the government's regulatory reform initiative in agriculture and agri-food.

I'd like to welcome our witnesses today. We have Eric Cheff, as an individual, and Leta LaRush, vice-president, BASF Agricultural Solutions Canada Inc.

Thank you for joining us here today.

Mrs. LaRush, you have five minutes.

**Leta LaRush (Vice-President, BASF Agricultural Solutions Canada Inc.):** Good afternoon. Thank you, everyone, for the opportunity to appear today on behalf of BASF Agricultural Solutions Canada.

BASF is the world's leading agricultural science company, operating in more than 100 countries and employing over 20,000 people globally in our agriculture solutions division. Across this network, our Canadian business plays a significant role. The innovation, manufacturing and regulatory expertise developed here directly supports our global business and the farmers we serve in every major agricultural region. I'm also proud to share that Canada has been selected as a focus market for BASF globally, prioritizing Canada for R and D investments.

In Canada we operate manufacturing facilities in Lethbridge, Alberta, and in Regina and Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, producing seed and crop protection products for domestic and export markets. We employ more than 600 Canadians across production, commercial, research and regulatory roles. We proudly invest millions each year in local R and D and stewardship activities.

Everything we do as a company is grounded in one purpose, and that's to support the people who do the biggest job on earth—farming. Canadian farmers are among the most innovative and resilient in the world. They are central, not only to Canada's food security but also to global food systems. When Canada's farmers thrive, the world benefits.

Our company exists because of farmers. When they succeed, Canada succeeds, but Canadian farmers cannot compete domestically and globally if the systems that govern innovation move slower than the challenges they face in the fields. That is the unfortunate reality today under the PMRA and CFIA. We work closely with both agencies as part of a shared system designed to protect human health, the environment and food security. Industry and farmers experience these regulatory frameworks together, not in isolation. When one part of the system slows down, the entire pathway to innovation is affected.

While both agencies play important roles, my testimony today will focus on the bottlenecks within the PMRA's review and re-evaluation processes and how these delays shape what tools farmers can access in the field. We value the PMRA's science-based mandate and Canada's reputation for safety, yet the agency's ability to deliver timely, predictable and science-based decisions has eroded. Files that should take months are taking years. The uncertainty and delays in timelines are impacting our ability to bring farmers the tools they need, when they need them.

A clear example is a new innovation that builds upon glufosinate, a very important herbicide for Canadian farmers. The new chemistry would provide increased efficacy and improve value for farmers. Unfortunately, as glufosinate is under review by the agency for re-evaluation and special review, we don't anticipate that our farmers will have access to this technology until the end of this decade. The U.S. received the approval in 2024.

These types of delays have a direct impact on farmers' ability to manage weeds, protect yields and adopt more sustainable practices. They also send a message to innovators: Canada is potentially no longer a first-launch market of new technologies. That means investment, research and early access could shift elsewhere.

BASF supports the intent of the government's regulatory reform initiative, and we recognize and appreciate the efforts by CFIA and PMRA to modernize, but the pace and outcomes remain inadequate. To truly serve farmers and the public, Canada's regulatory frameworks must be both rigorous and responsive.

We see three priorities to achieve that balance. First, to build predictability in both the PMRA and CFIA, they must be resourced and empowered to focus on their core mandates and commit to meet their established timelines. Second, the PMRA must adopt a model that uses the scientific evaluations and more efficient processes of such trusted jurisdictions as the United States and Australia. Third, ensure that the agency's mandate reflects both science and competitiveness. Farmers operate in a global market. Decisions that ignore timelines and economic impact ultimately hurt Canadian agriculture's sustainability and viability.

These are practical and achievable reforms. They will not compromise safety. Rather, they will strengthen it by ensuring that science, transparency and accountability guide every step of the process.

• (1535)

Chair and members, BASF is proud to manufacture in Canada and to partner with farmers in every province. Farmers are the backbone of this country. They feed our families, our communities and the world. They quite literally do the biggest job on earth. It's our collective responsibility as government, regulators and industry to make sure that they have timely access to the tools and technologies that make that job possible.

Thank you, Chair. I look forward to your questions. For any questions beyond my own expertise, I'll ensure that information is provided in follow-up.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. We appreciate your being here.

Next we'll go to Eric Cheff, who is online.

You have five minutes, sir.

**Eric Cheff (As an Individual):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Eric Cheff. I'm the owner and operator of At Heights Drone Services, an Ontario-based company in which I'm in partnership with Johan Wall.

For four years, we've successfully conducted drone operations across approximately 4,500 acres, accumulating over 500 hours of flight time. Our work demonstrates the transformative potential of drone technology in delivering safe, precise and efficient application of herbicides and fungicides, enabling farmers to optimize crop protection even under challenging weather conditions.

When we launched our business, we were informed that regulatory approval for agricultural drone application was imminent. Four years later, the absence of clear legislation continues to impede our ability to meet growing demand, forcing us to decline work from farmers weekly. Extensive studies by chemical manufacturers have validated the safety and efficacy of drone-based application, yet Canadian farmers remain unable to fully leverage this technology due to regulatory delays.

Drones offer a proven method to apply crop protection products at optimal times with reduced rates, enhancing environmental sustainability and global competitiveness for Canadian agriculture. The lack of progress in approving drone application for agricultural pesticides stifles innovation, limits productivity and places Canadian farmers at a disadvantage in the global market. We urgently request that the federal government, in collaboration with the Pest Management Regulatory Agency, expedite the development and implementation of regulations to enable safe and effective use of drones in agriculture. This advancement will empower farmers, support scientific progress and strengthen Canada's agricultural sector.

I'm available to provide further insight or data from our operations and to discuss advances on this critical issue.

• (1540)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, sir.

That's the end of our presentations.

We will go now to the Conservatives for the first six minutes in the first round of questions.

Mr. Epp.

**Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for appearing today.

I'll start with you, Mr. Cheff.

The U.S. EPA and Australia's APVMA consider drone applications to be approved for materials that are licensed for aerial application. With the delay—you mentioned four years in your testimony—what's that cost to you? How has that affected your business and local farmers' ability to manage their crops?

**Eric Cheff:** On a weekly basis, we're turning down work. These farmers are struggling with Mother Nature. They can't get into their fields. They're not able to apply these products to benefit their crops at an affordable time. This is really hurting not only the yields but also our business. We work on everything hand in hand. It's all about time and efficiency.

**Dave Epp:** Thank you.

You work with a network across Canada. Can you describe some of the other locations?

My understanding is that you're competing or that you have farm fields next to the U.S. border, where drones are flying over similar crops in similar weather and similar climatic conditions. Is that an accurate statement?

**Eric Cheff:** Yes, that's very accurate.

In the U.S., they're using anything that's already been licensed for aerial application. We have a lot of these products available to us. They are already being applied by helicopter or aircraft. It would be great if Health Canada would just let these products be used now for drones and continue the research and data. It could even ask us, as applicators, to give it that kind of data to speed up any further or newer products to come in, to show how these drones work. A lot of these products are used with aircraft, but the data wasn't there at one point in time. We're back to square one with aircraft and drones. It's the same thing. Let's use it, and let's see how much data we can grab from that.

**Dave Epp:** My understanding is that you have information back from PMRA via Health Canada that continuing the process of registering drone use is not a high priority. Is that an accurate statement?

**Eric Cheff:** Yes, that's very accurate. We've even been in collaboration with Agris, which is a large fertilizer supplier, and they've heard that it will be up to 10 years before we have any type of regulation.

**Dave Epp:** Have you had any direct concerns conveyed to you as to why there's a delay and why it's not a high priority? My understanding is that they can fly in more challenging conditions with less risk to the environment, to drift and things like that. Is that also an accurate statement?

**Eric Cheff:** Yes and no. Yes, it is safer, because you're looking at a smaller aircraft with smaller capacity. If there is an incident where you'd have a crash or something like that, you don't have a life that could possibly be lost. We had a close call up in the London-Kitchener area, where a pilot had a mechanical failure and crashed his helicopter, so that's part of it.

The second is environmental conditions. We don't carry 250 gallons of product in the air. If you have a failure, you could have that as an environmental risk. We have a reduced amount with the smaller capacities. There are a lot of factors involved in this that make it a safer application.

We fly a lot closer to the crops. It's all GPS-controlled and mapped. We have lidar systems, radars and sensors. Everything is very well controlled. You don't have to worry about human error; the sensors don't lie if they're reading properly. There are a lot of safety protocols involved in this. If you operate safely and effectively, there's less risk of an incident happening.

• (1545)

**Dave Epp:** Thank you.

I want to get one question in to Mrs. LaRush regarding InVigor canola and 11 years of glufosinate. What's the impact to Canada? Australia can use it. Can you give a broad impact statement?

**Leta LaRush:** On the questions around glufosinate, which I used in my example, in that example, the U.S. has access to use a new form of glufosinate that, unfortunately, we don't have access to in Canada because glufosinate's going through special review. The special review process works such that we can't submit any label changes or new chemistries associated with glufosinate during that special review.

I'm not sure if that answers your question, but that also has an impact as it relates to InVigor as well.

**Dave Epp:** It puts Canada at a competitive disadvantage.

**Leta LaRush:** There's no question. Yes.

**Dave Epp:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Next, for the Liberals, I'm going to go to MP Dandurand.

[*Translation*]

**Marianne Dandurand (Compton—Stanstead, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank both witnesses for joining us today.

Ms. LaRush, later on, we'll talk more about a complaint resolution process with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the Pest Management Regulatory Agency, or PMRA. I imagine that, over time, you have been through certain situations with these two organizations and you may have had to follow their process.

Can you comment on how the current system works?

[English]

**Leta LaRush:** Yes, I think you're referring to consultation with those two respective agencies, for which they've been working on the transformation agenda for quite some time and for which there has been the opportunity for some discussion with them around changes that we think are important to modernize the agency and increase efficiency. Unfortunately, we feel that some of the feedback that's been provided as industry, through that consultation period, has not been heard, or they haven't acted upon it.

I'm not sure if that answers your question directly, though. Maybe I misunderstood.

**Marianne Dandurand:** No, that's interesting, but I was mostly talking about a redress process or a redress officer. When you have a complaint about what's going on or what's happening, how does the CFIA or PMRA address it?

**Leta LaRush:** I think they sometimes offer consultation. Unfortunately, I'm not aware of any formal process for us to make complaints as industry when we have a concern, particularly about some of the issues I've talked about today, including the timeliness of getting some of these products through registration.

[Translation]

**Marianne Dandurand:** Thank you for your response.

Would you like to see this implemented? Do you think that we should do it? What type of solution could we come up with to improve the process when disputes arise?

Based on your experience, what could we do?

[English]

**Leta LaRush:** Yes, I think it's to make sure that we have the right people at the table and industry having the opportunity to provide feedback when we have concerns around particular issues. Maybe I'll give you a couple of examples of things that I think the PMRA isn't doing today that would certainly help to improve the efficiency in the way that things are moving through the process.

For example, we're currently not using studies from other jurisdictions and including these as part of our review process. I think that's a very pragmatic thing that we could be doing to help speed up the review process.

As I mentioned already, we also have some concerns about the fact that we cannot submit any label changes at the time that a product is going through special review. Again, I think that would be a very pragmatic solution, and easy to adopt, and we would encourage the PMRA to think about it and to support in that area.

● (1550)

[Translation]

**Marianne Dandurand:** Do you have the same observations regarding the Canadian Food Inspection Agency? Do you also work with them?

[English]

**Leta LaRush:** Yes, we also work with the CFIA. I think there's also an opportunity to improve timeliness as it relates to getting products through the system with the CFIA as well.

[Translation]

**Marianne Dandurand:** Are there similar systems within the Canadian Food Inspection Agency? Is there an appeal process, or is it the same situation as with the Pest Management Regulatory Agency?

[English]

**Leta LaRush:** Unfortunately, I'm not aware of a specific appeal process to raise the concerns that I've been speaking to today as they relate to the way they make decisions around chemistry, and when chemistry, as well as seeds and traits, are reviewed.

Another example that I think might be worth sharing is that of some of the requirements that exist as they relate to relabelling product. An area where we've tried to provide feedback with the PMRA specifically, not CFIA, is with respect to their process when there's a requirement for a label change. They actually require those products to be pulled off the shelves and relabelled, as opposed to other jurisdictions like the U.S., where they'll give us a time period by which that product needs to be relabelled.

As you can imagine, that significantly impacts efficiency. It's taking away time that we could be investing in manufacturing product. Instead, we're having to bring product back through the channel and relabel it, all while farmers are not having access to that technology during that period.

Again, this is something that we have given feedback about to the PMRA, something that we have concerns about. I think your question is as it relates to a specific review process. Unfortunately, we feel that some of that feedback is not being taken on board, and that is what has brought me here today.

[Translation]

**Marianne Dandurand:** Thank you.

I'll do my colleague, Mr. Perron, a favour by giving him an extra 30 seconds. I won't have time to ask any more questions.

**Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for joining us.

Ms. LaRush, you talked about labels. I gather that, basically, when the requirements for a product change, you must immediately remove it from the shelves in order to relabel it.

Is that right? Yes? Okay.

What would you like to obtain? Would you like a buffer period to comply with this requirement?

[English]

**Leta LaRush:** Yes. I think what would be more pragmatic is to notify us that by a certain date labels have to be changed—that for any new product that label has to be changed—as opposed to having to immediately bring all of those products back into our inventory and relabel. Again, as you can imagine, there's a lot of cost invested in bringing product back. It creates a lot of complication for our channel partners. Again, it's about more time and notice and just a more pragmatic approach.

[Translation]

**Yves Perron:** I understand. However, it will depend on the change requested. Sometimes, a previously unknown toxicity or something similar is discovered. It may be justified in some cases. You're probably right in saying that, in most cases, the industry could be given a buffer period to improve efficiency. I understand your point.

You spoke about studies carried out with other countries. We've worked extensively on this issue during this study. As I said, we believe that sharing expertise could be beneficial. I would like to hear your thoughts on this. We could even share responsibility for testing or analyzing new products with trusted jurisdictions. However, we must maintain our decision-making independence at home. We must remain independent and refrain from automatically adopting something approved in other places, because the climate and soil may be different. Some products used here may not be permitted in other countries, or vice versa. This would have consequences. How can we improve our efficiency without taking any chances?

Everyone agrees that the approval process is quite slow.

How can we share our expertise with our neighbours without losing our sovereignty? We shouldn't take any chances. We need to test solutions here at home, in our climate and soil type, for example.

[English]

**Leta LaRush:** Changing the approach to how we collaborate doesn't necessarily have to mean changing the science we use to make assessments of these products. For example, when a trusted regulator like the Australian APVMA has completed a full risk assessment on a product, we should be able to reference that, rather than needing to restart the process.

To answer your question, I don't think it necessarily means that we should compromise science, safety or the rigour we have in our processes. It means that we can incorporate some of the learning, science and data from trusted jurisdictions in our decision-making process to help speed up timelines.

● (1555)

[Translation]

**Yves Perron:** Of course, we would carry out tests here at the same time in order to compare the results. We can build on their foundations. I think that we agree on this point. We could be more effective in this area.

You spoke about labelling. An important request has been made. Labelling requires transparency. As you know, we believe that

gene-edited products should be labelled to ensure traceability. This is the government's responsibility.

The Pest Management Regulatory Agency, or PMRA, is often asked to operate with greater transparency. The process is unclear. Would you like access to a platform to track the progress of the product assessment in the queue? Could this meet a need in the industry? The timelines would be clearer.

[English]

**Leta LaRush:** I'm sorry. The audio was quiet at the end, but I believe I got the essence of your question.

One of the areas where we see a huge opportunity for improvement is having transparency and visibility around where a product is as it's going through review. Something that is extremely challenging and could have the potential to impact our decision to invest is not having a predictable timeline for how long it's going to take to get a product to market or how long it's going to take for one of these reviews to take place.

Having clarity from the onset around the expectation of what that timeline is going to be, and then having some accountability to deliver on that timeline, is very much needed.

[Translation]

**Yves Perron:** Okay, we're on the same page. Thank you.

We also need to carry out testing. Resources are needed. You said in your opening remarks that the PMRA must be given enough resources.

In your opinion, which parts of this agency's structure should receive the most resources? Would it be the assessment services?

[English]

**Leta LaRush:** I would encourage that, from a resourcing perspective, the resources be focused on the agencies' being able to deliver on their core mandate. Unfortunately, that was an area of disappointment when we looked at the work that was done through the transformation strategy and some of the proposals that were being made. We didn't feel they were addressing some of the concerns and feedback we had provided as an industry around the unpredictability in regulatory timelines, and the ability to take pragmatic approaches, such as using studies from other jurisdictions and some of the other examples that I mentioned. I would say those resources should go back towards investing in their core mandate as agencies.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

*I want to thank everyone for their testimony. This will conclude this portion of the meeting. We will suspend for five minutes while we change panels.*

• (1555) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1605)

**The Chair:** Let's come to order.

I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of the new witnesses.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking, or until you are asked a question directly by a member. For those participating by teleconference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic. Please mute yourself when you are not speaking. For those on Zoom, at the bottom of the screen you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation—floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel. All comments should be made through the chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, September 18, 2025, the committee is resuming its study on the government's regulatory reform initiative in the agriculture and agri-food sector.

I'd now like to welcome our witnesses. From the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, we have Pamela MacDonald and Merrill Bawden. From the Forum of Canadian Ombudsman, we have Tom Barber. We also have Nadine Mailloux, Ombudsman of Montreal.

Welcome to our committee. Thank you for being here. You have up to five minutes per association or individual.

We'll start with our folks online.

Maybe we'll start with you, Mr. Barber, from the Forum of Canadian Ombudsman. You have five minutes.

**Tom Barber (President, Forum of Canadian Ombudsman):** Good afternoon.

My name is Tom Barber. I am president of the Forum of Canadian Ombudsman, a national association dedicated to promoting the ombudsman role across Canada. I also serve as the ombudsperson at the New Home Ombuds office in Ontario. I've worked in various roles in the ombudsman field for the past 18 years.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the importance and value of ombudsman institutions. An ombudsman is an independent, impartial and confidential resource who helps people resolve complaints about unfair treatment, maladministration and poor service. When problems occur, the ombudsman acts as a bridge between the public and the government organization, helping both sides understand what went wrong and what can be done to fix it. Our role is to listen, to investigate and to recommend solutions to the problems we identify. In short, the ombudsman's role is to ensure fairness for the public where authority and power are exercised by government organizations.

Ombudsman offices play a critical role in strengthening trust in government. We identify inefficiencies, communication gaps and procedural barriers that frustrate people trying to access services. When these issues are raised and resolved, the result is better service delivery, greater consistency in decision-making, and ultimately improved public confidence.

Most complaints can be resolved informally and quickly, often through communication and clarification. This flexibility allows the ombudsman to resolve issues without lengthy or adversarial processes, saving time and resources for both the government and the public.

The ombudsman also plays a systemic role. We analyze trends, conduct systemic investigations and make recommendations for improvements to policies and processes. An effective ombudsman acts as an early warning system, identifying emerging issues before they escalate into crises or systemic failures.

If farmers and other industry stakeholders are experiencing frustration dealing with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the organizations the ministry oversees, it is my recommendation that the government consider creating an ombudsman office. This office would provide an independent and impartial avenue for addressing concerns and resolving disputes within the sector.

However, to be effective, the ombudsman office must be founded on several key principles.

The first principle is independence. The ombudsman office must be structurally and operationally independent from the organizations it oversees. This builds trust and ensures freedom from interference in the ombudsman operations.

The second is legal foundation. There must be a clear legislative mandate that defines the ombudsman powers and protections.

The third is investigative authority. The ombudsman must have the authority to access the documents and information necessary to carry out its investigations.

The fourth is accessibility. Industry stakeholders must know that the office exists and be able to access it easily, without fear of reprisal.

The fifth is confidentiality. Ombudsman investigations are confidential, and the information it receives should be legally protected.

The sixth is transparency and accountability. The ombudsman must report publicly about its findings and activities and recommendations.

The final principle is impartiality. The ombudsman must approach every issue fairly and without bias. The ombudsman must not take part in political or administrative activities that would affect their impartiality.

I'll close my remarks with a quote from a speech given by the Honourable Michael Tulloch, Chief Justice of Ontario, at Ombudsman Ontario's 50th anniversary reception:

Oversight is not a mark of mistrust; it is a mark of democratic maturity. It is how institutions show respect for the people they serve, by opening themselves to scrutiny, learning from mistakes, and striving to do better.

The Forum of Canadian Ombudsmen would be happy to share with the committee resources that expand on the principles for effective ombudsman oversight.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak. I welcome the committee's questions.

● (1610)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Next, we'll go to the Ombudsman of Montreal for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Nadine Mailloux (Ombudsman, Ombudsman of Montreal):** Good afternoon, committee members.

My name is Nadine Mailloux. I'm the ombud for the City of Montreal.

I'm also the president of the International Ombudsman Institute, the world's largest organization in our field. It comprises over 200 national legislative and parliamentary ombuds from more than 120 countries.

I've been an ombud for 25 years. I served as the president of the Forum of Canadian Ombudsmen until last June. I co-direct two university certificate programs for ombuds at the Université de Sherbrooke and York University. All these experiences have brought one reality to light. Ombuds play a vital role in building and, at times, restoring trust between members of the public and their institutions.

Let me start by sharing a belief with you. Access to an independent and impartial body is a pillar of modern democracy. However, what defines an ombud? What can Canadians expect in 2025 when they turn to an ombud? They expect the following. Their disclosure will remain confidential. The information disclosed will be treated independently of the entity concerned. The complaint will be handled by an individual who is free from constraints and free to determine the outcome of the case without any direction imposed. They can also expect that person to have the authority to demand accountability, to review the facts, to recommend a course of action and to answer for it publicly.

An ombud isn't just any role. The title shouldn't be used lightly. Ombuds carry a responsibility and guarantee fairness and justice for the individuals who seek their assistance. Without these guarantees, the role loses its meaning. We're no longer talking about an ombud, but simply an internal function.

In 2019, the European Commission for Democracy through Law of the Council of Europe, commonly known as the Venice Commission, adopted 25 principles to guide the establishment and operation of an ombud office. The United Nations has recognized and reaffirmed these principles on two occasions. Don't think that these principles are merely theoretical. They provide the necessary foundation for ensuring that our institutions remain effective and credible. If you decide to move forward with creating this type of mechanism, a recent OECD study provides some useful guidance. It

summarizes the factors that promote public trust in institutions as the perception of effectiveness, transparency and the perception of having the power to influence the process or system. Think about your experience as a member of the public. The ombud certainly plays a role in this area.

I'm here today to answer your questions and to explain our role. I can tell you why it's crucial to comply with certain standards. It's really about protecting the factor that unites us, you and me. That factor is people's trust in their institutions.

Thank you.

● (1615)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Next, we'll go to the CFIA for five minutes.

**Merril Bawden (Corporate Secretary, Canadian Food Inspection Agency):** Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today regarding the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's approach to complaint resolution and stakeholder feedback.

CFIA is a science-based regulator with a dual mandate: to protect, and to enable trade. Our primary responsibility is to safeguard Canada's food supply and plant and animal health. At the same time, we play a vital role in enabling trade to support the economic resilience of the agriculture and agri-food sector.

The complaints and appeals office of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency was established in 2012 to review concerns related to service quality, administrative errors and process issues in regulatory decisions. Importantly, it did not have the authority to overturn or amend decisions made by CFIA inspectors. Because the complaints and appeals office could not alter decisions and its mandate was limited to assessing adherence to process and recommending improvements, it was deemed to overlap with existing oversight mechanisms. It was dissolved in 2022 to streamline operations and reduce redundancy.

Stakeholders are now encouraged to resolve concerns through a tiered approach, first by engaging with the CFIA staff involved, then escalating to supervisors, and finally by submitting formal feedback through CFIA's centralized contact channels. Service standards guide complaint handling, and digital platforms facilitate feedback collection. Internal oversight mechanisms, including the inspector general's office, support consistency and continuous improvement across regions.

We understand that members of this committee have expressed concerns about transparency, impartiality and consistency in the absence of a centralized redress mechanism. I want to assure the committee that CFIA remains committed to responding to inquiries in a consistent way and to maintaining public trust, transparency and accountability to government operations.

We regularly communicate with industry via multiple channels, including public opinion research. Our research, conducted by independent public opinion research companies, consistently shows that the industry understands that the agency is doing well in key areas. Of the food businesses interviewed, 89% say the CFIA is doing well in ensuring that food sold in Canada is safe. Another 80% report that CFIA representatives are respectful, and 72% say they are helpful with the regulations. Finally, 71% say CFIA is a fair regulatory agency, pointing out that our information helps prevent non-compliance.

There is room for improvement, for sure. Only 59% say we have clear guidance on regulations, and 51% report that the agency listens to industry priorities. Of course, in focus groups, only some see compliance with regulations as being good for business.

Although a dedicated office like the complaints and appeals office is no longer in place, the CFIA continues to monitor service performance and examine feedback trends to help identify and address broader issues. These efforts are supported by internal processes and a commitment to continuous improvement.

In closing, the CFIA's work is guided by science, transparency and collaboration. Our approach is about building a system that is efficient, predictable and responsive, without compromising on science, food safety or market access. We will continue to work with stakeholders to identify new opportunities, while delivering on the commitments we've already made.

Thank you for your attention. We welcome any questions you may have.

• (1620)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Thank you to all of our witnesses.

We'll start with the Conservatives and Mr. Bonk for six minutes.

**Steven Bonk (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC):** Thank you very much.

My questions are for the CFIA. In 2012, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency created a complaints and appeals office, sometimes known as the redress office. There were a lot of complaints that went through the redress office before it was cancelled.

Has the redress office officially been cancelled?

**Merril Bawden:** Yes. I can confirm that the complaints and appeals office—

**Steven Bonk:** What is the new complaints mechanism called?

**Merril Bawden:** There are a number of processes that we now have in place. We have opportunities for feedback from external stakeholders through online portals and by telephone. To address

complaints, we have a series of escalation that happens through our operations branch.

**Steven Bonk:** From the information we have, before the CFIA cancelled the redress program, 18% of the complaints were reconsidered or amended, and of the service complaints, 39% were founded.

If there's such a high instance of problems within the CFIA, why was this redress officer position cancelled?

**Merril Bawden:** I can confirm that the CFIA remains focused on service excellence and regulatory integrity. In addition to the digital tools I mentioned, the CFIA now relies on internal review and stakeholder feedback to identify areas for improvement. The agency's commitment to transparency and accountability supports ongoing efforts to address valid concerns.

**Steven Bonk:** We have just heard from the ombudsmen. They were saying that it's very important to have independence in this role. Is this role currently undertaken by CFIA employees, or is it independent of CFIA?

**Merril Bawden:** It is taken on by CFIA employees.

**Steven Bonk:** We've had a lot of stakeholders as witnesses before this committee. They're saying that they're having a lot of trouble navigating CFIA just on simple procedural questions.

For example, people have had to cull their herds because of tuberculosis, and they're having real trouble following the process and the interpretation of the officers on the ground.

What would be the mechanism for them if they had a complaint?

**Pamela MacDonald (Executive Director, Inspection Support, Canadian Food Inspection Agency):** We always encourage industry to speak with their local inspector first whenever they have a question or a concern. Our inspectors have access to on-the-spot national experts, who are available should they receive a question and need further support to respond to industry's questions.

Industry also has the opportunity to speak to the supervisors and executives responsible directly for our inspectors on the ground, which includes an executive of the area level, the provincial level, who does not have direct reporting accountability for the individuals—which is that arm's-length piece that exists regionally—but has access to the specialized knowledge in order to provide that support and information to industry.

**Steven Bonk:** Do you think it would be helpful for these people with their complaints if there were an independent ombudsman or independent redress officer in CFIA? They're becoming very frustrated with the process.

**Pamela MacDonald:** I can speak only to the process that exists, which does include an executive at the area level who is able to address questions and concerns provided by stakeholders.

**Steven Bonk:** I'm going to ask Mr. Barber from the Ombudsman Forum a question now.

Do you think the PMRA would benefit from having an ombudsman where complaints from industry could be taken seriously without being influenced by the PMRA itself?

**Tom Barber:** I'm sorry, but PMRA.... I'm not familiar with that acronym.

**Steven Bonk:** The pest.... I'm sorry. Pest risk management.... Oh man, it just slipped me here.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Dave Epp:** It's the Pest Management Regulatory Agency.

**Steven Bonk:** Yes, it's the Pest Management Regulatory Agency. I'm sorry about that. It's one of the organizations we're studying here at the committee. We're finding that there are a lot of complaints coming in from industry, yet no one seems to know how to navigate the system to get these complaints addressed.

• (1625)

**Tom Barber:** I'll speak from my experience in the ombudsman field for the last 20 or so years. I've worked at three different ombudsman offices. I've overseen and been involved with complaints about multiple organizations.

Organizations tend to not be very good at being self-reflective. They tend to get entrenched in their process and their policies, and they don't have the ability to look at it from that independent ombud's perspective: Why did you do something in this way? Why do you do this that way? Maybe there's a better way of doing it.

That is why I think the independence and that fresh perspective that you'll get from an external organization coming in to take a look would be very helpful, and I'm not speaking about just the organizations and the sectors here. I would say that's the case for almost any large organization where you have lots of policies and you're dealing with the public. It's very beneficial to have that independent oversight.

**Steven Bonk:** How much of a difference do you see between organizational ombudsmen or independent ombudsmen? Is there a big difference in the number of complaints or the number of complaints that are amended?

**The Chair:** I'm sorry to interrupt. We've run out of time. We've gone over by about 15 seconds. Maybe someone else will ask the same question.

We'll go over to the Liberals and MP Chatel for six minutes.

I'm sorry about that.

**Sophie Chatel (Pontiac—Kitigan Zibi, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Bonk asked a very good question.

I would like to hear the answer, so please continue.

**Tom Barber:** One of the other pillars of the ombudsman role is that it's not the first line of complaint. It's typically the last line of complaint.

The public should attempt to address their issues through the existing complaint process as a first step. What I found in my time is that about 80% of the complaints that an ombudsman receives will be referred back to the organization and referred back to that internal complaint process. The complaints generally won't need to come back to the ombudsman. They will get resolved through that internal complaint process.

When you get into that other 20% of complaints, that's when you need some potential ombudsman intervention. Maybe the government organization doesn't understand the complainant, maybe the complainant is having trouble accessing the government organization, or maybe there's a dispute about facts that the ombudsman can investigate and help clarify.

In my experience, again, it's about 80% that will be resolved through the existing complaint process, but it's that roughly 15%-20% where the ombudsman can really help be effective, drive change and provide positive outcomes.

[*Translation*]

**Sophie Chatel:** Thank you.

This committee has heard a great deal about the attempts by agri-food industry stakeholders, such as farmers and food processors, to address tremendous challenges. These challenges include climate change, trade wars and other international trade issues, and the adoption of new standards.

The industry and the departments met at the agile regulations table. They identified 150 regulatory irritants, which are recurring complaints from the industry. It seems that the challenge lies in resolving these complaints, whether they concern the system or the service, and identifying best practices that could be implemented.

Ms. Mailloux, could the creation of an ombud position help us to work with the industry in order to find solutions to the problems identified?

**Nadine Mailloux:** You're right to point out that, in certain situations, recurring complaints are the ones that do the most good for an organization.

For example, at the City of Montreal, we sometimes see that the same issue gives rise to multiple complaints and we notice a trend. We then expand the scope of our investigation and get in touch with the organization, in this case a neighbourhood service, to talk to its expert staff and see what's wrong.

In most systemic investigations, we make recommendations regarding deeply ingrained practices in the system, including logistics and internal issues. These practices lead to people experiencing the same situation over and over again.

In some systemic investigations, we observed situations that hadn't been identified by the complainants but that, as the investigation unfolded, appeared to pose a problem. We issued a notice of concern to the City of Montreal.

That's why any ombud worth their salt must be able to carry out systemic investigations.

• (1630)

**Sophie Chatel:** Thank you, Ms. Mailloux. That's really enlightening.

Mr. Barber, one concern that comes up in connection with the creation of an ombud position relates to the downsizing of the public service. While the creation of an ombud position is considered a positive development, the question arises as to whether this constitutes an appropriate time to do so, given the current efforts to reduce bureaucracy.

[English]

**Tom Barber:** Obviously, considerations about the size and reducing the size of the public sector are a little above my pay grade, since I'm not an elected member. You do not need an incredibly large ombudsman's office to be effective.

Ultimately, you need to make sure the ombudsman's office is properly resourced in order for it to address complaints, but I don't think you necessarily need to dramatically expand the number of full-time public service staff in order to staff an ombudsman's office.

It's hard to estimate exactly the number that you would need as long as the office is well resourced. The internal complaint process that these organizations have is generally working well. The ombudsman's office can focus on those complaints that I mentioned earlier, namely, the ones that don't get captured by that internal process, and the ones that need the extra help in getting a resolution.

[Translation]

**Sophie Chatel:** I imagine that there would still be a positive impact. If systemic complaints were addressed much more proactively and if the department were to improve, it would benefit farmers and increase their productivity. There would be economic benefits, but this would still require a certain institution.

Ms. Mailloux, I would like to hear your thoughts on the costs and benefits of an ombud's office, but I have run out of time.

Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm going to have to ask you to stop there. It's been six minutes and 30 seconds.

I apologize.

Next, we'll go to Mr. Perron for six minutes.

[Translation]

**Yves Perron:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for taking the time to speak to us today.

Ms. Mailloux, you have 20 seconds to respond to Ms. Chatel's request.

**Nadine Mailloux:** The trust instilled by the presence of an ombud in an organization always pays off. It shows a level of self-examination that not all organizations necessarily possess. It inspires confidence. We don't need a large team to obtain a convincing result for complainants.

**Yves Perron:** Am I wrong in saying that ombuds don't need a large team, but that they need real powers to work effectively?

Is this sentence correct?

**Nadine Mailloux:** Yes. You have read my mind.

**Yves Perron:** In 2018, the Trudeau government created an ombud linked to corporate activity abroad. There has been a great deal of discussion about the powers and effectiveness of this office. When it was created, critics said that it could report wrongdoing but that it couldn't take action. It's your power that matters.

I'll refer to one of your responses. You said that you found a systemic issue and that you issued a notice of concern.

Does this notice force the administration to take action, or can the administration do whatever it wants with this notice and simply file it away?

• (1635)

**Nadine Mailloux:** We work with recommendations when we want to be sure, or almost sure, that our investigations have repercussions. Most ombuds around the world have the power of recommendation, which is non-binding.

In my case, the City of Montreal has a moral duty, in a way, to look at the substance of the ombud's recommendations. The recommendations are followed in the vast majority of cases. When we issue a notice of concern, it is for the common good and to serve the organization.

I'm an ombud, I'm independent, and in some respects I'm there to be critical of some of the things that are done on a daily basis. However, I love the City of Montreal and I want it to work properly every day. That is the spirit in which we issue a notice of concern, so that, in the case of a systemic investigation, for example, our observations will help the organization grow.

To plainly answer your question, recommendation is the way to go when I want the City of Montreal to respond to a particular problem.

**Yves Perron:** You say that your recommendations are followed, even if they are non-binding and the people concerned are not required to follow them.

**Nadine Mailloux:** Yes, they are non-binding.

**Yves Perron:** I imagine that if your recommendations weren't often followed, you would have changed jobs by now. At some point, your job has to serve a purpose.

**Nadine Mailloux:** Either I would have changed jobs or I would have made my recommendations public, which is a corollary of the power of recommendation. Every year, I report on everything I do, including all the investigations I conduct at the City of Montreal. Then I publish my report, make a public statement and so on. That's my experience, but it can change depending on the environment of each ombud.

When the City of Montreal does not follow or rejects a recommendation from the ombud, it has to defend itself. That may seem negative, but it isn't, because the city may not comply with it for a number of reasons. However, generally speaking, since we are a team that is very familiar with the field and makes reasonable recommendations, we make sure that the recommendations have a good chance of being followed.

**Yves Perron:** As part of our study on the Pest Management Regulatory Agency, we proposed creating an ombud position so that people could express complaints more directly and easily. Some people in our ridings are concerned about the creation of what Ms. Chatel described earlier as a "new structure". They tell us that it's not efficient enough and that we shouldn't create another inefficient structure.

What do you say to those people?

**Nadine Mailloux:** I tell them that, if the basic characteristics of an ombud's office are in place, it will necessarily improve the service provided. The ombud is there, keeping an eye on things.

As my colleague Mr. Barber said a little earlier, we generally act as a last resort. For example, in our office, when someone hasn't given the municipal government a chance to solve the problem, we direct them to the right person. If they come back, we intervene as a last resort and conduct an investigation.

The vast majority of our fellow citizens.... Obviously, it sometimes happens that we reiterate the City of Montreal's position, because the person's complaint was unfounded. People thank us because they understand the mechanism better. Whether we deem a complaint founded or unfounded, both are useful to us. Both nurture the relationship between the public and the organization.

**Yves Perron:** I understand that you send 80% of complaints back to the initial process, but the process has to be there.

Since I don't have much time left, I will now turn to the representatives of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. I invite Ms. MacDonald or Ms. Bawden to answer my question.

If I understand correctly, your agency no longer has an office to deal with complaints. If an ombud position were created at your agency, to whom would complaints be directed?

[English]

**Pamela MacDonald:** I can speak only to the process that exists right now. We have structures and individuals in place, at both the local level and the national level, to be able to speak to stakeholders' questions and concerns. As well, we have additional internal structures such as our inspector general's office, which does help oversee the quality of our inspector delivery and implementation to help further support our efforts.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Gourde, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I've heard the concerns of consumers, constituents, agricultural producers and processors about the new reality of cloned meat. It seems that the government is quietly changing the definition of "new foods".

According to documents published by Health Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the updated new food framework will exclude cloned animals from the definition of "new foods".

My understanding is that, for example, if I buy smoked pork, I can't know whether the pork I'm buying is traditional pork or cloned pork.

Can the Canadian Food Inspection Agency tell me if this is actually true?

● (1640)

[English]

**Pamela MacDonald:** I can speak only to what is under the mandate of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, but I would recommend that the committee speak with Health Canada to respond to the member's question.

[Translation]

**Jacques Gourde:** Health Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency issued a joint statement indicating that Health Canada accepted the meat, which is fine. However, labelling is the responsibility of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Since cloned pork, or cloned meat in general, is excluded, it doesn't need to be labelled as a "new food".

Does that make sense to you? Have you received any complaints to that effect? Right now, it is impossible for consumers to know whether Canadian meat comes from a traditional animal or a cloned animal.

[English]

**Pamela MacDonald:** I can speak to the roles and responsibilities. Health Canada does have the requirements for this type of issue, and CFIA is responsible for enforcement and compliance. I would offer that we could provide information in writing on whether any complaints have been received in this matter.

[Translation]

**Jacques Gourde:** My next question is for Ms. Mailloux.

If you receive complaints from consumers in Quebec and Canada saying that it is impossible to know whether the meat they eat, the pork they choose, is cloned, traditional or organic, do you think those are valid complaints? Could you work on that kind of complaint?

**Nadine Mailloux:** Mr. Gourde, I have to say you are taking me completely out of my comfort zone.

Under a potential legislative mandate for the ombud, from what I understand, that seems to me to be a complaint that an ombud with that jurisdiction could look into.

In our office, we sometimes look at complaints where people say that regulations are confusing. For example, they say that the City does one thing but announces something else. Those are the types of complaints we look at.

In fact, there's not much we don't look at, except for the decisions made by elected officials at the City of Montreal.

**Jacques Gourde:** You used the word “confusing”.

If a label doesn't tell you if meat comes from a cloned animal, that could be valid.

We could at least negotiate to put product labels back on.

**Nadine Mailloux:** Please understand that this is not my expertise and that there is no ombud yet for this framework. I don't know the legislative mandate they would potentially be given. That said, if there were an ombud, it would be the kind of thing they could look into.

**Jacques Gourde:** Mr. Barber, as an ombud, do you want to add anything to Ms. Mailloux's answer?

[English]

**Tom Barber:** I'll echo what my colleague has said. It is something that an ombudsman would look into, depending on the mandate.

It would get responses from the organizations involved, it would study the regulations and the policies, and it would make a determination as to whether or not there was anything unclear. It would basically help clarify the facts of whose responsibility it is, and if there is potentially a gap in responsibility or a gap in the regulations, that could be something else the ombudsman highlights.

[Translation]

**Jacques Gourde:** Thank you to all the witnesses.

That's all for me, Mr. Chair.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll go to MP Dandurand of the Liberals for five minutes.

[Translation]

**Marianne Dandurand:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Bawden, I'd like to talk about your former mandate at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

Could you tell us what you were responsible for when you were the redress officer?

• (1645)

[English]

**Merril Bawden:** Certainly. The complaints and appeals office, as it was called under the chief redress officer, was established to review complaints related to service quality, administrative errors and process concerns with relation to regulatory decisions.

It did not have the authority to reverse or alter decisions; instead, stakeholders looking to challenge a regulatory decision would be required to pursue formal legal mechanisms, such as judicial review.

[Translation]

**Marianne Dandurand:** Thank you.

Do the tasks you did at the time still exist? Is what you dealt with managed by other positions within the Canadian Food Inspection Agency?

[English]

**Merril Bawden:** There are mechanisms in place, and I will defer to my colleague, Ms. MacDonald, to speak to the escalation process within operations branch for how a complaint would be addressed in the current context.

**Pamela MacDonald:** Thank you.

If a complaint comes in and needs to be escalated through the existing process, stakeholders are able to leverage what we call the chain of command. They can speak to the managerial hierarchy that exists in the region, and they can speak to the senior director, an arm's-length executive in each area who doesn't have line accountability for the inspectors but has the delegated authority to be able to make an inspection decision and, in fact, overturn one if it becomes necessary.

The stakeholders can escalate their complaints up to the vice-president and even, in some cases, to our president if they so choose. Each of those layers has accountability and an ability to respond to complaints.

[Translation]

**Marianne Dandurand:** Thank you, ladies.

Ms. Mailloux, you've heard about how it works.

Is that the kind of thing an ombud does as well? Are an ombud's tasks similar to that?

**Nadine Mailloux:** What we do generally reflects the practice of ombuds. I'm a legislative ombud. It's important to point out that I'm not in contact with any department at the City of Montreal; I report to the municipal council. There is no interference from the City in terms of the decisions I make about a complaint.

When a complaint is received, we have access to all the documents and information held by the City. Based on that information, and with the assistance of our legal team, we review the complaint and come to conclusions that will determine whether or not the complaint is founded. Then we make recommendations to the City.

Obviously, we hold discussions with City authorities. However, at no point in the process is there any interference by the authorities with respect to the outcome of the complaint in question.

**Marianne Dandurand:** Thank you.

Were there more internal processes in the various jobs you held? You talk about an external, independent process. Have you ever seen internal processes such as the one used at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency?

**Nadine Mailloux:** I've seen internal processes, and I don't think it's a bad thing to have a process for expressing everyday dissatisfaction—quite the contrary. I do think that organizations would be well served, on an everyday basis, to try to resolve matters through internal proceedings.

We consider ourselves external to the City. Actually, I prefer to say independent because we are all employees of the City of Montreal. I report to city council. When I'm looking at a file, I'm not looking at a decision that I or my colleague made. I'm looking at a decision from completely outside the decision-making process that led to that decision and that is potentially the source of dissatisfaction. It gives me a fresh, but above all, disinterested take on the review.

Having an internal process—

• (1650)

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm going to have to jump in. I apologize. I gave you an extra 20 seconds.

Mr. Perron, you have two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

**Yves Perron:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll go back to the CFIA on labelling. The previous witness talked about gene-edited seeds. I was saying that, in our opinion, products need to be labelled because people want to know what they're buying. Farmers also want to know what they're buying. Organic producers want to be able to certify their production. The same goes for cloned meat.

You decided to allow the sale of cloned meat. However, you seem to be leaning towards not labelling it. In my opinion, that is a failure of one of your transparency responsibilities. It's odd because, in the context of this study, a lot of people on the ground came to tell us that they found it lacking in transparency.

What would you say to that?

[English]

**Pamela MacDonald:** I'm here to speak about our complaints and appeals office and answer questions associated with what the process looks like now. What I can offer is that we have a group called “Ask CFIA”, which is there to provide support to and answer questions from stakeholders and consumers pertaining to labelling, so that they can understand what the regulations and any changes that have been put in place mean to them and their businesses.

[Translation]

**Yves Perron:** Thank you for your answer, but it's not very clear.

If there is a group in charge of labelling, I think it's about time we sent them a memo notifying them that certain things slip right through, I'm afraid.

You say we're here to talk about the complaints office, so let's talk about it. A number of agricultural producers complain that inspections are uneven and vary depending on the inspector who comes in and on the day. There seems to be inequality in what is being demanded, or a vagueness in the standards.

I imagine you're aware of this. You receive complaints through your internal complaint system. You've been telling us for a while now that people are handling this.

How do you deal with those types of complaints?

Is there an internal process to compare the work of your inspectors to see if some are stricter than others? It doesn't seem to be fair.

[English]

**Pamela MacDonald:** We have the inspector general's office, which is responsible for overseeing the quality of inspection and delivery. It has verification officers who will go out and conduct a verification audit, if you will, of the inspectors as they do their duties and then compare it to the guidance that is written. I can confirm that inspectors are to follow the same four steps for their inspections. They prepare for the inspection, conduct the inspection, communicate the results and conduct follow-ups to ensure that any corrective measures have been taken.

However, because of the wide variety of products that we inspect, whether they be food, plant or animal, there are sometimes differences in the information that is asked for to be able to verify compliance.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We're going to do a quick round of one minute each, because I know there are a couple of wrap-up questions that people would like to ask.

Mr. Epp, you have one minute.

**Dave Epp:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My colleague tabled the statistics on the results from complaints up until the dissolution of the redress office. Can you please table with this committee the last five years' worth of internal complaints and how they've been handled, what the resolutions were, the numbers, etc.? Thank you.

Secondly, are you aware of the report the CFIB, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, has done on the service the business community feels it receives from CFIA?

**Pamela MacDonald:** No. I cannot speak to that.

**Dave Epp:** I can share with the committee that the top-line results are that 58% of the business community is not happy with the service standards. It is publicly available.

I would encourage you to address the CFIA, because there's a lot of data in there on specific areas of service complaints involving the business community.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Connors, you have one minute.

**Paul Connors (Avalon, Lib.):** My question is for Mr. Barber.

This question will come from industry people, and I'm wondering what your response is: Is an ombudsman another layer of bureaucratic red tape?

• (1655)

**Tom Barber:** No. Absolutely not. Whether or not you choose to come to the ombudsman is completely the choice of the member of the public. We're here if you need us. If you don't want to use us, then you're free to try to resolve the issue on your own.

**The Chair:** Mr. Perron, you have one minute.

[*Translation*]

**Yves Perron:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll go back to the CFIA.

The two ombuds we have with us today seem to me to be quite lovely and brilliant people who have a positive influence on the organizations they oversee.

Do you think it would be a good idea to create an ombud position for the CFIA to handle complaints, such as those from agricultural producers about illegal inspections?

[*English*]

**Merril Bawden:** That would be an organizational decision. I would say that the agency continues to evaluate its service delivery model and remains open to all stakeholder feedback.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

To all our witnesses, I know that you work for the public. I just want to thank you for the work you do. We appreciate your time here today. Thank you.

We will now end this portion and go in camera for the next part of our meeting. For anyone connected online, please use the camera Zoom link sent earlier by the clerk.

Mr. Gourde, you must have that link. If you have any issues, let us know.

Thank you.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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