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Chair: Michael Coteau



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• (1540)

[English]

The Chair (Michael Coteau (Scarborough—Woburn, Lib.)): I'd like to call the meeting to order.

[Translation]

Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

Is the sound quality good enough for the interpreters?

[English]

The Chair: Yes, we're good with the interpreters. Thank you to our interpreters for working so hard.

Before I officially call the meeting to order, I'm going to say, really quickly, that everything is fine with the interpreters. We're going to proceed as planned. If you sent a message out to any of the folks to get here early, you might want to give them an update.

I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number seven 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 in attendance in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

Before we continue, I'd like to ask all 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'll also notice a QR code on the card, which links to a short awareness video.

I have a couple of comments to make.

Please wait until you are recognized. For those on Zoom, you'll see at the bottom of the screen that there's an appropriate channel for interpretation—floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the specific channel.

As a reminder, all comments should go through the chair. For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand.

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.

I would now like to welcome our very patient guests. Thank you so much to our two witnesses for joining us today. We have the Anchor P Cattle Company and Diane Sawley, who is the ranch manager, by video conference. We also have the East Point Cattle Corporation and Erin Sawley. She is the co-owner.

I'm not sure if you're related, but it would be a pretty big coincidence if you weren't, having the same last name. Welcome. We appreciate it.

You have five minutes to present, and after that we'll open it up for questions from members.

We'll start with Diane. Welcome to the committee.

Diane Sawley (Ranch Manager, Anchor P Cattle Company): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and committee members. Thank you for allowing me to tell my story.

My name is Diane Sawley. Along with my husband Cody, son Remington and mom Ethel, we operate Anchor P Cattle Company. Our family has been ranching in the foothills of Alberta since 1900.

This is a summary of our time and resources allocated to the TB testing of our cattle herd.

On July 11, we were notified that our herd had been identified as a trace-out from a TB case in Saskatchewan involving cattle we acquired in December 2021. The CFIA subsequently assigned our case and initiated the necessary procedures. We completed the premises pre-interview producer questionnaire for bovine tuberculosis to enable the CFIA to gain a comprehensive understanding of our operation.

This is a brief view of our operation. We manage 550 commercial cows. Our land is spread over multiple locations with challenging landscapes. The main ranch is 30 kilometres west of Nanton, Alberta. Our summer range pastures are located anywhere from 40 kilometres to 132 kilometres from the main ranch and range in size from 1,750 to 8,000 acres. The cows are in five different herds and summered in five separate locations.

Following the completion of our questionnaire and interview with the CFIA, we explained that testing most of our cattle in July would be extremely challenging, if not impossible. The CFIA demonstrated flexibility concerning scheduling and agreed to test the herd in the fall, when it would all be in one location. Normal operations could proceed. However, on July 21, our caseworker informed us that due to the complexity of our operation and the presence of two commingled herds, both our cow herd and the associated commingled herds would be subject to quarantine. The official quarantine notice was issued on July 24.

To mitigate a four-month quarantine, we requested that immediate testing begin. An operational plan and a schedule were established.

I would like to note that the manpower and hours required to gather the cattle were considerable—approximately 800 man hours in total—but given the tight timelines, seasonal constraints and the size and configuration of our fields, it was unavoidable.

In addition to gathering and testing costs, several other expenses were incurred, including the loss of grazing range, disruptions in breeding programs, abortions during testing, fuel, vehicle wear and tear, and missed marketing opportunities. With the current cattle market at historic highs, the inability to market cattle during quarantine has been particularly stressful.

Testing began August 3 and ended August 28. In this time, we tested five separate herds in four different locations, which amounted to 10 test days and multiple days of gathering. Policy and procedure over this time were inconsistent.

Eleven cows in total were depopulated from our herd. The CFIA will compensate us for this loss, but this will be the only compensation we receive. We have also been tasked with proving the value of the depopulated cows.

My intent today is to detail the significant effort and resources dedicated to TB testing our herd. The planning and implementation required considerable time and attention. The entire testing process spanned an entire month, diverting essential focus from regular ranch operations and leading to missed business opportunities.

While I recognize the necessity of maintaining a disease-free cattle industry for international trade, I believe it is inequitable for individual producers to bear the full burden of these requirements.

Thank you.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you very much for being here today.

I will now turn it over to Erin Sawley for five minutes.

Erin Sawley (Co-owner, East Point Cattle Corporation): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee.

My name is Erin Sawley, and I'm speaking to you today from our family ranch near Melville, Saskatchewan. Together with my husband Shane and our three young children, we operate East Point Cattle Corp.

The past 12 months have been devastating. We went from managing a healthy herd of over 2,000 head of beef cattle and being named the 2024 commercial breeder of the year by the Saskatchewan Simmental Association, to having every single animal ordered destroyed by the CFIA, in February 2025, due to a positive case of bovine tuberculosis.

This event has drastically altered our lives, and it set our business back by years, possibly even a decade. When the positive case was traced to our farm, we committed to full co-operation. Over the years, we have maintained detailed records and implemented a rigorous traceability system, not only to support our breeding program but to contribute to the integrity of the industry.

Canada's disease control system relies on producer participation to ensure food safety and to maintain international market confidence, yet producers are often left to navigate the federal system alone, facing rigid procedures, limited opportunities for discretion from CFIA staff and an entirely insufficient level of communication. In our experience, the CFIA is not equipped to manage its own protocols effectively, and its policies lack the flexibility needed to respond to real-world challenges.

We appreciated Minister MacDonald's recent amendment to increase compensation rates for animals ordered to be destroyed, but those values were nearly a decade out of date and remain inflexible. If market prices continue to rise—as they may, given the shrinking North American beef herd—producers will again be forced to advocate for updates before compensation can begin.

A simple, effective improvement would be to adopt an evergreen model, like the wildlife predation compensation program under Saskatchewan Crop Insurance. Beef calf pricing is based on market data from the week before, during and after the loss, with producers receiving the highest value. If prices fall below a set minimum, the minimum is paid. Other species are compensated using six-month averages, and registered livestock and specialty animals are valued at one-and-a-half times the commercial rate.

These common-sense solutions would reduce administrative burden, save time and money for both producers and government, and eliminate the need to assess carcass quality long after the fact. Streamlining the process would also ease the mental health toll producers face during these crises.

As a producer going through this process right now, it would be very difficult for us to advocate for other producers to follow the path we have followed. At no step in the process have we been rewarded with any benefit for our wholesale compliance. It's been very difficult to watch situations unfold in high-profile cases in other parts of the country, and we wonder whether we should have behaved differently. As we said, we want to do the right thing, but when non-compliance offers a similar or even better outcome to the process, then the process is destined to fail. When the federal government leans this heavily on individual producers to take one for the team while risking their operations, families and livelihoods, with little to no reassurances that they will be supported through the process, it undermines everything the process sets out to achieve.

While I propose some simple, minor improvements, unfortunately I believe the entire framework requires a different approach, one that can assure producers that if they participate fully in the process, they will be made whole again, with an eye to returning to production as soon as possible. That is where the CFIA can truly achieve its joint mandate of safeguarding the food system and maintaining economic viability through market access and trade.

I want to conclude by saying that I hope you realize the opportunity you have before you to make real changes that affect everyday citizens during their darkest days. I would hope that is something my government can do for our industry.

● (1550)

The Chair: Thank you so much for your testimony. Obviously, it's a huge challenge that has been presented to you. Thank you for sharing it with us so we can learn about it for this study.

I'll go to John Barlow, from the Conservatives, for six minutes.

John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thanks to our witnesses.

I appreciate your comments and your commitment to doing what is right for your operations. For many of us, BSE is still fresh in our minds, and the impact that it had, especially in our neck of the woods. Diane would know that very well.

Erin, you mentioned there's a program, the wildlife predator compensation program, through Saskatchewan Crop Insurance. We've often fought to have a more timely and efficient process when it comes to compensation when producers are having to depopulate.

Is that a method or a protocol that could easily be copied by the federal government to make this process easier on you as a producer?

Erin Sawley: Yes, I think something like that could very easily be implemented right now. Through the compensation process, we're trying to value individual animals at a time when they weren't marketed. Throughout the whole compensation process, from day one, we have had no idea what we will be paid. We still don't know. We're 304 days in, and we have no idea what our compensation is going to look like. If producers had a window of reliability to say, "We were depopulated here, and here are our three weeks", it would at least give a framework for some idea of what compensation would look like.

John Barlow: In the last Parliament, we did a study on biosecurity preparedness, which also led to my own private member's bill on protecting biosecurity on farms. One of the recommendations we had was to "Review the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's compensation policy, when the destruction of animals is ordered, to include all cleaning and disinfection costs", and the costs associated with depopulation.

As you said, there was a lot of work by the members of this committee to get the government to change the compensation model, but it doesn't include other extraneous costs, whether they're for transportation or man-hours worked collecting cattle, as Diane said.

How important is it for you, as you mentioned, to be made whole ahead of your having to depopulate 2,000 animals when you have worked for years to build the genetics of that operation?

Erin Sawley: In the process, as you said, the CFIA only compensates for animals ordered destroyed. For example, we were ordered to destroy them on February 18, and the animals didn't leave our premises until March 31. We were expected to feed and care for 2,075 head for 40 days all at our own expense—our own manpower, our own fuel, our own tractors, everything like that. That's just one example.

As Diane said, it's about the days that it takes to gather cattle and the people you need to help process them. The CFIA doesn't have the capability to do that. They need us to put them through the processing facilities. They need us to gather them. After the fact, after the depopulation, we spent the entire summer cleaning and disinfecting, moving through that process, all with no compensation in sight—nothing from the CFIA.

John Barlow: Thank you.

Diane, you mentioned in your testimony that it was inequitable for producers to bear the full financial consequences and that the CFIA needs to do things differently.

We had officials of the CFIA here as part of this study a couple of weeks ago. The current government had it in their election platform and as a mandate that the CFIA adjust its own mandate to include food security and the economic impact on its decision-making. The CFIA officials said they do not need to change anything.

Does it raise some concerns with you, considering the experience you've had with the CFIA, that despite some government pressure, they are still not relenting on or willing to change the way they do things?

• (1555)

Diane Sawley: Yes, it does. In our situation, which is not even close to similar to Erin's, we basically had to test our herd. The man-hours we put into that to be compliant so we could have open borders was unrealistic. They don't really seem to care.

Also, because we tested five different locations at five different times, their policies and procedures didn't follow. They were inconsistent. When we first started testing, they were fairly lax. As our testing went through [*Technical difficulty—Editor*], which really doesn't make any sense.

There has to be some kind of compensation for your time.

John Barlow: What we've heard about from a lot of folks who have dealt with this is the lack of knowledge within the CFIA of your operation and how agriculture works. Has it been a similar experience for you?

The Chair: I'm going to stop you there because the six minutes has been exhausted. I'm sure you can answer that question in the next round.

We'll go to MP Harrison for six minutes.

Emma Harrison (Peterborough, Lib.): Before I say anything else, I'd like to finish the line of questioning from Mr. Barlow.

Diane Sawley: Can you repeat the question?

Emma Harrison: Sorry, it was the question John Barlow asked you, if you want to finish up the answer.

Diane Sawley: Can you repeat it?

The Chair: John, do you want to repeat the question?

John Barlow: Thanks, Emma.

We've heard comments from producers about the shocking lack of knowledge the CFIA has of agricultural operations. Was that experience similar, Diane, to what you had dealing with the CFIA on your operation? Maybe Erin can comment as well, if Emma is willing to give you the chance to answer that.

Diane Sawley: Yes, it was. They had no realization of the difficulty it would be for us, in the middle of the summer, to retrieve those cattle, test them, hold them for 72 hours, test them again and then return them to the field they were in. That is a three-day process in both directions. They were just clueless when it came to anything like that.

Emma Harrison: I'm a small-time cattle producer in Ontario. First of all, I want to say I'm sorry for the experience you've been going through. It's truly unbelievable. I can't imagine losing your whole herd.

Erin, would you be able to explain to the committee, as you talked about how it's not just about the loss of 2,000 animals, how that will pan out over the decades? For people who don't understand how cattle work, could you explain why this is a tremendous loss of decades of work by your farm and family?

Erin Sawley: Cattle herds are usually built over generations. Young people like us enter the cattle industry and maybe buy a few cows. Maybe you buy some bred heifers. From there, you carefully select which bulls you want to buy and you select which bred

heifers you want to keep to build your herd—build the genetics and the traits of your herd that you want to see for years to come.

That's how you build a quality herd, and it's how you build an operation that runs smoothly. You don't keep animals that are of poor quality or that can't calve on their own. It takes years to come to a herd of our quality, and then it's gone and can't be replaced.

That's been part of the challenge with the CFIA. They want to put a value on these cattle and on this herd as individual animals. They don't recognize the years it takes to have animals of this quality, of this nature, and to build this herd. They think we should just be able to go out and buy new ones.

• (1600)

Emma Harrison: I appreciate that fully. When I took over my family's farm, I had to restart it because my dad passed. The farm had sat vacant for a pretty long time, so we could only afford to buy a few head of bred heifers. Now I have my favourite line of cattle. Her name is Mabel, and I would be devastated to lose her. She's only ever had heifer calves, so I love her even more for that.

To either of you who feels comfortable answering, did you feel initially that you had the information up front on how this process would go and what was expected of you? Did you have enough information? Was it clear to you what the expectations were and how things would go for you?

Erin Sawley: I can answer that one, Diane, if you want.

That's a big no. We were very much left putting the pieces together as things went along. Had we not asked the questions we asked and been as involved as we were, we wouldn't have even known a lot of the things we learned through the investigation. Things were brought up piecemeal, and as things happened, different decisions were made.

No real road map was ever laid out in front of us. We had to take things as they came and try to navigate it through our associations and through talking directly to the CFIA.

Emma Harrison: I would like to give you an opportunity to follow up on what you would like to see going forward, from your personal experience. I know you've touched on a lot of points, but I would like to give you the opportunity to speak further to modifications that could be made so that farmers still feel like coming forward to report.

Erin Sawley: I don't even know where to start on that one. A lot of challenges came about.

Right off the hop, not knowing how you'll be compensated is a big piece. You find out that you're going to lose your entire herd, that all your animals are going to die; they're going to be depopulated, and for 300 days.... Still to this day, we have no idea what we will be paid for those animals—if we will be made whole and if we will be able to continue.

That's a big piece to people being compliant in these situations. When you don't know those things, how can you want to participate?

Emma Harrison: Certainly.

It would be really helpful to us if you could submit any ideas that would help. I know it will probably very lengthy, but anything you could submit to help move this forward would be great.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Perron, you have six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I'm going to start with Erin Sawley.

If you have one or two other suggestions for the committee, I'll let you continue with your idea. One thing you said was that you had no idea how much compensation could be paid to you, even though it has been more than 300 days. We understand that it must be incredibly distressing for you.

Why is that the case? Are the people at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency taking your requests into consideration? What do they say when you ask them for answers?

[*English*]

Erin Sawley: Part of the length of the compensation process was due to the pressure we needed to apply in the beginning to have the regulation for the compensation cap changed, which was very outdated. That definitely added a length of time.

We started the compensation process, and then we learned that we.... Sorry, it's a little tricky to explain. When the compensation process begins, we ultimately have to prove what our animals are worth. It does take a considerable amount of time, as we spoke of before, to prove the value to us of the animals, which we've developed the genetics of over years. There's been a lot of back and forth trying to establish that.

The team looking after the compensation, after they realized the scope of our project—and the scope was known from day one given how many head we had—realized quite a few days in that they needed to outsource this to an outside evaluation company. That added another month or so to the process.

They do communicate that they are working on it, but ultimately there's been no communication to give us any idea of what the outcome will be.

• (1605)

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: What you're telling me is disturbing. You're saying that after a while, it became clear that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency experts were unable to carry out the assessment. They called in an outside firm. You also seem to be saying that, even though your file is being processed, you feel that it has been shelved and that they call you once in a while to make you believe that they are working on it.

Are they really working on the issue? Three hundred days seems rather surreal to me.

[*English*]

Erin Sawley: Yes, it's a long time to leave up in the air whether you'll be able continue with your business.

It has been a really lengthy process, and a real challenging piece of this is that now they've hired outside evaluation, but this outside evaluation has not seen the cattle. They're gone, and they were never looked at beforehand. How do you establish quality and things like that from pieces of data?

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: Is it a matter of resources, culture or will, in your opinion?

[*English*]

Erin Sawley: I can't speak to what it would be. I think they did not understand the scope. As I said, they knew the scope of our operation from the very beginning, so it was surprising when all of a sudden they said, "Wow, this is a big file. We're going to need some help on it."

I think maybe it is just about a lack of resources. They're looking to people internally in the CFIA who have very little cattle knowledge or knowledge of the cattle industry. I'm glad they did essentially decide to outsource, but I think ultimately, they were trying to work through the file and then decided it was way too large.

We are still going back and forth on the actual number of cattle. They've come back to us with a number that is missing 150 head. There are some pieces like that, which are a little unbelievable, to say the least.

The Chair: We'll go to the next round, with five minutes for the first two speakers.

We'll start with Mr. Bonk.

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

As a cattle rancher not far from Erin's place, I feel her pain. I can't imagine having to go through this.

You talked about it taking years to build up genetics. It doesn't take years; it takes decades and generations on farms.

One thing you mentioned is that it's been 300 days since this happened, and basically you have all the expenses of running an operation without any of the revenue. It's not just about compensation for the time you spent on this file depopulating your herd and sanitizing.

Can you talk to the committee a bit about the toll it is taking to manage cash flow in an operation of this size, not knowing if you can repopulate this year and not knowing what the compensation will be? Can you talk about that so we can get some background on it?

• (1610)

Erin Sawley: As I said, right from the very beginning, we were unsure of what the compensation rates would look like. Payments don't go away, and you can't just start liquidating things.

We were offered interim payments from the CFIA. They will give you a third of what the projected value of your herd is, which is fine, and that can keep you going, but ultimately, it doesn't let you start to rebuild because you simply don't know what you can spend on new animals. Will we be able to rebuild at 50% or 60%?

They'll argue that they've allowed us to move forward with our business, but that's just not true. How can you make business decisions when you have no idea where you're going to come out at?

Steven Bonk: Could you talk a bit about the process itself? When you were going through this, did the CFIA have clear procedures or methods that they had to follow? Was a lot of discretion given to the CFIA for them to interpret the rules, or were the regulations fairly clear?

Erin Sawley: I would say no. I think a lot of decisions were made on the fly, so to speak. We would ask certain questions of our case officer, and we might not receive an answer for a week because it had to go from the case officer to a specific planning group and then back to us. It lengthened the process, and we weren't sure which planning group was going to make that decision, so we sometimes got conflicting information from different groups making different decisions.

Steven Bonk: If I could ask one thing, could you give us, as a committee, some very specific recommendations on how you think this process could be made more predictable, simpler and more equitable to producers, and easier to follow?

I want to thank you so much for your compliance, because Canada has a very strong reputation for having high-quality products and high biosecurity and phytosanitary standards. Thank you for your upholding them.

If you had any specific recommendations for this committee, what would they be?

Erin Sawley: I think confidence in the process is key to making producers compliant and to making them want to participate in the process. When we share our experience with other producers, it's full of difficulties, and the CFIA's lack of knowledge—I don't like to use the word “incompetence”—of the cattle industry and the beef industry doesn't instill confidence in producers that the process is being done correctly and being done in the best interests of everyone.

Steven Bonk: I'll join with Ms. Harrison in asking you to provide specific recommendations to the committee. If you could provide those to us in writing for the future, that would be very helpful. We need producers to have confidence in a system where they will comply, protect the Canadian industry and keep our reputation intact as a quality source for genetics across the world and of beef.

I also want to mention a bit about the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance protocol and the pricing form that it has. I'm quite familiar with it. It's basically just a rolling average of cattle prices in your area for the week prior, the week during and the week after. I think that would be very easy for our government to implement.

I'm just wondering if you had any further comment on that.

• (1615)

The Chair: I'm going to ask you to hold there. I'm going to the next speaker. Maybe you can answer that either through a submission or in the next round.

We'll now go to MP Dandurand.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Sawley, quite frankly, your story is very sad. What you went through must have been terrible and, unfortunately, it doesn't seem to be over yet. I understand that it takes a long time for a livestock producer to recover from that.

I'm going to let you finish your answer to my colleague Mr. Bonk's question.

[*English*]

Erin Sawley: I'm sorry, Mr. Bonk. You talked about the wildlife predation claim and whether a system like that would be beneficial.

Steven Bonk: Exactly. Could you talk about how it would give some predictability, in my estimation, so we could have a fair and easier way to track the true value of animals?

Erin Sawley: It would certainly give some predictability so that right from the beginning, when you're identified as being involved in one of these investigations, you can at least have an idea of where you're going to come out of it, instead of waiting with no idea what's going on. I think there would have to be some flexibility. You do not market certain animals at certain times of the year, and there would have to be a bit of flexibility for that.

It would certainly give people an idea of where they are going to come out. It's based on current market data, not simply on caps that had been set in years previous.

[Translation]

Marianne Dandurand: In your testimony, you mentioned issues around compensation and communication.

I'm trying to focus on the positive. I understand that at some points, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency nevertheless allowed you to change the dates of the procedures to be followed based on your needs. For example, since it didn't work during the summer, the agency agreed to have it done in the fall. Then, at your request, it was changed back to summer. I feel there has been some flexibility on the part of the agency.

Do you have any recommendations for us in terms of procedures and communication to make it even easier to deal with the agency?

[English]

Erin Sawley: I think Diane can speak more to that one, because we weren't given very much flexibility at all.

Diane Sawley: When we first met with the CFIA, they indicated that, yes, we could test our herd in the fall because of where they were at. They then came back and said no; they were going to quarantine us. It would have meant that our herd would have been under quarantine from July 24 until sometime in October when we tested. For that whole period of time we were under quarantine. At that point, we said we wanted to test our herd because we wanted to mitigate the length of the quarantine so we could market our cattle.

They were flexible in changing the dates, but the consistency in their messaging was not good. Also, there's the fact that every time you ask your caseworker a question, they have to go back to the team. We were told on several occasions that every case is done on a case-by-case basis, so there is no consistency. There's no framework as to how this is going to operate.

We had two commingled herds, which means other producers had cattle mixed with ours. One of them was on the Waldron Grazing Co-op, which is the largest grazing co-op in Canada. It's on open grasslands. It could have affected 74 different operations if we had determined we had TB, and they could not give us proper protocol for biosecurity. They would always tell us that it's done on a case-by-case basis and that until something happens, they can't determine what that will be.

• (1620)

[Translation]

Marianne Dandurand: Could you tell me more about working with the provinces? Are the provinces involved and helping out?

Please be brief, as I have only 25 seconds left.

[English]

Diane Sawley: In Alberta, our ABP has been good in helping us go between us and the CFIA, but with regard to actual producer support, it's all by mouth.

We're not getting any support through our producer groups other than communication.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. Perron for two and a half minutes, please.

[Translation]

Yves Perron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Erin Sawley, I didn't have time to tell you this earlier, but I wish you all the best; we are with you.

Ms. Diane Sawley, since things don't seem to have been completely resolved in your case either, I wish you the same.

You mentioned that, whenever a decision has to be made or a minor issue arises, officials at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency don't seem to have any autonomy. That's what we see in most departments. Public servants have no leeway and have to stay in their little boxes. Beyond that, they have to get the approval of their superiors. It can take two or three weeks, even a month, to get an answer.

Did I understand you correctly?

[English]

Diane Sawley: Yes, that would be correct. The caseworker you deal with is just an in-between. It goes to the top and then it's a waiting game from there.

Erin Sawley: I would agree with that.

I have to add that it's especially frustrating when you get put on a call with maybe the epidemiology planning group and they tell you that what they would have done is different from what you're hearing from a different planning group that manages a different part of the operation.

[Translation]

Yves Perron: It's incredibly sad.

Ms. Diane Sawley, if you have any recommendations to improve things, please send them to us in writing. Perhaps there should be better training and more autonomy for the people who go into the field to conduct the assessments.

Do you feel that the delays at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency are due to a serious lack of resources, or do you think there's also a culture and efficiency issue?

[English]

Diane Sawley: My guess would be that it's more an inefficiency in working culture than a lack of resources, because when they sent their crew out to do the testing, they had more than enough people.

[Translation]

Yves Perron: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll do three minutes each, if that's okay.

We'll go to Mr. Barlow.

John Barlow: Thanks, Chair.

I really appreciate the frank responses from our witnesses and their understanding of the importance of doing everything they can to follow the protocol in protecting our disease-free status in Canada. However, I think what's excruciatingly frustrating here is that there don't seem to be any lessons learned. We had the bovine TB outbreak in Alberta in 2016, and we lost almost 12,000 head of cattle as a result of that.

Erin and Diane, you're both saying that there seems to be an incredible lack of knowledge at the CFIA about how to deal with this, and a lack of communication. It doesn't seem like they learned anything from the outbreak in 2016. They didn't put together a framework, or even amend the Health of Animals Act to have the compensation portion changed.

Another example is a recommendation we had from the biosecurity report to change the compensation to include clean-up, disinfecting and other costs, and the response from the government at that time was that producers should use AgriStability and private insurance. Do they cover, or are they even accessible for, an issue like this that you're dealing with? Diane and Erin, maybe just take a second on that. Can you access private insurance or AgriStability to cover your costs?

• (1625)

Diane Sawley: To my knowledge, private insurance would not be an option. I am not aware that AgriStability would be either.

Erin Sawley: I agree. We actually had our cattle insured. We went through the motions to make a claim to have some of the costs covered, but diseases are not covered in any way, shape or form.

It's the same with AgriStability. We're working right now to see how that program may help us, but it's not looking great.

John Barlow: It's frustrating when the government is recommending programs to cover your costs that you don't even qualify for. It's an incredible lack of knowledge or a dismissiveness for the government to offer these programs.

Lastly, can you talk about the impact this has had on your mental health as you try to go through it? It's one thing to depopulate a herd that you've worked years to build, but to have 300 days of not knowing where you are is.... Our goal is to make sure we grow the cattle herd in Canada, not lose young ranchers, entrepreneurs and business owners. What has the impact been on you and your family, Erin?

Erin Sawley: We have young children, and I don't know whether they'll want to continue on. It's been very trying. There have been a lot of uncertainties to handle for that many days.

The Chair: We'll go to our last speaker in this round, MP Chatel, for three minutes.

[Translation]

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

Thank you to the witnesses for taking the time to testify on this important aspect of our study. The purpose of the study is to provide concrete solutions as part of the review of the processes of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the Pest Management Regulatory Agency. Their experience is very useful to us, and I thank them very much. The shared sentiment around this table is clear: We fully support them in the face of this challenge. I thank them for taking the time to tell us about it.

A number of producers have told us that the time it takes to pay compensation is one of the major problems with the system. You're confirming that for us as well. They mentioned that caps are another issue, especially if you own an elite herd. It's really a significant problem when the value exceeds the cap set out in the regulations. Let's remember that compensation is governed by regulation. From what I understand, the situation is worse in the United States, where compensation is even lower, and by far.

The emotional impact as well as the feeling of being in limbo and going through this on their own is another important issue to consider. I'd like to hear your thoughts on potential solutions, because that's precisely what we're looking for. What you experienced can help improve the system.

I'm thinking of some models, such as the one in the State of Michigan, which is working with the federal government to provide compensation, or the one in the Netherlands, in Europe, where the federal agency compensates for the loss of a herd. However, as you pointed out, there is a whole related aspect to consider, which is rebuilding. When a herd is destroyed, it has to be rebuilt, which requires considerable investment.

My colleague talked about the AgriStability program. Since we will soon be reviewing these programs as part of the federal, provincial and territorial discussions, it would be important to have your recommendations.

Do you think it would be appropriate to set up a system combining federal compensation and a risk management program, such as AgriStability, to better support producers?

You can provide a written response to the committee.

• (1630)

[English]

The Chair: I'll have to stop you there. Thank you so much.

Thank you to our witnesses for joining us today. I think I can say, on behalf of all of us in the room, that we really appreciate that you shared your stories with us. We look forward to getting any further submissions that you feel would help us in this study. We appreciate your time, and I personally wish you all the best.

We'll suspend for five minutes.

- (1630) _____ (Pause) _____
- (1641)

The Chair: I'd like to call the meeting back to order.

I'll make a few comments before we start.

Please wait until I recognize you. For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen, you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation. All comments should be addressed through the chair.

We are continuing, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, September 18, 2025, our study of the government's regulatory reform initiative in agriculture and agri-food.

I would like to welcome our witnesses. From the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers, we have Richard Lee. From the Ontario Tender Fruit Growers, we have Phil Tregunno. Finally, from the Prince Edward Island Potato Board, we have Greg Donald.

I'll give each person five minutes, and then we'll open it up for questions.

We'll start with you, Mr. Lee.

Richard Lee (Executive Director, Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the standing committee.

I'm here today on behalf of the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers and a sector that contributes significantly to Canada's food security, export competitiveness and rural economies. Our growers are committed to producing safe, high-quality food while upholding Canada's reputation as a trusted trading partner.

We support the government's goal of modernizing regulatory frameworks to ensure that they remain effective, efficient and responsive. At the same time, we believe that reforms can be expedited in ways that reduce unnecessary costs to producers without compromising health, safety or trade integrity.

As to areas where reforms can be expedited, streamlining approval processes for crop protection tools can be done by expediting PMRA reviews of low-risk and reduced-risk pest management products, particularly biologicals and integrated pest management solutions, and by aligning timelines with those of trading partners such as the U.S. and the EU to prevent competitive disadvantages. On the modernization of food safety and inspection protocols, the CFIA could expand the use of digital platforms for documentation, traceability and compliance reporting, which would reduce paper-based redundancies. Due to a shortage of adequately trained inspectors, the CFIA has demonstrated inconsistent oversight practices that either disproportionately impact greenhouse operations or fail

to provide the necessary resources to support fair and effective inspections.

There are opportunities to reduce costs without compromising health or trade. Concerning risk-based regulatory oversight, shift from one-size-fits-all compliance to risk-based models, focusing resources on higher-risk activities while easing the burden on operations with strong compliance histories.

With regard to international harmonization, reduce costs associated with retesting or recertifying products already approved by trusted international regulators, pursue mutual recognition agreements to minimize duplicative regulatory requirements for exports and develop a North American perimeter strategy that aligns with our key trading partner to protect food security and the investments made in farming.

To have simplified reporting and record-keeping, consolidate overlapping reporting obligations into a single standardized platform accessible to both the CFIA and the PMRA, and provide clear guidance and templates to reduce administrative costs for growers.

On cost recovery and fee structures, review cost-recovery models to ensure that fees charged to growers are proportionate to the actual regulatory service provided, and consider exemptions or reduced fees for small and medium-sized operations adopting sustainable practices.

Ontario's greenhouse vegetable growers generate more than \$1.8 billion annually, forming a substantial share of the \$5.3 billion that greenhouse vegetables contribute to Canada's economy. Serving both domestic and export markets, the sector sustains over 35,000 jobs across the full value chain.

Regulatory delays or duplications increase input costs, reduce competitiveness and slow the adoption of sustainable practices. Streamlined, science-based reforms will allow growers to access safer, more effective pest management tools, reduce administrative overhead and maintain Canada's reputation for food safety and trade reliability.

In conclusion, Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers is a committed partner in advancing Canada's regulatory reform agenda. We believe that by expediting approvals, reducing duplicative costs and modernizing oversight, the government can strengthen both the competitiveness and sustainability of our sector while continuing to safeguard public health and international trade standards.

We urge the CFIA and the PMRA to prioritize reforms that deliver measurable efficiencies for producers, ensuring that Canada's agri-food system remains resilient, innovative and globally competitive.

Thank you.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we'll go to Greg Donald.

Greg Donald (General Manager, Prince Edward Island Potato Board): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of the Prince Edward Island potato industry. P.E.I. is proud to be a national leader, producing over 20% of Canada's potatoes. Our industry contributes more than \$1.5 billion to the island's economy and supports thousands of jobs.

I'm here to ask not for lower standards but for smarter, more efficient regulation, regulation that protects health and safety—I think we all agree on the importance of that—while also supporting competitiveness, innovation and trade. I'd like to make three key points here today.

One is that CFIA and PMRA must adopt a more business- and trade-oriented mindset. These agencies play essential roles in safeguarding Canadian agriculture, but their current approach is overly cautious, slow-moving and disconnected from industry realities. We need a cultural shift to change this.

We must also ensure our producers aren't placed at a competitive disadvantage compared to importers of food.

Here are some examples. CFIA should act not just as an enforcer, and should not be seen by producers as a barrier to trade but as a partner in trade, with timely certifications, consistent policies and science-based decisions. There needs to be a food lens applied to considering how regulatory decisions affect producers and supply chains. We need to ensure Canadians that we do have a good supply of affordable and quality food.

The sector should not be the one constantly adjusting to bureaucracy. It's time for the system to adapt to the sector.

Similarly, PMRA's approach must move faster in approving tools like drones and crop-protection products already used in comparable countries. Delays limit competitiveness and stall innovation. Both agencies must embed economic impacts and business practicalities into regulatory decisions, not as an afterthought but as core responsibilities.

The second main point I'd like to make today is on the opportunity to reduce or cut costs and red tape without compromising safety or trade. Producers face redundant, overlapping and outdated regulatory requirements that increase costs without improving outcomes. There are multiple food safety audits covering the same things. Export shipments are subject to repeated inspections. There is the continued use of outdated inspection methods, like hand-grading potatoes for inspections, when automated technologies are available. Our packers use them, things like optical sorters, cameras

and in-field tests that can be used by inspectors 24-7 and entirely remotely.

The third key point I'd like to make today is that political leadership is needed on stalled and long-standing issues. Some regulatory issues simply can't be solved through process improvements alone. They require political direction to move forward.

The 2021 U.S. market closure to P.E.I. fresh and seed potatoes is a really good example. Despite science being on our side and risk controls in place, trade was halted, causing millions in losses and lasting damage to our seed trade. The situation exposed a critical flaw. Scientific risk assessments mean little if not backed by strong political leadership. We need our leaders to defend science-based trade decisions and push for resolution when agencies alone can't.

In conclusion, our message is simple. We support strong regulation, but strong doesn't have to mean slow, burdensome or disconnected from business realities. We urge this committee to recommend reforms again for those three things: a more business and trade-oriented mindset with the agencies, streamlined and harmonized compliance requirements, and the use of political leadership to resolve stalled and long-standing issues when science alone isn't enough.

The P.E.I. potato industry is ready to be part of the solution. We are committed to safe, high-quality food and strengthening Canada's global leadership in agriculture.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we'll go to Mr. Tregunno online.

You have five minutes, sir.

Phil Tregunno (Chair, Ontario Tender Fruit Growers): Thank you very much, Chairman and committee members, for the opportunity to discuss some of the issues tender fruit growers have.

As growers, our main focus is import replacement, and, as a farmer along the Niagara River, I know that having the tools in place to compete against our competitors on a timely basis is very important to our success.

An example of some of the problems we have had with CFIA is a small item like nectarines. In 2020, we requested an update on the labelling and grading requirements on nectarines; we still have not seen it yet, even though all the stakeholders have been giving input on it. We have been assured that it is happening in the very short term, and we certainly hope it is moving that way. This is just one example of how slow things can be with the CFIA.

A part of our import replacement is getting new varieties into the country. Right now, if you want to get a new variety into this country to compete with some of our people across the border, it has to be sent to the CFIA for three years and checked with whatever system they are using right now. Once it is cleaned—if it is clean after three years—it is sent to a nursery, and it takes another two years to get enough product, at least, to supply our growers. Then, our growers have to grow it for four years.

There is technology being used now, whether it is next-generation sequencing or anything else like that, that the medical community has been using for years, which can tell you whether it has a virus right away. We could speed up that whole process and be in the marketplace a lot faster than, certainly, the minimum seven years it would take, or nine or 10 or whatever it is going to be.

We're also hampered by the plum pox virus, which we have dealt with in Niagara for quite a long time. Some of this testing could certainly be used in that area, so we could get bud wood out of the area when it is clean, and then we could do it outside the area. Product that came into the area, was stored and then went out could certainly be changed, and we could go for a later date than some of the requirements they are making us do now, where they are asking for it to be completely dormant and then shipped out of the area. There are just a lot of rules that are outdated and that need to get brought up to the new system.

We have the same problems with PMRA, with minor-use crops. They don't seem to have enough people there or a big enough budget to process a lot of the new chemicals we can use in our operation. We are losing some. As a result, we have to apply for emergency registrations, which is a very poor way of doing things, because, of course, if it is an emergency, it has already happened, and you are reacting to a problem that is already there instead of being proactive. PMRA needs to be worked through again, and they need to develop a positive way of dealing with new chemicals, possibly using technology and taking into consideration the chemicals used in other jurisdictions, and using some of that information so we can update the chemical uses for some of these minor crops we are growing.

Those are some of the concerns we have as an industry. I find that CFIA is the problem, as it is a technology thing. They need to update, whether it is a bureaucracy item or something that is stopping them from doing that, but some of these new technologies and rapid testing are things they need to move to.

● (1655)

I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We go to the Conservatives for six minutes. Go ahead, Mr. Barlow.

John Barlow: Thanks, Chair.

Thanks to our witnesses who are here. I appreciate that.

I'm going to start with Mr. Donald from the P.E.I. Potato Board. I want to touch on a comment that you made during your opening remarks, saying—and I'm paraphrasing a bit—that, if we had the scientific information to back it up, it means nothing if there's no political will to enforce that change. We've certainly heard about the CFIA's unwillingness to change its mandate to include folks on food security and economic impact. Certainly, I don't think that there's an industry in Canada, like the P.E.I. seed potato industry, that hasn't felt the brunt of that, with the issue that happened in 2021. The Liberal government brought in an international advisory panel to look at whether there was an infestation of potato wart on P.E.I. What were the findings of that government-appointed advisory panel when they looked into the wart issue on P.E.I.?

Greg Donald: That report you're referring to was.... An expert panel was brought in, with various scientific expertise from around the world. They were very familiar with that particular plant health disease. Their findings were.... In general, it's a very lengthy report, and there were a lot of recommendations. We know that this issue was there, but it was relatively localized and under control. They made many recommendations, and among them was to focus on the areas where the problem is, obviously, and that there didn't need to be the intensity in areas where it isn't.

Similarly, with potatoes, we have a quarantinable area in Saint-Amable, Quebec, another one in central Saanich, B.C., and I think in the U.S. there are many states that have quarantinable potato pests. However, at the end of the day, we have the scientific ability, and we've been doing that to manage plant or animal health issues and, at the same time, to maintain and continue to grow our business.

John Barlow: In essence, if I recall, the advisory panel said P.E.I. potato wart is low risk. Despite the scientific research done by that advisory panel and their lengthy report that was released, has the ministerial order banning the export of P.E.I. seed potatoes been lifted?

● (1700)

Greg Donald: Despite that report and having made many efforts—we have the safest potatoes, in my opinion, in the world—it has yet to be lifted.

John Barlow: What has been the economic impact of that ministerial order during the last four years now—almost to the day; I think we're getting pretty close—on the seed potato industry in P.E.I.? Can you put a number on that?

Greg Donald: Yes, and I have to say, relatively speaking, our farm cash receipts now are about \$400 million for the entire industry. It's a relatively small portion annually. The exports that were lost represent \$6 million, but since that issue...four years, that's \$24 million and, I might add, the year before that, so it's over \$30 million.

I can't emphasize enough the importance. That segment of our industry is literally the foundation of our entire industry. Without good seed growers and seed production, we don't have a table industry or a processing sector. The dollar figure, as a percentage, is smaller, but I can't overemphasize how important it is.

John Barlow: Is there much of a seed potato industry now in P.E.I.? You're four years in. What is the outlook if this ministerial order remains in place?

Greg Donald: The majority of our seed potatoes, prior to this and currently, are used right on P.E.I., so the industry is still strong and that's important to the industry. However, I might add that individual producers would not want to spread this particular plant health issue on their own farm or to their neighbour.

Again, I can't overemphasize all of the multiple layers of mitigation and things that have been put in place. This issue has been on P.E.I. for two and a half decades, and, in my opinion, what happened in 2021 was already under control and managed. It really did not need to happen, nor does that ministerial order impacting seed need to be in place today.

John Barlow: I have two quick questions. I have only 30 seconds left, so I'll give them both to you at the same time.

First, in your expert opinion, is P.E.I. infested with potato wart?

Second, is there any commitment by the current government to compensate P.E.I. seed potato growers for the loss of an international market?

Greg Donald: It is absolutely not infested. I know that our industry, our growers and our island have taken great offence to that reference. It is in a very small geographical area, and it has been under official control. As I said, with all the testing, it's the safest place in the world.

As far as compensating our seed growers, despite indications that it would be addressed by the minister at the time, there has been no compensation for our seed growers.

The Chair: I'll stop you there, sir.

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

[*Translation*]

Sophie Chatel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being with us this afternoon.

Our study is very important because we're looking for concrete, foundational changes that offer some degree of agility and solve a lot of problems. Solutions emerge from ideas that were brought before this committee.

A lot of problems have been identified in a list produced by the sector engagement table studying agile regulations. One of the proposals is to give a lot more decision-making power to the sector or

industry that is part of the table and to have recommendations that should be considered by the agencies.

A second proposal is to look for products that are already certified in countries with standards similar to Canada's, be they European countries, the United States, Australia or New Zealand, which adhere to the codex. It would be presumed that these products are good, and they would be provisionally accepted until the agencies have time to complete their review.

A third proposal is to create an ombuds office. In a situation similar to the one we are discussing today, the Canada Revenue Agency was the subject of numerous service complaints, and the government created the Office of the Taxpayers' Ombudsperson, an institution that has gained an international reputation. The ombud operates fully independently, and their recommendations are virtually all adopted. Of course, the recommendations don't call for additional funding or legislative change. They're service-related recommendations. What I've been hearing from most witnesses in this case is service-related complaints.

Lastly, the fourth proposal is to make the industry sector part of the sector engagement table on agile regulations and decision-making. Another idea is to put agencies such as the Pest Management Regulatory Agency back into the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada portfolio.

Mr. Lee and Mr. Tregunno, I'd like your opinion on that.

• (1705)

[*English*]

Richard Lee: Thank you for that question. You hit on a couple of key points there.

When we talk about PMRA approvals and timelines and adopting approvals, our key trading partners, similar to the U.S. or EU, have already cleared or pre-approved some of these registrations. The EU probably has one of the most stringent approval processes. Canada, instead of redoing that review and implementing that review once again, could adopt strategies to harmonize those approvals with those key countries.

As it relates to the ombudsman recommendation, I think that would be an excellent recommendation. We fully support it. We have a situation in which there's no formal resolution process. There's no formal complaint process with a CFIA inspector, other than challenging that inspector face-to-face and going to their manager. That puts us in a very precarious position. You have a situation where officers have discretion. Discretion can be a very valuable tool, but in the same vein, it could be a very detrimental tool to the sectors. When you have two inspectors allocated to the same region and have two different interpretations on the safe food for Canadians regulations, we have a challenge. We have an unfair competitive gain for one grower compared to the other.

Greater oversight on the CFIA local offices and having a formal resolution process would be welcome additions and recommendations.

[Translation]

Sophie Chatel: Thank you, Mr. Lee.

What do you think, Mr. Tregunno? If you don't have time for a complete answer, I'd appreciate your sending a written response to the committee.

[English]

Phil Tregunno: That would be great.

I'm down in Niagara. I'm also a grape grower in addition to growing tree fruit. They're using next-generation sequencing. The grape industry has also had an issue with different viruses in grape plants, as they bring them in from France and other different countries.

They are using that already to make sure they're getting clean nursery stock. If we also adapted that to trees, we'd have the same effect. It's just a matter of someone in CFIA making those changes and doing that.

I agree completely with Richard that there are many jurisdictions across the world that are reviewing these different chemicals for minor use in a smaller industry, like ours. I think if those same reports were adjusted and used in Canada, it would be very good—

• (1710)

The Chair: I'm going to have to stop you, sir. We're about 25 seconds over. I apologize.

I'll go to Mr. Perron for six minutes, please.

[Translation]

Yves Perron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being here with us.

Mr. Donald, two important things you said troubled me.

First, you said that, in 2021, you didn't need the departmental decision. Can you explain that to us?

Second, you were promised compensation four years ago, but you still haven't received anything. Why do you think that is?

[English]

Greg Donald: In my opening statement, not only was I stressing the importance of having good, sound science, with our, in this case, CFIA regulator to help us manage plant health issues, but also, to be clear, I was saying that it's important, combined with that, to have strong political leadership for our industry. That's what I was referring to.

I believe, subsequent to the plant health issue, because of a challenge from our main trading partner, at that time the federal minister imposed a ministerial order that prevented the shipment of all P.E.I. potatoes.

In my opinion, that didn't demonstrate confidence in our own regulator that was tasked with that job. We needed to have the confidence in our regulator, just like we do with our main trading partner in the U.S., with USDA APHIS. They have many states with many quarantinable pests. Their product comes into our country. We trust their regulator and their government.

On compensation, specifically to our seed producers, there's compensation for fields that were directly involved and also for the disposal. We disposed of enough potatoes to fill the Rogers Centre. In a day when we have concerns about food security, etc., we destroyed lots of potatoes. There was funding to help pay for hauling those potatoes to the field and putting them through a snow blower. There's no additional compensation.

For our seed growers, they did not and have not to this day been allowed to sell seed off P.E.I. To the previous question, they've received no compensation for that whatsoever. That was done to protect the Canadian seed industry.

[Translation]

Yves Perron: You said the seed industry got zero support in 2021. Does that still exist?

[English]

Greg Donald: I'm sorry. Could you restate the question?

[Translation]

Yves Perron: You said that seed industry producers haven't received any compensation since 2021. It's now 2025. Are these producers still in business? What have they been doing without income for four years? Can they at least run their businesses locally?

[English]

Greg Donald: They still produce seed that can remain on P.E.I. for island producers. They cannot sell seed from Prince Edward Island to the rest of Canada.

[Translation]

Yves Perron: You were promised compensation, but you haven't received it. Is that right?

[English]

Greg Donald: Yes. It was indicated in the early days that this would be looked at and addressed.

[Translation]

Yves Perron: When a minister says that the matter will be looked into, it shouldn't be taken as a promise.

Mr. Lee, in your opening remarks, you made many specific recommendations. I imagine that you gave your text to the committee clerk. I can tell my colleagues that I heard a number of good recommendations worth considering, particularly with regard to speeding up the process.

That said, how can the assessment be completed more quickly without unreasonably increasing the risks? This aspect must also be considered. We're in a good position to criticize and complain, but we aren't scientists. There must be processes to follow.

You have about one minute to respond.

• (1715)

[English]

Richard Lee: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

One example is alignment with our key trading partners, as I illustrated earlier, in which pest risk assessments have been completed already. Ultimately, another option is low-risk groups. We could have a low-risk approval process for integrated pest management. That's an option to be able to implement something that doesn't take six to seven years to approve. It's costly relying on government to provide information when registrants aren't able or willing to provide the information or funds to support those studies.

When you look at emergency use registrations, as my friend has mentioned, it is just that: an emergency after the fact. We need to be modernized, thinking forward and aligning our efforts and programs with key trading partners that have already gone through these processes and are aimed at protecting their production base and enhancing that trade.

[Translation]

Yves Perron: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

We have about 14 minutes left. I know Mr. Perron asked if we could talk a bit about one of the studies in the future. Maybe we can carve out three or four minutes at the end to talk about the grocery code of conduct.

If we have 10 minutes, then we'll do four, four and two and then stop there. We'll have that conversation at the end.

Is that fine with folks?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay.

We're going to Mr. Epp for four minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses.

I'll ask you to keep your answers short, as I have limited time.

Mr. Lee, you mentioned the lack of process to address concerns with decisions from CFIA inspectors. Were you aware that there was a redress officer under the Harper government and that the office was closed shortly after 2015?

Richard Lee: I am aware of it. It's one of our advocacy points to implement the resources necessary to address some of these issues.

Again, as I've indicated, the discretion of those officers is a very dangerous tool if misused.

Dave Epp: Thank you.

Mr. Tregunno raised the concern that it's taken too long to get sizing standards in for nectarines. I understand that the cucumbers have gone through a similar process. There has been some recent gazetting.

How long did that process take?

Richard Lee: At my best recollection, it was a minimum of four years to make a regulatory amendment that had little to no support from the CFIA, instead of assisting and enabling industry to make the proper process. All they were providing the sector was how it couldn't be done, as opposed to how it could be done.

After four years, I'm happy to see it has been published in the Gazette along with overly prescriptive labelling requirements for cucumbers. When you look at a long English cucumber, it ranges from 10 to 14 inches. Three-quarters of that cucumber would have had to be covered with labelling.

Dave Epp: Thank you.

Several years ago, my office engaged with yours. We tried to engage with CFIA to proactively develop protocols in the case that we had an infestation or something come into the country, to rapidly respond to it. We couldn't even get the CFIA to engage with our meetings.

You mentioned in your opening comments a North American perimeter. Why is that so important?

Richard Lee: We export 85% of our produce to the United States, about \$1.7 billion. You can appreciate that with these trade irritants that we're seeing, a North American perimeter strategy would help protect our production base and our investment.

The U.S. is quick to protect from any type of invasive species. An example is the response to Mediterranean fruit flies on peppers. Once the U.S. identified them on the product, they banned any imports.

Canada was not willing to do so. The CFIA stood by their pest risk assessments. They failed to modernize. They claimed climate change. They indicated that in our harsh winters here in Canada, the pests would not be able to sustain themselves.

Dave Epp: How cold does it get in a greenhouse in February?

Richard Lee: We have year-round production.

Dave Epp: Thank you. That was facetious.

I know a number of greenhouse operators in my area—our area—have operations on both sides of the border. They are actively moving their organics production to the U.S. because of a lack of harmonization, and then they're looking to market those organic products back into Canada. Why?

• (1720)

Richard Lee: It's very difficult to grow to that U.S. standard. You have to meet the certification of a national organics board and additional red-tape hurdles.

Trying to get that equivalency so that our growers can compete globally has been an ongoing challenge.

Dave Epp: Roughly how many audits does the CFIA impose upon the greenhouse sector in a year?

Richard Lee: An average farm will face and be subjected to anywhere from eight to 15 audits.

Dave Epp: Can that be streamlined?

Richard Lee: It can, absolutely. You have ESDC, and you have federal, provincial and municipal redundancies with no common denominators. The redundancy red tape is extremely cost-prohibitive and creates—

Dave Epp: Thank you. I'm going to get one more question in.

Mr. Tregunno, on plum pox, the 2014 order was just repealed. The 2025 order was put in on a smaller area, but why is there still a plum pox virus restricted zone?

The Chair: You have five seconds.

Phil Tregunno: We're unsure why there still is one. It's really redundant now.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

We're going to go to the Liberals for four minutes. Go ahead, Mr. Connors.

Paul Connors (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Donald, I have to say that Kent MacDonald wanted to be here today. He had planned on being here, but unfortunately he couldn't make it. He wanted to say hello.

You mentioned drones, and that's been brought up a number of times during our consultations. How would that impact your industry from an economic perspective, and what do you see as the reasoning for it taking so long to be approved?

Greg Donald: There's absolutely no reason that it shouldn't be approved. We bring food in every day from the U.S., where that technology is used.

In terms of what it means to the industry, it's an opportunity to save money by using less crop protectant or pesticide. In the event that a field is too wet, they can scout the field with a smaller drone

and then send in a larger drone to spot-apply. It's far more practical than using a ground rig.

Ultimately, it's a way to grow more affordable, better-quality food, and it's better for the environment.

Paul Connors: I'm going to ask you a bit of a broad question now.

We talked about potato wart. Your organization has been around for a long time. In your opinion, how has the regulatory red tape and burden changed over the years? Do you think the role of regulation has changed over the years as well?

Greg Donald: I've been around for a long time too.

The way I have to answer that is that years ago, the inspectors in the agencies at the interface with the producer, in particular those in the CFIA, came from a farm. They had both a farm and a business background. Producing food and following the rules were both inherently important to them, and they followed the rules. As those folks have left—have retired or have left for whatever reason—all that institutional knowledge is gone from the people who are there today.

They have good people. They have good inspectors and we have good inspectors, but it needs to come from leadership now. It has to come from a clear mandate to manage our plant health and animal issues, but that we also have to maintain and grow the business. It has to cascade all the way down to those inspectors that there are objectives and KPIs that are an important part of what they do.

We don't need enforcers. We need partners.

Paul Connors: Mr. Lee, I see you nodding your head. Would you like to be able to answer that question as well?

Richard Lee: We are talking about regulators. There are overzealous inspectors who take it upon themselves to make decisions that impact business, investment and financial comfort levels. I have inspectors indicating that they are the federal regulator and that what they say, goes. They have the discretion to decide that a complete structural barrier—construction requiring permits—has to be erected by a bathroom inside a packing house that is greater than 30 feet away because there was the potential of food safety risk.

When you are faced with that type of discretion, and you want to challenge it, you fear reprisal. It is a situation that is a very delicate one to navigate.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Paul Connors: If you have anything else to add to that, can you submit it in writing? To the gentleman online, could you do the same thing?

Richard Lee: I'm happy to do so.

The Chair: Thank you.

You have two and a half minutes, Monsieur Perron.

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Lee, I'm struck by what you just said. We spoke earlier about public servants who didn't seem to have any autonomy during inspections or crises and who always had to defer to their supervisors. You said that some inspectors were more zealous than others.

How can these variables in the field be explained?

[*English*]

Richard Lee: I see the lack of training, a lack of knowledge of that sector and a lack of willingness to learn more about that sector. With safe food for Canadians licences, we have a unique situation. There's not a one-size-fits-all solution. We license growers, packers and marketers. You need to have that licence to undergo that activity.

Growers are subjected, based on one officer's interpretation, to maintain a safe food for Canadians licence, even though they don't know where that product is going. It has to go through a licensed marketer, who will determine whether it stays within the province or is shipped outside. That inspector's supervisor agrees with me.

Where is that consistency? Where is that willingness to work together and seek the consultation of all industries so that you get it right?

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: You spoke about electronic labelling and the large label required for cucumbers. Could you take a few seconds to explain how this changes things for your industry?

If time permits, I would like Mr. Donald to comment as well.

[*English*]

Richard Lee: I'm sorry. I missed the first part. It wasn't interpreted.

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: Can you talk about electronic labelling and electronic phytosanitary certificates?

[*English*]

Richard Lee: Most of our members do have electronic labelling in place. The problem is the prescriptiveness of the need to list your farm and the country of origin. The actual address on this cucumber was one of the prohibitive recommendations made by CFIA and adopted.

When you implement a soft enforcement of a regulation that's passed federally, what message is that sending? There's no confidence in the sector. There's no confidence in your regulatory authority if they decide they're not going to enforce those standards.

That has been ongoing for more than four years—a soft enforcement of a federal regulation instead of making it right the first time.

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: I want to take this opportunity to thank all of our witnesses for being here today, online and in person. We thank you for the work you're doing to build this country. Thank you so much.

We're going to do a little bit of business here.

Monsieur Perron, you said that you had a proposal for the committee.

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Committee members, remember that, when we passed the motion to study the grocery code of conduct, we planned to invite witnesses to find out where things stood. The motion stated that we should undertake this study “at the appropriate time.” In my opinion, that time has come.

I move that the committee begin this study when we return from the parliamentary break week. I don't have the text of the motion in front of me. However, I believe that we agreed that the committee would spend two meetings on this matter. Let's start with that. We can then see whether we need to spend more time on it.

If my colleagues agree, we could send our witness lists to the clerk. This would give us a week to invite them.

• (1730)

[*English*]

The Chair: Does anyone want to speak to that?

MP Chatel, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Sophie Chatel: I gathered that we would begin the study when we return from our constituency week. Would you like us to hold the first meeting and save the second for another appropriate time, perhaps in November, or would you prefer that we hold both meetings as soon as we get back?

[*English*]

The Chair: Monsieur Perron, you have the floor.

[Translation]

Yves Perron: I think that we'll know after the first meeting. I suspect that we'll need to hold both meetings as soon as we get back. I know that we had planned to invite the minister during that week. There will be some overlap. However, obviously, that doesn't mean that we need to stop this study. We're prioritizing this study because we need to move forward. We also said that we could extend the study to eight meetings. I don't think that we agreed on this, but I think that's what we said.

Sophie Chatel: I would like to ask a question.

[English]

The Chair: Please go ahead, MP Chatel.

[Translation]

Sophie Chatel: I want to know whether witnesses have already been invited to participate in this study. Has a date been set?

[English]

The Chair: Yes.

[Translation]

Sophie Chatel: What date has been set for the appearances?

[English]

The Chair: Can I stop you? I'm sorry. When I speak, I can see the mic is still on, and then I can't hear the translation. Sorry, I couldn't hear what you were saying. The mic is on and it lowers the volume drastically.

Go ahead once again.

[Translation]

Sophie Chatel: I want to know whether witnesses have already been invited. If so, on what date will most of them be coming?

The Clerk of the Committee (Wassim Bouanani): At least three witnesses have confirmed their attendance for this study and will appear on October 20.

Sophie Chatel: I believe that the minister confirmed that he would appear on October 23.

Would it be possible to begin the study on the grocery code of conduct on Monday, October 27, or would it be better to start it on Monday, October 20?

Yves Perron: I think that it would be best to start it on October 20. I know that we still have time and that we can move the date. However, I think that opting for October 20 will convey the message that we're still looking into the matter and that we want to see progress on the issue.

Sophie Chatel: Okay. There will be a meeting on October 20. We'll decide later when we want to hold the second meeting.

[English]

The Chair: Let's go over to John for a bit.

John Barlow: I guess that gives us some time to move those witnesses from the 20th, though I always hate to do that if they've committed to a date. Then we have the minister on the 23rd. I don't think the grocery code of conduct is going to collapse if we wait

until the 27th to have that meeting, so that would be Monday and Thursday.

As a few of us had mentioned, we also want to do a one-meeting look at the spent fowl issue. We've seen a stark increase in the amount of spent fowl crossing the border into Canada. I know a number of us have had some conversations with Chicken Farmers of Canada, and they've raised that issue. They just want one meeting with officials to discuss that.

I guess my suggestion would be one of two things. If we are okay with moving those witnesses on the 20th, we would pause the current study for a few weeks and we would have the first grocery code of conduct meeting on the 20th and see where we're at in terms of how many meetings we would need.

We would have the minister on the 23rd.

I hate to be juggling back and forth from study to study, but I know we've done that in the past. If we pause this one, we'll pick up with the grocery code of conduct on the 20th, then have the minister and then, that following week, continue on with the grocery code of conduct if we need it, or we can look at a date for the spent fowl, if everyone is okay with that.

It sounds like we're going to need more than one meeting for the grocery code of conduct, from what I'm hearing from my colleagues. My suggestion is to pause the study we're doing now until we deal with the grocery code of conduct, and I would like to see one meeting on the spent fowl.

• (1735)

The Chair: I'll remind you that the minister will be here for one of the two hours, so there will be an opportunity on the 23rd to use that other hour for anything we want.

MP Dandurand, go ahead.

[Translation]

Marianne Dandurand: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I agree with the comments made. We have some very important studies to carry out, including the study on spent fowl.

I think that we have an urgent need to look at the grocery code of conduct, given that its full implementation is scheduled for January. If there are any concerns, it would be better to address them as soon as possible. I think that we should start the study on the grocery code of conduct on Monday, October 20. This would give us time to see whether we need to schedule more meetings for this study.

On October 23, we'll be meeting with the minister. We could also start the study on spent fowl, which I think is a less complex issue. We fully understand the challenges involved in this matter, but we need to address them and put them on the record. We'll then see what needs to be done in the coming weeks.

Sophie Chatel: I think that we all agree. However, I have a good suggestion for the committee. We could move the three witnesses scheduled for October 20 to the second hour of the October 23 meeting with the minister. This would fill the hour.

On October 20, we could begin the study on the grocery code of conduct.

On October 23, we could meet with the minister and the three witnesses, whose appearances will have been postponed by just a few days. We would put this study on hold, see whether we need to organize another meeting on the grocery code of conduct and carry out the study on spent fowl. If I look at the dates—

[*English*]

The Chair: I think I've got it: The 20th would be the full meeting.

[*Translation*]

Sophie Chatel: Exactly.

[*English*]

The Chair: The 23rd would be the minister and the other half would be the code of conduct.

Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Sophie Chatel: No, Mr. Chair. I'll say it again.

On October 20, when we return from the parliamentary break week, we could spend two hours on the study of the grocery code of conduct.

On October 23, we'll spend the first hour with the minister. In the second hour, we could hear from the three witnesses that the clerk had previously scheduled for October 20 as part of this study. This would mean postponing the witnesses' appearances by just a few days. We would then put this study on hold.

On October 27, we could begin the study on spent fowl or continue the study on the grocery code of conduct. We'll see what needs to be done at that time.

On October 29, we would either continue the study on the code or carry out the study on spent fowl, depending on whether we spent two meetings on the study of the grocery code of conduct.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Epp and then Mr. Perron.

Dave Epp: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I agree with that; we need to look at the spent fowl. I have no issues with the scheduling that's being discussed. However, I will share with the committee that I'm already hearing many entreaties from the industry on the grocery code of conduct that two meetings will not be enough. I'm not trying to pre-empt the other things, but I'm getting the feedback that this committee needs to hear more.

The Chair: How many meetings would you suggest, then?

Dave Epp: My understanding is the initial discussion was up to eight. I'm not sure we would need all eight, but more than two.

The Chair: Mr. Perron, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: I agree with Mr. Epp. We should start with the two meetings scheduled, and then we'll see. The committee has always been quite adept at scheduling more meetings for a study.

I agree with Mrs. Chatel's proposed compromise, which is to postpone the witnesses' appearances by a few days, out of respect for them. We could then put the study on hold if Mr. Barlow agrees. We should also start the study on spent fowl, because that issue also requires urgent attention. We could alternate between these two studies for as long as necessary, if my friend, Mr. Barlow, agrees.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, John.

John Barlow: I'm fine with that. My only suggestion would be that it depends on who these three witnesses are and if they booked travel. If they're Ottawa-based, then I don't think it's a big deal to move them.

Looking at the calendar, let's push off the current study we're doing until November. That would give us the 20th, the 27th and the 30th to deal with the grocery code of conduct, if it needs that much time. Then, at that point, we would look at spent fowl if we could get one meeting in on that, and then we would continue with this one at that point.

That would give us the 20th, an hour on the 23rd, the 27th and the 30th to deal with the grocery code.

● (1740)

The Chair: That's pretty clear.

[*Translation*]

Sophie Chatel: Mr. Barlow, I gather that you're proposing that the second hour of the October 23 meeting shouldn't be allocated to the witnesses for this study. I know that some witnesses have a great deal to say, including the official from the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute. This study is still quite urgent, since the government is currently working on implementing a reform and reducing red tape. Having these witnesses appear before us would already give us a great deal of evidence.

I would personally prefer that we finish this study. However, if these witnesses aren't available at that time, we could spend the second hour of the meeting discussing the grocery code of conduct. I would prefer to spend the second hour of the meeting with the three witnesses called for October 27. We would then put this study on hold until we've finished addressing the two issues considered urgent.

[*English*]

The Chair: Your thoughts, John?

John Barlow: I'm not that worried about it, but are these three witnesses the last witnesses we're going to have as part of the study?

I know you have it as time-sensitive, but it's not that time-sensitive if we're not going to look at the report or the first draft or any of that until November, so I don't know why these three witnesses have to be on the 23rd. I don't know why that's so time-sensitive.

If we push those three back and we pick up the study and carry on like we were going to, I don't know why making sure we have them that first week would matter one way or another. Maybe I'm missing something.

[*Translation*]

Sophie Chatel: The study must move forward and we must put it on hold at a logical time. I know that we'll be meeting with other witnesses. However, solutions are emerging. I think that we must hear from these initial witnesses. Even though we must wait for the report, their evidence could already prove useful for the work currently under way.

[*English*]

The Chair: There are 20 more witnesses for this study in the queue. Obviously, it would be great to move through three, but we're not finishing this study any time soon. We have a lot more folks in the line.

It's up to you. What's the will of the committee?

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: Mr. Chair, I personally have no preference for either of the last two proposals.

Mr. Barlow said earlier that we should check whether the witnesses are coming from Ottawa or from outside the city. They may also not be available on Thursday.

To resolve the issue, we could ask the committee clerk to contact the witnesses to ask them whether they would prefer October 23 or 27. In any case, we'll be discussing the study on spent fowl on either October 23 or 27. It's a difference of four days, so I don't know whether this will change much. I suggest that we proceed according to the witnesses' preference. That should settle the matter.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is that a fair proposal?

[*Translation*]

Sophie Chatel: Yes. Absolutely.

I want to confirm one thing. If these three witnesses aren't available, or if one of them isn't available, we'll invite the witnesses connected to the grocery code of conduct. We would start the study on the grocery code of conduct on Monday, October 20, and continue the study on October 23. We would then possibly spend another hour on the topic on October 27. Lastly, on October 30, we would begin the study on spent fowl. Is that right?

• (1745)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Perron, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: Mr. Barlow can tell us, since it's his party's proposal. However, I think that we also need to urgently address the spent fowl issue. I personally see no problem with alternating between these two studies, which are both urgent.

Mr. Barlow, I gather that you want to start the study on spent fowl on October 23 or 27, but that you don't want us to wait until we finish the study on the grocery code of conduct. Is that right?

[*English*]

John Barlow: I'm fine either way. It's whenever we can get those witnesses organized. We'll have to give a list of witnesses to the clerk for the grocery code of conduct, I would assume, by Monday. The spent fowl one is very easy. That's officials, Chicken Farmers of Canada and maybe processors. I think we will just go with when the clerk is able to get these witnesses scheduled.

The Chair: Okay.

Would you tell the committee what you've heard, just so that we're all on the same page?

The Clerk: I believe what was said was this. I can check with the witnesses, the ones who already accepted for 20th with the current study, if they are available to postpone their appearance to a later date, two weeks later, in November. If there's no issue with that, then on the 20th, 23rd, 27th and 30th, we undertake the study on the code of conduct.

The Chair: Is that okay so far?

John Barlow: Yes.

The Chair: You go ahead, and then I'll go to Sophie.

John Barlow: If we can get the witnesses, the officials, the Chicken Farmers of Canada and the processors in a day in there, we just need one meeting for them. Let's just start with that on the 20th and the 23rd, and we'll figure out—

The Chair: At that date.

John Barlow: Yes, at that time.

The Chair: So the agreement is that when we come back, the next four meetings will be on this issue.

Is that agreed?

John Barlow: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. There was one little piece to the current study.

John Barlow: The minister on the 23rd does not change.

The Chair: Correct.

Sophie Chatel: Just to make sure, on the 20th, when we return, it's the code of conduct.

The Chair: Yes.

Sophie Chatel: On the 23rd, it's the minister, plus.... Now it's changed. I thought it would be the three witnesses—

The Chair: The witnesses, if possible.

Sophie Chatel: If possible, but if not?

The Chair: If not, it's the code of conduct.

Sophie Chatel: Then we move to the second week. We have two days, the 27th and 30th. The 27th is the code of conduct again, and the 30th is the—

John Barlow: Spent fowl.

[*Translation*]

Sophie Chatel: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Spent fowl will be agreed upon when we're back, right? We'll finalize that.

John Barlow: Yes.

The Chair: Monsieur Perron.

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to make sure that we understand each other, because the versions differ slightly.

The October 20 meeting will be devoted to the study on the grocery code of conduct. Everyone agrees on that.

On October 23, the minister will appear during the first hour of the meeting. We can't reschedule his visit. If the three witnesses whom you want to finish speaking with are available at that time, we'll hear from them. If not, we'll meet with them on October 27. If the witnesses aren't available, we could continue the study on the grocery code of conduct on October 23. That's what you said, and I agree. Basically, the study on spent fowl will require a full meeting.

On October 27, since we said that it was urgent, we'll have started the study on the code of conduct. We're a smart and co-operative committee. We'll see where things stand after one or two meetings on the code. We can then make adjustments. I'm aware of the situation regarding spent fowl. The fact that a different party moved the motion doesn't mean we're unfamiliar with the situation. I think that we should begin this study no later than October 27. If everyone agrees, I think that's how we should proceed.

I would like to add one detail about October 27. When we meet with the witnesses to discuss spent fowl, we should meet with processors and producers before speaking with public servants. That

way, these people can explain the issue to us and give us the information that we need to ask the department officials better questions. If we start with the department officials, we may not have all the information and we may be unable to get to the bottom of things.

If my colleagues agree, that's what I would do.

• (1750)

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

It sounds like the 20th when we get back is going to be on groceries. On the 23rd, the minister comes in for the first half and the second half will be the witnesses on the current study, if they're available. If not, we will go back to groceries.

The following week, on the 27th we are going to focus on the spent chickens, if that's possible.

What happens on the 30th?

Yves Perron: That's enough.

The Chair: We'll decide.

Is there a consensus here?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We don't need to move any motions if we all just agree.

John Barlow: I agree with Mr. Perron's comment that we have the officials for the second hour on the spent fowl issue. I think that's a good idea.

The Chair: Does everyone agree? Thank you.

Can I adjourn the meeting?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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