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Chair: Michael Coteau



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• (1540)

[English]

The Chair (Michael Coteau (Scarborough—Woburn, Lib.)): Welcome, everyone, to the sixth meeting 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 like to 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 and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including our interpreters. You will also notice a QR code on the card, which links to a short awareness video.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and the members. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. 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 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 through the chair. For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. If you're online, please use the Zoom "raise hand" function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order to the best of our ability. Please have patience. We appreciate your understanding in this regard.

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

Welcome to our witnesses. Thank you so much for being here, both in person and online.

From the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, we have Stéphanie Levasseur and Maria Alkayed.

From the National Cattle Feeders' Association, we have Janice Tranberg and Cathy Jo Noble. They are joining us in person. Welcome. Thank you for being here.

From Producteurs de grains du Québec, we have Salah Zoghلامي.

Thank you to everyone for joining us. We appreciate your time.

Each group will have up to five minutes.

We'll start with the Canadian Federation of Agriculture.

[Translation]

Stéphanie Levasseur (Second Vice-President, Canadian Federation of Agriculture): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

I'll be speaking to you in French. I sent the committee my notes in advance, so the interpreters shouldn't have any trouble following me.

My name is Stéphanie Levasseur, and I am the second vice-president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, or CFA, as well as an apple grower in southern Quebec.

The CFA is Canada's largest general farm organization, representing approximately 190,000 farm families from coast to coast to coast.

The discussions we are having here today aim to inform the government's regulatory reform initiative that seeks to reduce red tape and modernize regulations, which, in our view, is extremely important.

Canada's agricultural and agri-food industry is deeply rooted in both rural and urban communities across Canada. We contribute almost \$150 billion annually to the GDP, and the sector employs 2.3 million people.

With a sizable agriculture sector, vast natural resources and a relatively small population, Canada is well positioned to make agriculture a strategic driver of economic growth.

The time has come for agriculture to become the cornerstone of Canada's future. It is strategically positioned to boost economic growth, drive innovation, support sustainability and productivity objectives and improve the standard of living of all Canadians.

And yet, Canadian farmers are being squeezed between rising input costs, ongoing labour shortages, increasingly frequent and severe climate events, and deepening financial pressures, compounded by growing global instability.

All of this is happening against a backdrop of declining agricultural productivity growth at a time when the demand for agricultural products and food security concerns has increased.

Canadian farmers need access to innovations, new technologies and pest control products if we are to compete and help grow Canada's economy, as we believe we can.

We need to streamline and realign our regulatory priorities if we want to make that happen. The first step is to make agriculture a priority not just for the agriculture department, but across the Government of Canada. That is why the CFA recommends that the government consider agriculture and agri-food a national priority by amending the cabinet directive on regulation to mandate that government regulations reflect the economic interests and competitiveness of Canadian producers and strengthen Canada's food security by ensuring a stable, competitive and sustainable domestic agriculture and agri-food supply chain.

As the main government regulators, the Pest Management Regulatory Agency, or PMRA, and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, or CFIA, directly impact the availability of pest control products as well as, among other things, the labelling, packaging, licensing and certification of Canadian agriculture and agri-food products. As such, these agencies are major actors in this reform.

While their duties are critical to maintaining Canada's domestic and international reputation as a supplier of safe, quality agriculture products, decisions are made without sufficient consideration of food security, food prices and much less their economic impact on Canadian agriculture and its competitiveness. In our view, this needs to change.

In addition, to level the playing field with countries we trade with, timelines for the regulatory process need to be shortened and efficiency increased. Re-evaluations should not take a decade. Evaluating drone usage for some crops, for instance, should not even take five years.

Access to both innovative and existing products and technologies that farmers and producers need to produce the safe food that Canada and the world needs should be prioritized.

Right now, Canada is lagging behind other countries in terms of access to much-needed pest control products, feed, feed additives and emerging technologies.

• (1545)

To accomplish this, the CFA recommends better alignment and collaboration with trusted and like-minded international regulators to harmonize decisions, expedite decision-making, and leverage the trusted research work that is—

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm going to have to stop you there. It's been a bit over five minutes. You'll have an opportunity to answer questions when they're directed to you.

Stéphanie Levasseur: Perfect.

The Chair: Thank you so much. I'm sorry for interrupting you.

Now we'll go to the National Cattle Feeders' Association for five minutes.

Janice Tranberg (President and Chief Executive Officer, National Cattle Feeders' Association): Thank you. Good afternoon.

The National Cattle Feeders' Association is the national voice of cattle feeders. Cattle feeders are beef farmers who bring their calves onto their farms at the age of about six to 12 months. They modify their diets from grass to a high-energy feed to produce more beef using fewer resources, which results in an improved environmental footprint.

The growth of Canada's beef sector is limited by duplicative and unnecessary regulations. We call on the government to modernize regulatory systems so as to serve as partners rather than obstacles to Canadian farmers.

Today, we will outline three recommendations for regulatory reform.

Our first recommendation is on labour. There exists a profound and chronic shortage of labour in the agriculture sector. Foreign workers are necessary to maintain and grow our beef sector. The majority of foreign workers hired by cattle feeders are for year-round, long-term jobs. They're not seasonal. As a requirement for bringing in these foreign workers, Canadian employers must first advertise for domestic labour, but it's with little success. With no other option available, feedlots bring in employees through the temporary foreign worker program with the goal of moving them through the system to permanent residency.

The TFW program is complicated, backlogged and fraught with unnecessary and unpractical rules and processes. The main route to permanent residency, which was the agri-food pilot, has recently been cancelled, and no other program is in place to replace it. It's time for the government to build the right foreign worker program for the sectors that have a genuine need and a positive track record, such as the agriculture sector.

Cathy Jo Noble (Vice-President, National Cattle Feeders' Association): Our second recommendation is in regard to the timely approval of innovations.

Agriculture is one of the most innovative sectors in Canada, but Canada's approval of innovations takes years in what is a cumbersome system that duplicates efforts across departments as well as across global jurisdictions. This creates a scenario where innovations that can deliver sustainable and cost-efficient solutions are available to our global competitors, but not to Canadian farmers.

We propose that Canadian regulators provide provisional registration or approval of products that are already approved in two or more trusted global jurisdictions, so that Canadian farmers are not left behind.

Third, we recommend a modern Canada-U.S. border process. The Canadian and U.S. beef industries operate within an integrated market, with cattle often crossing the border more than once in their lifetime. As such, regulatory inefficiencies and duplication at the Canada-U.S. border must be addressed.

Livestock moving across the Canada-U.S. border in either direction must be inspected by a vet accredited by the USDA or CFIA at the origin as well as at the destination, and there is further inspection at the border. For cattle coming into Canada, the process is an unnecessary duplication by the CFIA officials. If Canada and the U.S. accept each other's inspection systems as equivalent, then with technical advancements, there is ample opportunity to improve the process, which will reduce government cost, industry cost and stress on animals.

There are a limited number of border crossings that have vets to do the inspections. The working hours of the vets are limited—for example, it's not in the evenings or on weekends—and these vets are also dealing with domestic animals crossing the border, such as dogs and cats. The result is a negative impact on the flow of commerce and increased wait times that impact the drivers as well as the welfare of the animals.

We have provided three specific recommendations in our remarks. Beyond that, we're happy to discuss the need for a transformation of culture, mandate and reporting structure for the PMRA, CFIA and VDD. This will catalyze investment in the Canadian agriculture sector. Maintaining food safety standards, consumer confidence and economic growth can be done on a parallel track.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you.

Our final speaker in this segment is from Producteurs de grains du Québec.

You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Salah Zoghalmi (Director of Agronomic Affairs, Producteurs de grains du Québec): Good afternoon Mr. Chair, members of the committee.

Thank you for inviting us to participate in this study.

The effective implementation and management of measures to regulate technologies, biotechnologies and other strategic agricultural inputs is crucial for the grain sector in Canada and Quebec.

Our recommendations in the context of this study are for the PMRA and the CFIA.

Overall, these government agencies must take food security and economic and operational impacts, particularly on farms, into account in all their regulatory decisions, without compromising health and safety.

Health and safety remain paramount, but a balance must be struck between assessing risks and assessing the ability of farms to remain competitive and productive. The growth of food production depends on it.

Balanced regulation can protect public health while promoting economic growth, competitiveness, and rapid access to innovation. The goal is to maintain the current level of protection, but by adopting approaches that allow the agricultural sector to thrive.

More specifically, it is essential that the PMRA draw on evaluation processes and regulatory best practices from other countries that are considered reliable and risk-based in order to eliminate duplication and maintain the competitiveness of the agricultural system.

Agricultural producers are ready to adopt modern crop protection technologies. Rapid access to safe and effective products is essential. Regulatory delays and lack of transparency hinder the introduction of new technologies. By drawing on practices in other countries, Canada can improve its regulatory efficiency without compromising safety.

Canada can and must become a global leader in agricultural innovation. To do so, clear signals must be sent to investors. Furthermore, given the modest size of the Canadian pesticide market, regulatory performance must be exemplary in order to attract innovation.

Consequently, it is essential that the PMRA achieve all of its regulatory performance objectives.

Rather than a major transformation, we recommend redirecting resources toward core activities to ensure rapid access to innovations.

We need to fast-track the development and full adoption by the CFIA of the electronic phytosanitary certificate exchange system, ePhyto, for the import and export of grains with international trading partners.

The digitization of global agricultural trade is moving quickly. Canada must fully adopt the ePhyto system to remain competitive. This will reduce costs, improve trade security and facilitate trade. While progress has been made with Mexico, Canada still lags behind the United States and Australia. The United States already exchanges ePhytos with over 100 countries.

More broadly, reducing red tape and administrative burdens is essential for the grain sector. While some of the government's actions are positive, the overall approach remains far too passive. This is particularly true with regard to the commitment to consider food security and economic impacts in PMRA decisions, as promised in the Liberal Party's spring 2025 platform.

The industry has long supported improvements to the PMRA's pesticide re-evaluation process. The agency has reported that the workload is exceeding its resources. One of the main constraints is the requirement to repeat risk assessments when new data becomes available after proposed decisions have been published.

It is troubling to note that, each year, the number of applications for new product registrations submitted to the PMRA is declining—in fact, it has dropped by half over the past decade—and that approval times have nearly doubled. This puts Canadian agriculture at a significant disadvantage and undermines its competitiveness. Given that it takes an average of about 12 years for a new crop protection product to reach the market, agricultural producers are susceptible to devastating losses due to pests in the meantime.

In addition, the PMRA had promised to consult with agricultural groups earlier and more frequently.

• (1555)

We consider this essential in order to avoid major changes after the decisions have been published.

[English]

The Chair: I'm going to have to stop you there. You've exceeded the five minutes.

We'll start with the Conservatives.

You have six minutes, John.

John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Thanks, Chair.

Thanks again to our witnesses for being here.

You can certainly sense the frustration of some of the witnesses who are having to deal with these agencies.

Ms. Levasseur, I want to start with you. I believe you said that you were an apple grower. We've had the recent decision on dicamba from the PMRA, which is very similar to what agriculture went through with the lambda-cy decision a year ago. This had a devastating impact on apple growers specifically. It seems this is happening yet again, where PMRA is making a decision on a label change before the science is even complete on that potential change. We know that PMRA made a mistake when it came to the difference between animal feed and the food system.

What impact did that potential label change on lambda-cy and banning the use of lambda-cy have on your apple orchard? Maybe you can talk about the impact it had on your CFA members.

Stéphanie Levasseur: Well, I may not be able to talk directly about that particular product, but history has repeated itself many times in the past five or six years, I'd say, where PMRA has been trying to recoup lost time because they hadn't been doing their re-evaluations in a proper and timely fashion. They're kind of speeding it up to get back on track, but as you say, they do not always take into consideration the fact that there's no alternative. It doesn't enter into their equation. For them, it's only a question of assessing risks to health and nature, and they don't really have any inclination to take into account what effect it has on the growers or producers.

John Barlow: Thank you.

I have limited time, so I want to go to my next question. Again, it's for CFA.

The Prime Minister made a commitment in his election platform that there would be a mandate change to CFIA and PMRA to include food security and economic impact in their decisions, which is exactly what you are alluding to. However, when we had the officials here a couple of weeks ago and asked them if they had a timeline to act on this mandate change, the response from the CFIA and the PMRA was that they have no reason to change the way they do business.

As a representative of one of the largest agriculture groups in the country, what would be your response to that answer from the officials from CFIA and PMRA, that they have no intentions of acting on those mandate changes and the promise in the Liberal platform?

• (1600)

Stéphanie Levasseur: It's kind of disheartening, really. It illustrates well the lack of coherence in government regulations that we've been living with. Sometimes the left hand says the opposite of what the right hand says. This is a perfect example.

If the mandate is there, these agencies should comply and work with us to achieve what the Prime Minister is asking of them, without putting into peril the security of the public or the safety of our food supply. We do need to stay competitive, and we do need them to accelerate the process to keep our tool box replenished.

John Barlow: I have one quick question—just a yes or a no, if that's okay.

The CFIA has put out their red tape reduction report. Was CFA offered a formal consultation as part of that process? We have heard that agriculture groups were asked not to participate. Do you know if you were allowed or if there was a formal consultation, yes or no?

Stéphanie Levasseur: No. We were not invited.

John Barlow: Thank you.

I want to go now to the cattle feeders.

After a number of studies that have happened—I want to get my dates correct here—and some follow-up by AAFC was conducted in 2018, 2019 and 2020 in assessing the new rest stop hours for animal transportation, it has now been shown that there is no scientific reason to be making these changes.

Would you expect that Transport Canada and CFIA would now reverse these changes and allow you to go back to the system that was working well for decades?

Maybe, Janice or Cathy Jo, you have a bit of an assessment of the impact these changes are having on the industry in terms of unloading and loading cattle.

Janice Tranberg: Thank you for that question.

The biggest challenge is lameness. When you take cattle on and off a truck, you cause lameness. Some of the concerns, I think, that they were addressing were more the public concerns about whether these animals were getting sufficient amounts of food and water. When they were bringing these recommendations forward, they were actually in the process of doing some research that they had funded to find out what would be the impact of the length of time. We did request that they pause until the science was there to make the changes, but the changes were made, as you suggested.

Now that the research has come out and is public, it has shown that there is more harm to loading and offloading, but we haven't seen any changes coming forward. Some of the complications are.... For example, if you're driving a truck all the way across from Alberta to Ontario and get hit by a snowstorm—we just had snow in Alberta—and something gets delayed, all of a sudden now you have to find a spot. You have to offload those cattle and bring them back on. That is increasing the risk.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll move to the Liberals for six minutes, with MP Harrison.

Emma Harrison (Peterborough, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here.

We have heard witness testimony over and over again that the duplication of regulatory burden is their biggest frustration. Where would the cutting of red tape have the biggest impact on your sector?

Janice Tranberg: There's a number, but I'll just go to one of the examples that we provided on the border services.

As a truck gets inspected, a seal gets put on it. A seal means literally that it seals the truck. The animals have been run through a chute. They've been shown to be healthy. All the numbers match

up. They go on the truck, and the truck is sealed. Now you get to the border coming from the U.S. to Canada, and that's done by a USDA vet. Now you're at the Canadian border, and you have to wait for a vet, so you have to time your truck to get through when the vets are actually there. Not only that, the vets are also looking after cats, dogs and other things that are crossing the border. Now you have this load of animals sitting on the truck for over the time that they're allowed to be on a truck, for over the time that the trucker is allowed to be driving. Then they have to go through their vet inspection. When they get to the destination, again, within 48 hours, the animals are offloaded. They're kept in a separate pen. They cannot mingle, and a CFIA-accredited vet has to come and inspect all the cattle.

In my mind, that's a complete duplication of CFIA vets. If we didn't have that, if we trained our CBSA agents to just go through the paperwork and make sure everything is okay, I think that would be a good savings, and it would also help with transport and commerce.

• (1605)

Cathy Jo Noble: I think it's particularly important for cattle feeders because we're transporting live animals. As much as we support the diversification away from the U.S., we have live animals, and we can't transport live animals easily in the volumes that we're sending down to the United States. It has to be that Canada-U.S. relationship.

Emma Harrison: Thank you.

When the truck arrives and there is no vet available, is there a time limit, or what happens? How long are people potentially waiting?

Janice Tranberg: When the truck arrives in Canada, as I said, the cattle get offloaded, and they have to be in a pen that is specific to those animals. They can't mingle with any other animals, and a vet has to be there within 48 to 72 hours. I think that's less of a concern, because we have our relationships with our vets in each province; it's more at the border. When it's been sealed at one end, it can't be opened until it gets to the other end, so that seal remains on there. What is the need to have that vet at the border?

Emma Harrison: You spoke a little bit about some innovations that you would like to see move forward. Could you speak more to the innovations that you would like to see approved?

Janice Tranberg: There's something called an ultra-high-frequency tag. All animals get tagged, and this allows someone to literally pass by with a wand and be able to pick up every single tag that's on that truck. This technology is being used in the United States. We've piloted it in Canada, but it's not used in Canada yet. That's just one example. There are other examples of technologies coming up, but that would be, again, at the border, an easy way to make sure that the cattle that are on the truck match all the paperwork that they have in front of them.

Emma Harrison: I have another question for you.

We spoke a little bit during the summer about the concern regarding interprovincial trade barriers. Would you like to have this opportunity to speak more about your concerns when it comes to interprovincial trade barriers, provincial regulations and federal regulations?

Cathy Jo Noble: I've shared with most of you our comments in written format. The concern is that in the provincial abattoirs, there are different levels of rules and regulations. We are concerned because we have arrangements with our global partners that the product they're receiving is up to a federally regulated standard. We need to ensure they feel confident that they're still receiving a product that comes up to a federally regulated standard to access our global markets.

The second challenge is that we are able to import meat, but it has to meet our federally regulated rules of how it's processed in another country. If you bring that global common denominator down, it's hard to say you cannot have beef product coming into our country from a country, or a plant, that has lower standards than federally regulated standards, because we're accepting that movement across the province of that lower standard.

We think it feels rushed. We have concerns, and the industry has concerns. We really recommend that this one be set aside to do some due diligence to see that it isn't going to impact our access globally, and that we're able to protect our own markets, as well, from what's coming in.

Emma Harrison: Thank you.

Janice Tranberg: I will just quickly add, as well, that one of the solutions might be to help bring everybody up to our federal standards. However, some of those local abattoirs are really necessary, so it shouldn't be mandatory.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Monsieur Perron for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I thank the witnesses for being with us today.

Ms. Levasseur, you mentioned those drones that we discussed in previous meetings.

No one understands why the same product can be sprayed from an airplane, but not from a drone. We're all aware that the doses involved are smaller, that they fly at a lower altitude and that a drone

has six propellers instead of two, but it's odd. We've already talked about this several times and we would still have quite a bit more to say about it.

Do you have any concrete proposals that we could bring to the CFIA to change its procedures?

Do you have any examples of regulations or steps in the process that we could do away with to get things moving faster?

In your opinion, are the delays in this case the result of insufficient resources, inefficiency or bad faith?

Stéphanie Levasseur: Thank you for the question, Mr. Perron.

I wouldn't go so far as to say it's bad faith. It's a very typical reaction to the unknown. This is new technology, so there is uncertainty around it.

That being said, I can tell you there are a lot of trials and pilot projects going on in the world. Drones are being used to spray pest control products or fertilizer, to seed or to monitor the fields. So these are very useful little machines.

All things considered, I think that drones are lower risk than airplanes are. If planes can be used for aerial crop-spraying, drones should be, too. It bears noting that there are fewer and fewer options for products that can be sprayed from an airplane. In addition, drones offer much greater precision than airplanes. So it should be easier to approve spraying by drone than by plane.

I don't have an exact answer to your question. Perhaps you should contact people in the sectors that use or want to use these machines. We could send you more specific examples after the meeting.

Yves Perron: If you have any specific recommendations or concrete examples to share with the committee, I would be grateful if you could send them to us in writing.

This also applies to the other witnesses. If you have anything you'd like to tell us that you didn't have time to mention, please don't hesitate to contact us in writing.

Ms. Levasseur, I'd like to address the issue of emergency registration applications. People from the Association des producteurs maraîchers du Québec, among other organizations, have brought a problem to our attention in this regard. They explained that they had used this process when there had been outbreaks of disease or the proliferation of insect pests or parasites that were damaging crops. However, approval of the products they requested was given too late, once the crisis was over.

How can we improve the emergency registration process?

Once again, please feel free to send us your specific proposals in writing after the meeting.

Stéphanie Levasseur: We could certainly provide you with information in writing after the meeting.

We never submit applications for completely unknown products. These are well-known products, and the same applications have to be made year after year because the regular registration process never pans out or takes too long.

Emergency approvals often involve molecules for which we have already submitted applications. There are lists of products that could be eligible for an expedited process, including products that have already been evaluated and submitted the previous year. These applications could be approved automatically, or at least fast-tracked.

There would be a way to manage these applications, especially when they have to be repeated over and over because producers are still waiting for the regular registration process to be completed.

Yves Perron: Thank you very much.

Another concern was raised regarding recommendations made by Quebec government scientists about certain products. Since tests had not been conducted at the federal level, producers had resorted to other products, which were also unsuitable. Perhaps the sharing of expertise should be promoted.

I'd like to hear Mr. Zoghلامي's thoughts on the issue of emergency registrations, particularly in the grain sector.

Salah Zoghلامي: Thank you for the question.

As far as emergency registrations are concerned, our sector is less affected because we don't have the same production cycle. This cycle is not as short as that of the produce sector, for example. So we don't have as many problems with various insect pests.

I'd like to come back to the issue of drones, which you mentioned earlier. We've been asking for access to drones for a long time.

Trials have been conducted in several countries around the world, and the results are very accurate.

Let me give you an example. Sometimes, pockets of pests or weeds in a field are inaccessible to machinery. This means that either the entire field must be sprayed or no action can be taken. However, with a drone, it is possible to spray the affected area, apply a product, or monitor the area using very precise GPS coordinates. This makes it possible to adjust the dose, increase the effectiveness of interventions, and eliminate risks.

Unfortunately, the approval process takes a long time. Many producers who use drones for seeding, in particular, also want to use them for pesticide application.

• (1615)

Yves Perron: Thank you, Mr. Zoghلامي.

You won't have time to respond, but please don't hesitate to send us a detailed proposal in writing on the ePhyto system, which you mentioned. I'd be very interested in that.

Salah Zoghلامي: I'll be sending you that information.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll now move to the second round, starting with five minutes for the Conservatives.

Mr. Gourde.

[Translation]

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

My first question is for the representative from Producteurs de grains du Québec.

Mr. Zoghلامي, over the past year, grain producers have been affected by a fairly significant drop in market prices. Input costs are also rising. Profit margins are practically non-existent, which is unfortunate for these producers.

Are nitrogen fertilizers still subject to the 35% tariff? This is in addition to other costs.

Salah Zoghلامي: I'll have to look into that. It was implemented very recently, and I need to check the update to see where we stand. I can send you this information in writing later.

Jacques Gourde: There was one year when producers were reimbursed, but only in the first year.

Do these additional costs remain in the state coffers, or are they still reimbursed to producers?

Salah Zoghلامي: In the first year, we received a refund under collective programs. Part of this tax was injected into the on-farm climate action fund. The Agrisolutions climat program benefited from these funds for its operation.

This wasn't done on a case-by-case basis, and the amount allocated doesn't fully reflect what was spent in taxes or the costs to producers. As a result, there are fewer reimbursements under a collective program for beneficial actions on the farm.

Jacques Gourde: In terms of the cost per hectare for a crop such as corn, what might this import tariff represent?

Salah Zoghلامي: I don't have exact figures for you, but it's a percentage increase in production costs. It's a portion that increases production costs.

Jacques Gourde: Will producers have a positive profit margin, or will it be negative overall?

Salah Zoghلامي: I would say that, this year, it would be negative.

Jacques Gourde: I now turn to the representatives of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. Tariffs affect grain producers as well as other producers, including dairy and beef producers. The latter need a lot of hay crops for their animals. They also use nitrogen fertilizers in eastern Canada. These imported fertilizers are also subject to tariffs. The rate is said to be between 30% and 35%, but we will look at the details later.

Is there anything to do about this?

Stéphanie Levasseur: Tariffs are political decisions. It certainly affects all producers who need to use these products. Unfortunately, there are few options to purchase elsewhere. We can only purchase products subject to tariffs. We can't really use anything else. So we are stuck with this problem.

Indeed, there are challenges in just about every sector of crop production. The effects of tariffs are being felt in all sectors, but perhaps more so in the grain sector than in the produce sector. That said, I don't know the figures off the top of my head.

● (1620)

Jacques Gourde: I'm very concerned about the decline in the number of farmers in Canada. Farmers represent nearly 1% of the Canadian population. Unfortunately, this percentage is still declining.

Have we reached the tipping point?

Farmers are forced to hire many foreign workers. They have difficulty finding people. This small percentage of people feeds all Canadians.

Will this percentage decrease by half again in 15 years?

Stéphanie Levasseur: I hope not, because that would definitely put us in a critical situation. The country's food security would then be compromised. In my opinion, the day we have to rely on foreign countries to import our food, we will see prices increase tenfold, because there would no longer be any competition on the Canadian market.

The farming population is certainly declining. However, agricultural production is not declining to the same extent. Farms are consolidating and growing in size. Of course, there are fewer and fewer readily available young farmers to take over family farms. Families are smaller than before, which means that parents have fewer children to choose from as successors. In addition, children are often interested in things other than agriculture.

The situation is worrying. What is even more worrying this year, as Mr. Zoghlami mentioned, is that net income is declining. For three or four years now, we've been seeing very worrying declines in income.

This year, particularly in Quebec, is the first time we have seen negative income since we began collecting data.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry. That's time.

We go next to MP Dandurand with the Liberals for five minutes.

[Translation]

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here and sharing their knowledge and experience of the industry with the committee. They've been very helpful.

I will begin by addressing the representative of Producteurs de grains du Québec.

We're currently discussing tariffs on inputs and production costs. I would add that the season has been difficult due to the climate events that have occurred in Quebec.

What is the impact of the extreme climate events that have been occurring one after another on production, compared to that of tariffs on nitrogen fertilizers?

What is hurting producers the most right now?

Salah Zoghlami: Both situations are hurting producers. Assessing which hurts more depends on the state of the crop or how the crop has been affected by climate change.

In any case, weather conditions have been very severe. This has had a negative impact on field crops. Some people have lost virtually their entire crops, while others have seen their yields decline significantly. Weather conditions have had a very negative impact on crops this year. Unfortunately, this is a recurring, cyclical phenomenon.

As for tariffs on fertilizers, this is just one more thing on top of everything else. It's like a constraint that producers have to live with. It reduces their net income and increases their production costs, without necessarily being a drastic loss, because it's a one-time occurrence.

On the one hand, the imposition of tariffs leads to a long-term decline in income. On the other hand, the impact of weather conditions on crops can cause producers to lose everything.

Which of these two situations has the greatest impact? This year, it will depend on the number of fields and regions affected by the dangerous weather conditions that have occurred.

Marianne Dandurand: Has the market been able to shift toward producing countries that are not subject to tariffs?

Salah Zoghlami: There aren't that many choices. There are currently few input suppliers that deliver to Canada. In the past, nitrogen fertilizers came mainly from Russia, with the United States as the second source.

Given the current needs of these countries, there is a shortage, which is driving up prices.

● (1625)

Marianne Dandurand: Is this situation speeding up the adoption of soil management practices that aim to reduce fertilizer use and are also good for the soil?

Are there any positive consequences to this unfortunate situation?

Salah Zoghlami: Yes, there have been many changes. Producers are adapting and adopting good agricultural practices that can improve soil quality. Soil is part of their farm's capital, so they're making efforts in this regard.

Although these are good practices, their beneficial effects aren't achieved in a year or two. They need to be applied over several years. For example, it takes up to 90 years to increase soil organic matter by 1%. These practices require many years of work to be effective.

Marianne Dandurand: In your opening remarks, you said that PMRA resources should be refocused on its core activities.

What activities have its resources been expanded to in recent years?

What are the core activities to which resources should be refocused?

Salah Zoghalmi: Let me give you an example. Our agency has ruled on the monitoring of crop protection products after they've been marketed, and producers are required to follow up on this. We've noted that there are additional costs associated with this monitoring for producers.

However, registering crop protection products and assessing the risks associated with their registration is the primary mission of the PMRA. Opening a second parallel project requires resources and incurs costs for the owners of registered products. As a result, producers have to pay more for their crop protection products.

The agency should abandon this approach and focus its efforts on registration.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

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

[Translation]

Yves Perron: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Zoghalmi, I'd appreciate if you could complete your answer about process duplication at the PMRA. I'm very interested in this question.

Salah Zoghalmi: There is indeed duplication, since, as part of its approval process, the PMRA does work that has already been done by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, or EPA. Since the Canadian and American systems are relatively similar, it would be appropriate not to redo work that has already been done. It would be better to use the EPA's results directly to speed up the registration process in Canada.

In my previous statement, I was going to add that priority should be given to producers' needs for crop protection products. This doesn't mean that analysis or risk management activities should be reduced. A distinction must be made between what's essential and what's important.

Yves Perron: Thank you very much.

Ms. Tranberg, I'd like to address the issue of slaughter regulations.

You mentioned the distinction between local slaughterhouses and federal slaughterhouses.

While I'm sensitive to the areas of jurisdiction involved, is there any way to review the standards so that certification is the same everywhere?

I'm thinking, among other things, of the extremely high cost of federal inspections.

What could the federal government do about this?

[English]

Janice Tranberg: So, as we mentioned, one of the possible solutions would be to help some of the provincial abattoirs come up to CFIA standards, but you also have to understand that this means having vets on hand. Number one, we already have a shortage of CFIA vets, so we would have to train more vets, and then there's a cost to that.

I think that is a possible solution, but again, you also have to remember that, as we mentioned, some of those local abattoirs are very necessary. People use them. They don't necessarily have to be to federal standards. I think the complication is how we make sure that food safety is there and that we don't impact our export trade markets but allow both provincial and federal abattoirs to coexist. We're just saying that there has to be consideration around inter-provincial trade of red meat. You have to think about those things and how we are going to ensure that this happens.

The other option is province-to-province agreements.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you to all of our witnesses joining us here today. We appreciate your time.

We'll suspend for five minutes. Thank you.

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1635)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

I have just a couple of comments before we start. If you are speaking, please wait until you are recognized by me. If you are on video conference, click the microphone icon to activate your mic.

I will remind you that we are here pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, September 18, 2025.

We have three witnesses joining us here today. From Pulse Canada, we have Greg Northey. From Seeds Canada, Brent Collins is with us, and representing Soy Canada is Brian Innes.

Thank you so much for joining us here today. We welcome your input.

We'll start with a five-minute presentation by Pulse Canada.

• (1640)

Greg Northey (Vice-President, Corporate Affairs, Pulse Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for the opportunity to appear today.

My name is Greg Northey and I am here on behalf of Pulse Canada, representing over 26,000 growers and more than 100 processors and exporters of peas, lentils, beans and chickpeas.

Canada accounts for close to one-third of the global pulse trade, and upwards of 85% of what we produce is exported. The pulse sector is resilient, and we are committed to our role as a trusted supplier of high-quality food for the world, but to continue to compete globally and ensure Canada is the preferred supplier to the world's top markets, we need government to champion a domestic regulatory policy that removes unnecessary barriers to our competitiveness.

For many years, Pulse Canada has engaged deeply in Canada's regulatory reform efforts, participating in consultations, responding to Canada Gazette proposals and submitting detailed recommendations. Across all of that work, our purpose has remained the same: to build a regulatory environment that continues to protect health and safety while also enabling innovation, investment and trade.

Successive governments have recognized the need for reform. Efforts such as the smart regulation agenda of the early 2000s, the red tape reduction action plan in 2012, the Red Tape Reduction Act of 2015, and the current 2025 red tape review all acknowledge that outdated rules create unnecessary costs, slow innovation and limit competitiveness. Yet, despite decades of reviews and commitments, many of the barriers we identified 10 and 20 years ago still exist today.

That reality matters, because Canada's future as a global agri-food leader depends not only on what we grow, but on how quickly and effectively we can bring new products to market, adapt to evolving consumer demands and respond to new technologies and trade opportunities. Achieving that requires a regulatory system that is agile, aligned with our trading partners and focused on enabling growth, not one constrained by excessive risk aversion and institutional inertia.

Three examples illustrate why the shift is urgently needed.

First, regarding protein content claims, we have been calling for reform of Canada's outdated protein labelling framework for many years. Canada and the United States remain the only countries that require a protein quality test before a food can make a protein content claim. As a result, staple pulse products like beans, lentils and peas—foods that Canada's own food guide calls protein-rich—cannot say so on their labels.

We have recommended adopting internationally accepted approaches and ultimately moving toward the simpler, quantity-based approach used in the EU and Australia. However, despite repeated submissions and years of discussion, Health Canada's September 2025 red tape reduction update does not mention protein claims. The overall language in it is positive—"alignment", "flexibility"—but there is no action, no timeline, no measurable outcome. This is emblematic of a broader pattern—ambition without accountability and regulatory caution that continues to hold innovation back.

Second, with respect to CFIA's adoption of electronic phytosanitary certificates, for more than a decade exporters, including Pulse Canada, have urged CFIA to adopt full electronic phytosanitary certification, or ePhyto, to streamline trade documentation. CFIA

began exploring this in 2018 or even earlier. In recent months, we've seen a potential ePhyto project being developed for this fall to Mexico, but after more than a decade, this is still a partial step.

Third, with regard to the PMRA, the recent red tape review of the Pest Management Regulatory Agency underscores the same pattern we see elsewhere. Long-standing issues are acknowledged, but meaningful progress remains distant. Joint reviews with international partners, for example, are an important tool, but PMRA has been discussing expanded joint review processes since at least 2008. While plans to broaden these reviews to more partners in risk areas are included in the latest update, the timeline has now stretched to 2027 and beyond, far too slow when Canadian farmers are competing today against producers in jurisdictions that already have access to these tools.

These examples reflect a system that remains reactive rather than proactive, adjusting course only when pressured, rather than anticipating industry needs and enabling innovation before problems arise. They also reflect a broader challenge across Canada's regulatory landscape, one of excessive risk aversion that too often prioritizes avoiding mistakes over seizing opportunities to deliver real economic and competitive gains.

Canada's agriculture and agri-food sector is ready to lead in innovation and sustainability and in supplying the world with high-quality plant-based food, but that will only happen if government embraces a new mindset, one that sees competitiveness and innovation as core regulatory outcomes and one that measures success by results, not reports.

Pulse Canada and our members are ready to partner with government to achieve that shift, but the time has come to move from ambition to action and finally build a regulatory system that is fit for the future.

• (1645)

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That was perfect timing.

Next, I will go to Seeds Canada and Brent Collins.

Brent Collins (President, Seeds Canada): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today.

My name is Brent Collins, and I am the president of Seeds Canada. It's a national association representing seed developers, growers, analysts, retailers and service providers across the country. I also serve as the head of seeds and traits for BASF Agricultural Solutions Canada, a Seeds Canada member.

I'm here today to support your study on regulatory reform in agriculture and agri-food and to provide factual and impartial insights. For any questions beyond my expertise, I will most certainly follow up with information to be provided.

Seed is the foundation of Canada's \$112-billion agri-food industry. Our sector contributes \$6 billion annually to the economy, 63,000 jobs, and \$700 million in both imports and exports each year.

To unlock the full potential of Canadian agriculture, we must modernize the regulations and institutions that govern seed development and commercialization. The current framework is outdated, overly complex and burdened by red tape. It does not reflect today's realities of rapid innovation, climate change and global competition.

Modern and efficient regulations are essential to ensure that Canadian farmers have timely access to high-quality seed and the latest genetic innovations, ideally ahead of our international competitors. Regulatory burden must be reduced, and risk management must be balanced with cost and speed to market. This is especially important in the current environment, with trade wars challenging farmers' markets and depressed commodity prices.

The seed sector is primarily regulated under the Seeds Act and regulations administered by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the CFIA. This framework was originally developed in the early 1900s and remains mostly the same today. The agricultural landscape of today versus when the legislation was developed share little in common. At that time, wheat was king, canola didn't exist and farms ran on manual or animal labour.

The regulations have been under review through the CFIA's seed regulatory modernization initiative, a five-year process involving extensive stakeholder engagement. Seeds Canada has been an active participant throughout, including the most recent consultation, which closed on October 3.

We welcome some of the proposals in the CFIA's policy paper, such as incorporating regulations by reference and recognizing an external advisory committee. Overall, the changes fall short of the transformative modernization that was promised. Given the time and resources committed to this process, the proposals fall short of meaningful change and, in some cases, will increase seeds cost and discourage adoption of innovation by farmers.

The advisory committee, a concept included in the policy document and originally proposed by Seeds Canada in 2022, must be more than symbolic. It should be a strong, inclusive body with the authority to guide regulatory amendments, standards setting and policy development.

We are also concerned that many proposals are framed as explorations rather than concrete reforms. After five years of consultation, further deferral risks stagnation. For example, delaying the expansion of first party seed crop inspection is a missed opportunity to improve efficiency and reduce costs.

The proposed shift toward alternative service delivery models with a single service provider requires scrutiny. The recent removal of CFIA's alternative service delivery policy from its website, just as third party delivery of critical services is being proposed, raises concerns about transparency and potential cost impacts for farmers and seed companies.

Similarly, we were disappointed with CFIA's progress report on red tape reduction. The proposed actions are unlikely to meaningfully improve farmers' access to innovation. True modernization must be guided by three principles: transparency, efficiency and collaboration.

• (1650)

We urge the government to do three things: first, to establish a formal role for the advisory committee; second, to commit to clear timelines for implementing further reforms; third, to ensure regulatory changes, improve seed access and reduce costs for farmers.

In closing—

The Chair: I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to stop you there. I gave you an extra 15 seconds to finish the three points.

Next, for five minutes, we have Mr. Innes.

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: Mr. Chair, I'm sorry to interrupt, but I need to rise on a point of order.

At the beginning of Mr. Collins's testimony, the interpreters mentioned that the sound tests had not been validated for interpretation.

If I understand correctly, we sadly won't be able to get Mr. Collins's answers live. He would have to provide us with his answers in writing.

I believe I understood the interpreters' message correctly. They're signalling to me that this is the case.

The interpreters read the opening statement that Mr. Collins provided them, but the sound level isn't conducive to the hearing health of our interpreters.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Collins, apparently your sound is not at the standard for the House of Commons. What we're going to do is this. You can submit your presentation. We will not be able to ask you questions, because of the sound quality, but we'll follow up with you. However, you can stay on and listen in.

Monsieur Perron.

[Translation]

Yves Perron: The fact is, Mr. Chair, that the witness took the time to appear before the committee. I would humbly suggest that committee members submit their questions in writing to the witness. I think we could do that. Since the witness is unable to answer questions due to poor sound quality, he could provide us with his answers in writing.

I think that would be a way to show respect to the witness while respecting our official languages.

[English]

The Chair: Okay, I think that's actually a good idea.

Mr. Collins, you can stay on. If there are questions directed to you, don't answer them. You can submit the answers back to the committee officially. Just jot them down, and we'll be able to add those into our report.

Madame Chatel.

[Translation]

Sophie Chatel (Pontiac—Kitigan Zibi, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I was going to raise the same issue my colleague just raised.

[English]

The Chair: Okay, excellent. I think we're good.

Thank you, Mr. Collins, for your understanding—and please stay on.

Brent Collins: Thank you.

The Chair: We have Mr. Innes for a five-minute presentation.

[Translation]

Brian Innes (Executive Director, Soy Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

A regulatory system that does not impose unnecessary burdens is important to our international competitiveness. Your study is very timely, because there are many things facing our industry from abroad. Yet, what we do here in Canada to enable our competitiveness is completely within our control.

I'm here representing the soybean value chain. Soy Canada brings together members from across the value chain, including our seed developers, our farmers, our processors and exporters—from the Atlantic all the way to the Rockies. We are the third most valuable crop in Canada, and we produce world-leading food-grade soybeans to produce soy milk, tofu and miso, as well as commodity beans to process into animal feed, oil for humans and biofuel.

• (1655)

[Translation]

With more than 70% of our production exported, we're very focused on global markets and what our sector needs to be competitive.

I'd like to highlight three areas where action and direction could make a real difference for our sector.

First, we suggest the committee recommend the PMRA consider food security and economic impacts in their regulatory decisions without compromising on health and safety.

This is important, because it would lead to processes and decisions that deliver better outcomes for farmers while upholding health and safety.

There are many voices in the conversation about regulating crop protection products, but ultimately, we need to think about why we need these products in the first place: food security and competitiveness.

[English]

In the soybean sector, we're living a real example of how this renewed focus would create real benefits. The recently proposed decision to remove all post-emergent uses of dicamba herbicide on soybeans would take away a valuable tool for our farmers. If food security and economic impact were priorities, the PMRA could consider that this crop protection tool has real value for farmers to control weeds resistant to other herbicides, and there would be an ability to consider that the most valuable and practical time to use this tool is after the soybean crop emerges. This is the very use the proposed decision is set to take away. How was removing the most valuable use pattern considered by the PMRA?

Second is that the committee recommend that the CFIA's ongoing seed regulatory modernization effort must not make processes slower or more expensive.

[Translation]

We're seeing a real risk of the process to list soybean varieties becoming slower and more expensive.

For food grade soybeans, currently the Canadian Seed Growers' Association provides a variety listing service that processes applications within a few days. The CFIA is proposing to take over this process.

[English]

We're concerned that this will mean a slower and costlier registration process for our soybeans.

Last is that the committee recommend that the CFIA expedite the rollout of electronic phytosanitary certificates. Canada is an international laggard in electronic documentation, significantly behind our U.S. competitors, who can use these electronic phytosanitary certificates for more than 100 countries. This frustrates our customers and imposes costs on our sector that our competitors just do not have.

For example, consider our soybean exports to Japan, where almost 3,000 paper phytosanitary certificates are required. This creates an extra burden in time and in courier costs. We estimate these costs to be about \$1 million per year, just for our soybeans to Japan. There are also added risks and financing costs that come with that.

It's a self-imposed cost in Canada that's hurting our competitiveness and frustrating our customers. It's embarrassing to have our customers repeatedly ask why we can't do this. We were able to send emails 30 years ago, but today we are sending 3,000 paper copies of phytosanitary certificates to Japan.

[Translation]

We must do better, and the committee has an essential role to play in motivating change.

[English]

Thank you for your interest in how your political leadership can have a real impact on improving the regulatory environment and our competitiveness.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Innes. We appreciate your testimony.

Now we'll go to the Conservatives for six minutes.

Mr. Epp, go ahead.

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses for appearing today. I'll ask each of the witnesses—Mr. Collins, I would welcome your response in writing—to answer the following question in the order of testimony. That would be Pulse Canada and then Soy Canada.

This comes from Robert Arnason under crop management news: "It should take two to four years to review the safety of a pesticide.... [PMRA] began looking at the health and environmental safety of glufosinate-ammonium [the active ingredient in Liberty] in 2018. It expects to complete the evaluation in 2027." Yes, that's 2027—nine years. PMRA is allowing present uses to continue as it goes through the re-evaluation process, but it will not allow new uses. BASF's InVigor canola hybrids have a tolerance for Liberty but cannot receive registration for it to be used, as they are considered a new product. "Glufosinate-ammonium has been used [in Canada] for 30 years...and...there are no known cases of harm to humans when applied according to labelled instructions."

By the way, the BASF LibertyLink canola system was launched in Australia in 2021. With respect to canola, we compete with Australia in the Indo-Pacific, which is a focus of this government's attempts to expand our agri-food exports through the new office we have in Manila. I was just in that region three weeks ago promoting those same exports.

Here is my question for all of you. In your specific sectors, do you have any products that the Canadian industry does not have access to because of the extremely slow processes at PMRA?

Mr. Northey.

• (1700)

Greg Northey: No specific product comes to mind, but to a pulse farmer and a farmer of all the other crops, these kinds of issues are a problem, obviously. It's clearly not acceptable. As we noted in our opening testimony, whenever we see the kinds of reports from regulatory agencies that we saw in September, where they talk about ambition and they have the correct words but we're not seeing the action, it's a problem.

I think the question around drones is a really good one. In the U.S., farmers have access to drones right now, while the PMRA conducts its reviews. We haven't been able to get there. Ultimately, these are always the issues that we face with our regulatory agencies. We've faced them for many years.

Dave Epp: Just before I go to Mr. Innes, from your agency's perspective, what would be a solution to get past the announcements and get to the action?

Greg Northey: I think you've heard testimony in the past few days, and Ms. Levasseur reflected on it as well, on what kind of mandate change would be required at agencies. Obviously, they're respecting the health and safety of Canadians, for sure, but what would it look like if they took into account different aspects within their mandate that would focus on the kinds of things we're talking about, whether it's competitiveness or whether it's the things our farmers need and our industry needs? We've talked about it for many years. That is ultimately what would drive change.

Dave Epp: You mentioned the mandate change. That was in the Liberal election platform, and yet we've heard testimony at this committee by both agencies that their mandates do not need to be changed. Do you agree?

Greg Northey: No. They do need to be changed.

Dave Epp: Thank you.

I'll shift to Mr. Innes, please.

Are there any other products that the soy industry does not have access to in Canada vis-à-vis our competitors?

Brian Innes: The example I cited in my opening remarks could be a real example of exactly what you're talking about, where American farmers would have access to this herbicide dicamba. If the proposed decision from the PMRA becomes final, that would mean our Canadian farmers would not have access to that herbicide.

It's a really significant impact when you think about how farmers need to manage resistant weeds. Whether we're talking about kochia in western Canada or whether we're talking about water-hemp or fleabane or ragweed, all of these weeds are resistant to herbicides. Our farmers look for ways to manage their crops and create the best yields they can. When you take away tools—and certainly tools relative to the other folks who are able to produce just miles away—that has a real impact on our sector, eroding our competitiveness.

Dave Epp: Do you have any comment on the need for a mandate change by both of the agencies we're studying?

Brian Innes: The really important part is that there should be direction to the agencies to consider economic competitiveness, as well as think about economic impacts. Whether it's a mandate change or whether it's a direction that then gets implemented in policies—there are many options and ways in which it can be done—there needs to be a change in how they do business.

Dave Epp: Thank you.

Mr. Collins, I would welcome your written comments on both of those questions.

In August 2025, Food and Beverage Canada testified to the finance committee that the federal government should conduct a reverse burden of proof with respect to regulations and the elimination of regulations. What would be your comment?

We also heard testimony that we should have harmonization where there are two trusted partners who have done the review process for either re-evaluation or the certification of new active ingredients.

Mr. Northey, what would your comments be?

• (1705)

Greg Northey: I think it's an interesting idea. Right now, we have a one-for-one rule in Canada. Ultimately, they look at administrative burden. However, the reality is that, while the administrative burden is one piece, the cumulative burden of all the regulations is what impacts the sector. If a new regulation comes in, even if it's a modernized regulation, the ability of the regulated party to understand the regulation—how it's rolled out and the interpretation—is the full burden. Whether it's a reverse burden of proof, as was suggested, or whether it's just a better focus on the economic impact of the cumulative burden of regulation, all ideas should be on the table.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to the Liberals for six minutes.

MP Chatel.

[*Translation*]

Sophie Chatel: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being here with us today.

Thank you, Mr. Innes, for emphasizing our study's importance.

Indeed, we in this new Liberal government are committed to reducing red tape and ensuring that we have a modern regulatory system. That's why we're undertaking a reform. As Mr. Northey said,

there is an accumulation of regulations, and although each one has a purpose, this accumulation poses a problem.

Our agencies have taken a first step, and this committee's aim is to encourage them to go even further, particularly by listening to what experts like you have to say.

As for the idea of simply changing the agencies' mandate, I fear that this may not be enough. As government officials told us a few weeks ago, food security and economic issues are already part of their mandate, either implicitly or explicitly.

In my opinion, we need to go beyond defining a mandate. We really need to institutionalize collaboration and best practices. We have heard some excellent recommendations in this regard, particularly from the representatives of the National Cattle Feeders' Association. Mr. Epp also mentioned this.

[*English*]

According to them, if “two or more trusted global jurisdictions” recognize a product already, then we should provide what they call a “provisional registration”.

[*Translation*]

That means that the product would be immediately available while the analyses are being done.

My colleague Mr. Epp also spoke about the reverse onus proposal. This would involve, for example, creating an external advisory committee to represent the industry. This committee would be responsible for reviewing seed regulations and could recommend solutions to the reported problems. Its recommendations would be binding unless the agency can prove that a particular solution can't be adopted because it poses a health risk.

Our own officials have also proposed treating high-risk and low-risk products separately. The goal would be to speed up the registration of low-risk products and take the time needed to deal with high-risk products.

I'd like to hear your comments on these recommendations first, Mr. Innes.

I'll ask Mr. Collins to send us a written response later.

Brian Innes: Thank you very much.

I'll start with the idea of drawing on how things are done in other countries to speed up decision-making in Canada.

• (1710)

[*English*]

For us in the soybean space, in seeds, for example, it's not that helpful, because oftentimes our seed varieties are very focused on local conditions, whereas varieties produced in other areas, even in Michigan or in North Dakota, don't perform naturally in Canada.

What's more important is that we think about the culture of the regulatory agencies we have. Those agencies should be encouraged, as you rightly note, to discuss with industry what is important for food security and economic competitiveness, and that can be a consideration in those decisions.

When I think about dicamba, for example, which I mentioned, it's not that we need to follow decisions; we need to consider what our farmers need here in Canada and arrive at a regulated outcome that both protects health and safety and delivers food security and competitiveness. If we thought about how we use the products in Canada, at what temperatures and against what weeds, and where the soybeans are in their growth period, we would arrive at better outcomes, but because our culture is broken, we have a really hard time.

[Translation]

Sophie Chatel: My time is almost up but I'd also like to hear from Mr. Northey.

Mr. Innes, I'd like you to provide us with additional details in writing regarding our desire to institutionalize collaboration and come up with concrete solutions. This would help us move forward in defining this economic mandate on food security, without compromising the health and safety of Canadians.

Mr. Northey, the floor is yours.

[English]

Greg Northey: All these ideas are great. I think the key is to realize that there will be no one-size-fits-all solution, because the range of regulations that impact our sector is very broad. Bill C-5, PMRA and AAFC all have some regulations that impact us, so the three suggestions—

The Chair: I have to stop you. It's about 20 seconds over. I apologize.

Mr. Perron, you have the floor for six minutes, please.

[Translation]

Yves Perron: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being with us today.

Mr. Northey, I'll be nice and let you finish your thought.

[English]

Greg Northey: Thank you. I was going to say that we can put all of these on the table. To be honest, many of them have been around for a long time, but the reality—and you mentioned this yourself—is the action. It's actually doing it. It's implementing it. It's taking these things and making them concrete across the whole system.

All these options may be great, and others have really great ones as well, but we've seen so many reports, as I said, for 30 years on this topic. It's about putting them into action.

[Translation]

Yves Perron: Thank you very much, Mr. Northey.

Mrs. Chatel did raise an important point at the beginning of her remarks about recommendations. The problem is often related to

the accumulation of measures or standards. Each requirement, taken individually, may be perfectly logical.

How can we ensure that we don't remove requirements that are important?

Let's take an example. Mr. Innes, you mentioned dicamba, which is currently under review. Correct me if I'm wrong, but if I understand correctly, this is a re-evaluation of a product that was already approved. Now we're being told that new data suggests this product could pose a health threat, and that may well be true.

How can we strike a balance and not be too quick to withdraw a product that our farmers need? On the other hand, we can't allow farmers to continue using a product if it's harmful.

I'm not drawing any conclusions. We're here to ask questions, together.

I'd like to hear your comments on this, Mr. Innes.

Brian Innes: Thank you for the question.

Protecting health and safety certainly must remain paramount. However, we should still be able to find collaborative solutions that are consistent with health and safety obligations. We can ensure food safety while also achieving economic benefits.

For example, the PMRA could adopt a collaborative process to better understand the potential impacts of its decisions. This is what was lacking in the dicamba case.

Of course, the same can be said of the lambda-cy decision. There are several examples of this at the PMRA and the CFIA.

To improve the situation, we need to show that the impact on food safety is significant and review the industry's regulatory processes. We need to keep this in mind and make it a priority.

• (1715)

Yves Perron: You want us to consider the impacts. I can understand that, but scientific knowledge can change. We may eventually have to change some of the criteria.

Mr. Northey, when the CFIA re-evaluates products that are already in use and decides to withdraw or modify an authorization for use, it's certainly not because the people at the agency woke up one morning and decided they were going to withdraw the authorization for a certain product. There's a reason behind it.

What's the right way to approach this?

[English]

Greg Northey: It's a very good question. The key for us, I think, is that if you take the PMRA, for example—the way it assesses the products, the science that goes behind it and the high level of standing that the PMRA has globally—we don't want to erode that.

For many of these situations, it may be just a matter of their having to increase the consultation, to increase the sources of data and to have the resources to go more quickly in their assessment. In a lot of these cases when there's a huge delay, it may just be that their caseload or the load of the work they're doing is such that they cannot expedite these particular decisions that are so important for the sector.

As long as we have transparency, insight and what we view as the appropriate lens into what the industry needs and the decision they make, as long as they make it fast and with an understanding of it, and as long as there are processes to work through to have their decision changed or to apply more data, that's really what we're asking for. However, in many cases, it could be just a resourcing issue. It's not necessarily how they're doing it. It's about whether they're getting the proper input and doing it quickly enough.

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: This brings me to another topic.

On the one hand, people sometimes say that certain products should be taken off the market because Europe has discovered that they pose a cancer risk. On the other hand, people point to the economic impacts and say that the product poses no health risk when used correctly.

Wouldn't improving or speeding up the process—without compromising quality, of course—enable us to find less harmful alternatives in these problematic cases?

Do you have any examples of new products that have been awaiting approval for a long time in your respective fields of expertise?

It seems there isn't enough time for a response, but you can send us your answer in writing.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

We have roughly 12 minutes left. We'll do five minutes for the Conservatives and five minutes for the Liberals, and then we'll finish with Mr. Perron for two and a half minutes.

I believe I'm going to Mr. Bragdon for five minutes.

Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will be splitting my time with Mr. Bonk here shortly.

Mr. Northey and Mr. Innes, thank you for being here today.

I just want to ask this: Was either of you or your organizations approached by any of the governmental departments—CFIA, PMRA or AAFC—for a consultation process regarding the elimination of burdensome regulations? Were you folks consulted in that?

Brian Innes: No.

Greg Northey: No.

Richard Bragdon: Neither one of you was.

I guess I can ask the gentleman online as well. Mr. Collins, you can submit that, if you'd like.

Obviously, if we're going to get to good policy, we're going to need good consultations with the key stakeholders whose industries are most impacted.

If you were to make recommendations, what would they be? I'll ask you to answer as succinctly as possible as to how to best alleviate the choke points or improve the aspect of making Canadian agriculture more competitive across the board. Can you summarize that as quickly as possible?

• (1720)

Greg Northey: Just to confirm, are you asking if we were consulted for these reports that were just published in September? No, we were not, but to be fair, we've been consulted for many, many years on these things. Every two years we're asked. For agriculture, there's an agile regulations table set up by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. They have 170 distinct regulations that have been identified by the sector. So, there's no shortage of massive lists of regulations that impact the sector.

Again, I would just point out that it's taking those and actually putting some change into action.

I'll cede some time to Brian.

Brian Innes: When I think about your question, it's not always about the regulation as written. It's about how it is executed. When I look at the things that I brought to the committee today, I see that all of those things could be solved by the way the agencies execute their mandates.

If we look at electronic phytosanitary certification, we see that it's not a regulatory limit; it's a limit of action and a willingness to take action. If we look at the seed regulatory modernization and how we can go from days in one organization to literally two to three months, which is our experience with the CFIA, we see that this timeline could be adjusted through action.

Richard Bragdon: Mr. Innes, to follow up on that, what do you suggest is the solution to that? I know we've identified the problem, but what do you feel is the quickest way to a solution for that?

Brian Innes: It is clear direction that working to enable food security and economic competitiveness is important for our regulatory agencies.

Richard Bragdon: Okay, thank you.

I'll turn it over to Mr. Bonk.

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

Mr. Northey, you made a very impactful statement at the beginning of your remarks when you said there's "institutional inertia" in CFIA and PMRA. We know the Liberals have spent upwards of \$80 million in their transformation efforts within PMRA. I'm wondering if any of your stakeholders have seen any benefit at all from this.

Greg Northey: The transformation agenda was a challenging process, for sure. We had lots of opportunity to sit on the different committees and working groups that were involved in it, but what ultimately came from that agenda was fairly minimal. There was a regulation that was a positive development that came out of that, but they pulled it back recently.

The overall effort.... To reiterate, everyone identifies the problem we have, where agencies have a set of regulations that are either not performed well or not really working for industry. They embarked on that, but that transformation agenda did not bring the impact they were hoping for.

Steven Bonk: Every one of you today has brought up the need for more collaboration, and you could hear in Mr. Collins' voice that, for his organization, there was no collaboration when they were coming up with a lot of these regulations. Would it be possible, Mr. Innes, for you to talk about...? You always use dicamba, for example. Did you feel there was enough collaboration between your organization and CFIA and PMRA?

Brian Innes: When we think about implementing food security and competitiveness, it's ultimately about evolving the process to enable it to be more collaborative. The process for a special review is a black box, and what we end up with is a proposed decision after years of behind-the-curtain discussions at the regulatory agency.

The Chair: I'm going to have to stop you right there. Thank you very much.

Mr. Connors, you have five minutes.

Paul Connors (Avalon, Lib.): Good day, gentlemen. Thanks for coming in.

I know your organizations have been around for a long time. Greg, you just mentioned that you've been consulted before. How has the regulatory red tape and burden changed over the years, in your opinion? I think most of us would agree there is more than previously, so I think that's already been answered, but what is the reason for that? Is it because of the complexity of the issues now and how the industry has changed? How do you think the role of regulation has changed over the years?

Greg Northey: Yes, we've been consulted a lot on regulation. There's always been an opportunity to feed into what should change. Some of the biggest things we're noticing are the speed of business, the speed of innovation and the way we need to get our product to market. If you're talking about CFIA and phytosanitary certificates, for instance, and how you get a shipment from Saskatchewan or Ontario to your end-use market, the speed is incredible now and the competition is even higher. While before we could generally muddle through and have 10-day service standards for things or take 410 days to get a novel trait decided upon, we just can't do that anymore. We have many competitors globally, and we're trying to position ourselves in Canada to compete in the world in our system.

Whether it's risk aversion or whether there are not enough resources to implement the regulations from the government side, we're just noticing it more, and it becomes much more problematic. Ultimately, what happens is that Canadian businesses have to put in their own resources. You have to hire three more people to deal with the regulatory process to make it go smoothly, and it becomes more problematic. That's where the friction is really emerging.

• (1725)

Paul Connors: Mr. Innes, did you have anything to add to that?

Brian Innes: Our customers' expectations are also changing. When our Japanese customers talk to us and ask us for electronic certification, it's because their business is moving faster as well. They can go on a U.S. government website, scan a QR code and get the documentation, whereas it takes us literally using a courier to pick it up from the processing site in rural Canada and take it to an international place where it can be flown over, which then gets it onto another truck, and then it finally gets to the place where it needs to be in Japan—whereas it could have happened just like that.

Paul Connors: You just mentioned the agile project. Do you think there are ways that can be improved? I am looking for your recommendations, I guess.

Greg Northey: It's been a long process. Just to reiterate, it's been a process to identify the regulatory burden and regulations that need changing. Again, there was early talk about sandboxes, this idea of putting everybody in and trying regulations and unique ways in which.... If you're going to regulate something, you allow an environment, at least for a year, to test to see what the impact would be. For instance, for protein claims for pulses, put it in a sandbox. It's not going to damage the individual consumer. What are those looking like? However, we've seen nothing from that.

The ideas were there, and the intention was good. We have a giant spreadsheet. We've seen some things come out of it. We've had certain trials, at least in the pulse sector, and Protein Industries Canada has had some success getting some trials done that come out of that. Ultimately, it's a very good process, but what is the action?

Paul Connors: Do you think it would benefit the industry if it was followed up on and became something that the industry could implement?

Greg Northey: Yes, having a sense from the regulators that we can try and run with this to see how we can address this.... We can raise it, and it goes to a regulator, but then we don't know—to Brian's point—what happens to it, because it goes through a risk process, and what comes out at the end of it is often, from a Canadian perspective, not as dynamic as what we'd like to see in terms of how that regulation should actually look.

Paul Connors: Mr. Collins, you can certainly send in your written answers to any of those questions I just asked.

The Chair: Mr. Perron, you have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let's pick up where we left off, Mr. Innes. In the case of dicamba, you told my Conservative colleagues that inadequate collaboration was the problem. You said that the re-evaluation process was opaque and that farmers were presented with a *fait accompli*.

Consultations have begun and the agency is requesting additional documentation. Wouldn't that be considered consultation? If not, do you believe consultations should happen right at the outset?

Brian Innes: We believe the agency's role is to consider the farming community's perspective before making decisions. Here, a decision was made and everyone has to comply.

Our organization is also responsible for answering people's questions about regulations on crop protection products, which creates a lot of work.

• (1730)

[*English*]

The Chair: I apologize. We need to check the interpretation here. It's not coming through.

Mr. Perron, if you want to say something, we'll see if it works.

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: I hope the interpretation is working.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes.

We'll take it from the top.

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: Mr. Chair, I'd like to know how much time I have left.

[*English*]

The Chair: You have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Innes, we're going to start over since the interpretation wasn't working.

In the case of dicamba, you told my Conservative colleagues that there hadn't been any collaboration with the agency. You said the process was opaque and that farmers were presented with a *fait accompli*.

The agency is now requesting additional information; could that not be considered a consultation phase? If you believe this is inadequate, what would you propose?

Brian Innes: We know that the agency's decision was the result of a years-long deliberation process.

That said, if any of its decisions are going to impact farming practices, we believe it is important that the agency establish a consultation process. Farmers will want to know how they can adjust their practices to manage the risk cited by the agency. This process is important not only for food safety, but also for competitiveness.

The agency can change its process if it cares about how its decisions affect the farming community.

Yves Perron: That's great. Thank you for clarifying that.

Earlier, in response to a question from Mrs. Chatel, I believe, you mentioned that it was worth looking at what other countries were doing with regard to use authorizations, but that it was also very important to look at what was being done in Canada. Indeed, these measures must be adapted to different crops and to where they're grown.

You emphasized that more action should be taken on crops rather than relying on decisions made abroad.

Could you elaborate on that point?

Brian Innes: What matters to our farmers is what's happening in their fields. What the agencies need is to understand international decisions and scientific decisions. For farmers, what matters is knowing how they can produce safely based on the local climate. They have to deal with weeds, diseases, local pressures, and so on.

Collaboration with international agencies is important, but the most important thing is what matters to our producers.

Yves Perron: So, we should prioritize local production.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

This concludes our meeting.

I want to thank all of our witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Collins, please feel free to submit any type of document. If you need any assistance, please contact the clerk. Thank you for your patience and understanding.

The meeting is adjourned.

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