

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE 15<sup>TH</sup> REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD ENTITLED, *PROTECTING AGAINST ANIMAL BIOSECURITY  
RISKS: THE STATE OF CANADA'S PREPAREDNESS***

The Government of Canada (the Government) is pleased to respond to the Fifteenth Report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food entitled, *Protecting Against Animal Biosecurity Risks: The State of Canada's Preparedness* (the Report).

The Government extends its sincere gratitude to the members of the Committee, and the organizations and individuals who appeared before it, for a thoughtful and thorough examination of the complex issue of animal biosecurity in Canada. The Government supports ensuring biosecurity preparedness and appreciates the comprehensive recommendations developed by the Committee to strengthen Canada's biosecurity preparedness. Engagement with provincial and territorial governments, academics, industry, and non-profit and community organizations effectively addresses the wider-ranging challenges detailed in the Report.

The Response is the product of a concerted effort among implicated federal departments and agencies: Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), Health Canada, the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), and Global Affairs Canada.

Animal biosecurity consists of the practices and principles that protect animals from the introduction and spread of infectious diseases, and is a responsibility shared between federal, provincial, and territorial governments, industry associations, and farmers. All of these stakeholders work together to strengthen biosecurity. When applied consistently, biosecurity measures help minimize disease risks to Canadian farms and their livestock, reduce the threat of disease to animals and Canadians, and help maintain market access and international trade. The Government has contributed funding to strengthen biosecurity in Canada through innovation. For instance, in August 2023 the African Swine Fever Industry Preparedness Program, which is led by the federal government, provided the Manitoba Pork Council with an investment of over \$900,000. This investment intends to support biosecurity assessments and improvements, wild pig management, retrofitting existing abattoirs, and ongoing research.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 1**

**That the Government of Canada improve Canadian biosecurity preparedness by working closely with international partners to share best practices and coordinate efforts in enhancing biosecurity measures, especially considering the ease with which diseases can cross borders in a globalized world; increasing funding for the development and implementation of innovative biosecurity technologies and practices, such as sensor technologies, automated disinfection systems, and improved animal traceability systems; and conducting annual reviews of biosecurity protocols in collaboration with industry stakeholders to ensure that the measures are up-to-date and effective.**

The Government supports the first two parts of this recommendation, as the intent aligns with existing Government initiatives. Animal biosecurity is an area of shared responsibility involving the federal-provincial-territorial (FPT) governments, industry associations, and producers. It consists of the practices and principles that protect animals from the introduction and spread of infectious diseases. Emergency preparedness is crucial in a globalized world, given the ease with which animal diseases can spread across borders. Collaborating with international partners, investing in appropriate technology, and having efficient and adequate measures in place are essential to prepare Canada to respond to diseases and threats.

##### *International collaboration*

The Government is working closely with international partners to coordinate efforts in enhancing biosecurity measures. There is a strong history of Canada's international leadership and collaboration to protect animal health at the multilateral and bilateral levels. Multilaterally, the CFIA leads the Government of Canada's delegation to the World Organisation for Animal

Health (WOAH) and participates on the working group for the North American Plan For Animal and Pandemic Influenza, the North American Foot-and-Mouth-Disease Vaccine Bank, and a series of international forums regarding African swine fever (ASF). The Government continuously leverages these activities and networks to share best practices and coordinate activities. The CFIA also collaborates with international partners to develop and strengthen disease response and preparedness activities for diseases of concern such as ASF, highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), and foot-and-mouth disease (FMD).

#### *Increasing funding related to biosecurity technologies*

The Government supports the development and implementation of innovative biosecurity technologies and practices. The Government is currently working with agriculture and agri-food industry to improve its biosecurity practices and to develop new biosecurity systems. The Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (Sustainable CAP) was launched in April 2023 and represents a \$3.5 billion investment over five years by FPT governments to help drive sustainability, innovation, economic growth, and competitiveness. Sustainable CAP has three key programs – AgriAssurance, AgriScience, and AgriInnovate, which can provide support to the agriculture and agri-food industry to develop and implement innovative biosecurity technologies and practices. In particular, AgriAssurance supports the sector to develop assurance systems, standards, and tools that enable the industry to improve its biosecurity practices by making credible, meaningful, and verifiable claims about its products and the manner in which they are produced. Moreover, the programming supports systems aimed at protecting animal health, including the development of biosecurity systems.

For instance, since 2016 the AgriAssurance program has provided funding to the Canadian Pork Council for three projects that support the development and enhancement of the Canadian Pork Excellence Program Platform. This Program Platform has integrated three assurance programs for food safety, biosecurity, and traceability into one single platform. With the support of the AgriAssurance Program, the traceability program, known as PigTRACE, has been fully implemented across Canada and has resulted in improved reporting on the movement of pigs across the country. This vital data is important in contributing to protecting Canadian producers from biosecurity risks, such as ASF.

#### *Annual reviews of biosecurity protocols*

The Government acknowledges the third part of the recommendation to conduct annual reviews of biosecurity protocols in collaboration with industry stakeholders so that biosecurity measures remain current and effective. The Government's authority is limited to specific disease control activities pertaining animal diseases. Routine on-farm biosecurity protocols are voluntary. Since 2009, the CFIA and AAFC have engaged with industry, the provinces and territories, and academia to develop the ten voluntary national biosecurity standards that were published for Canadian producers.

These voluntary standards cover a number of industries, such as poultry, cattle, sheep, swine, bees, and dairy. They were informed by scientific literature and best practices shared by domestic and international experts. These standards outline the practices and protocols that farmers are encouraged to routinely implement to prevent animals from being exposed to disease at the farm level. Most standards also recommend that producers regularly review their biosecurity protocols to ensure they are properly implemented and reflect the most up to date scientifically-based knowledge.

In addition, the CFIA has developed voluntary disease-specific programs, such as the Chronic Wasting Disease Herd Certification Programs and the Canadian ASF Compartment Program. Both of these programs have important biosecurity elements that can be implemented by industry, such as cleaning and disinfecting facilities, equipment and vehicles.

As biosecurity is a shared responsibility, the CFIA provides input when these standards are being developed. For instance, the CFIA provided comments and input to industry as it

developed the National Avian On-Farm Biosecurity Standard. The CFIA has also been providing input to the Canadian Pork Council as it reviews the National Swine Farm-Level Biosecurity Standard.

## **RECOMMENDATION 2**

**That the Government of Canada develop a national awareness campaign on the importance of biosecurity measures and high animal welfare standards in preventing the spread of animal diseases. This campaign should target both industry stakeholders and the general public.**

The Government supports this recommendation. The CFIA develops materials, such as visual aids, checklists, and informational guidance, geared towards industry stakeholders and the general public with awareness materials on the importance of biosecurity and high animal welfare standards, such as those implemented through the Codes of Practice and on farm-assessment programs.

Since 2020-21, the CFIA has managed biosecurity advertising campaigns with a focus on the prevention of ASF and HPAI and promoting rules for pet imports. Tactics have included airport signage, search engine marketing, interest and geo-targeted digital advertising, YouTube and print ads. This is in addition to proactive media outreach, social media campaigns, and engaging with industry associations to develop risk and preparedness communications and issue communications products to their stakeholders.

Canada is committed to continuing to raise awareness of the importance of biosecurity measures and high animal welfare standards at the national level and work collaboratively with other government partners and to engage with industry stakeholders to develop and amplify common messaging.

## **RECOMMENDATION 3**

**That the Government of Canada improve Canada's ability to protect animal health and respond to animal disease outbreaks by: engaging in public-private partnerships to develop new vaccines, treatments for animal diseases, and best management practices for the health of live animals; encouraging the standardization and harmonization of requirements for animal medications with trusted jurisdictions to ensure long-term accessibility to these products, and; developing and maintaining vaccine banks, as the government has proposed to do for Foot and Mouth Disease in Budget 2023, to allow for a rapid response in the event of an outbreak.**

The Government supports this recommendation, as the intent aligns with existing Government initiatives. Given the growing human-animal interface, many future threats of disease could infect Canadian livestock, have a significant impact on the agri-food and agriculture sector, and jeopardize Canadian exports. That is why the Government supports a One Health approach. The One Health approach is a multisector and multidisciplinary collaborative approach that aims to improve the health and wellbeing of humans, animals, plants, and the environment and address common threats.

The CFIA is actively working with other federal government departments, universities, and international partners to develop and/or evaluate vaccines for animal diseases. Specifically, the National Centre for Foreign Animal Disease (NCFAD) is working to support vaccine development and evaluation for foreign animal diseases of concern, including ASF, FMD, and HPAI. These studies have the potential to generate vaccines and therapeutics that can be used to control these high-consequence animal and/or zoonotic diseases. As some of these vaccines rely on emerging technology, such as mRNA, they could be easily manufactured in Canada if they are successful.

Health Canada and the CFIA recognize the benefits of harmonizing requirements with other international regulators whenever possible to encourage the submission and retention of veterinary products in Canada, including drugs and vaccines. Veterinary drugs are regulated under the *Food and Drugs Act* and its regulations, administered by Health Canada. Vaccines are regulated under the *Health of Animals Act* (HAA) and its regulations, administered by the CFIA. Given the small market for veterinary products in Canada, a number of initiatives are already underway to access tools that protect animal health and respond to outbreaks of animal disease, and support and promote international standardization and harmonization. For instance, Canada takes part in international standard setting bodies focused on animal health and food safety to contribute to discussions focused on international harmonization. In addition, whenever possible, Canada implements international veterinary drug guidelines. These guidelines not only help encourage long-term accessibility to veterinary drugs, but also help necessary veterinary drugs successfully reach the Canadian market. Canada also routinely engages with other trusted regulators, including the United States, United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia. This ongoing collaboration allows for consistency and predictability across jurisdictions, and for information sharing to discuss emerging issues and challenges, including potential product shortages, allowing Canada to swiftly respond, coordinate, and address any threats to long-term access.

As Canada modernizes its veterinary drug regulatory framework, Health Canada is examining options to facilitate access to veterinary drugs. The Regulations Amending Certain Regulations Made Under the *Food and Drugs Act* (Agile Licensing) would allow the Minister to impose terms and conditions on a drug. These terms and conditions could be used to manage the uncertainties relating to the benefits and risks of a drug needed to treat a serious or life-threatening condition. This provides a mechanism similar to those employed by other trusted regulators and should help Canada access and maintain access to new medically necessary veterinary drugs.

The Government is committed to protecting Canada's agricultural resources and animals against foreign animal diseases, and takes the threat of high-consequence diseases such as FMD, ASF, and HPAI seriously. Strict measures are in place in an effort to prevent these diseases, including biosecurity and import controls on animals and food.

Budget 2023 announced \$57.5 million over five years (2023-24 to 2027-28) and \$5.6 million ongoing to establish an FMD vaccine bank for Canada and to enhance existing FMD response plans. Funding will enable the CFIA to secure sufficient doses of FMD vaccines to protect Canada's livestock industry in the event of a large FMD outbreak. This investment will supplement Canada's access to vaccines through the North American FMD Vaccine Bank, which has a limited supply. The CFIA is working with provinces, territories, and the livestock sector to continue to enhance Canada's preparedness and verify that any response to an outbreak is robust and coordinated.

Canada has historically used a depopulation strategy for HPAI with the goal of eradicating the disease and returning to a disease-free status. However, the scale and duration of this outbreak, as well as international efforts to develop a vaccine for HPAI, has prompted Canada to take action. In response, the CFIA created the HPAI Vaccination Task Force in June 2023 to bring together veterinarians, experts from academia, the poultry industry, and federal and provincial government representatives to study the challenges and opportunities for the development and implementation of an HPAI vaccination program. This task force serves as a forum for discussion, information-sharing, and consensus building on an approach to HPAI vaccination in Canada, and is exploring the use of vaccines based on scientific research, international trade, and disease control considerations.

Canada has not yet approved vaccines for use against ASF. The CFIA continues to monitor and contribute to ongoing developments in ASF vaccine technology closely. If a vaccine that is suitable for the Canadian context is developed, the CFIA will discuss appropriate scenarios for use with stakeholders and consider the use of a vaccine bank if deemed appropriate. The

existing relationships with stakeholders that have been built under the ASF preparedness engagement approach can be leveraged to do further work with other diseases in the future.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4**

**That the Government of Canada prioritize signing protocol agreements with its trading partners for diseases such as African Swine Fever.**

The Government supports this recommendation, as the intent aligns with existing Government initiatives. It is committed to protecting animal health and preventing the introduction and spread of animal diseases. Under the Pan Canadian ASF Plan, the CFIA has been proactively negotiating zoning arrangements with key trading partners. In the event of an ASF outbreak in Canada, trading partners would recognize disease-free geographic areas that Canada establishes. The goal is to allow trade to continue from these disease-free areas and avoid unnecessary market disruptions. While these zoning arrangements may facilitate the reopening of export markets, it would still take time to establish primary control zones to bring the disease under control, and for trading partners to recognize the established zones. The time required depends on the nature of the outbreak and ability to control disease transmission.

On August 26, 2022, the Government announced investments of \$45.3 million to prevent and prepare for ASF. Of these funds, \$19.8 million is directed at CFIA efforts, such as increased surveillance, laboratory testing capacity, supporting international partners in the development of an ASF vaccine, and establishing ASF zoning arrangements with key trading partners.

Negotiating zoning arrangements with international partners is a complex process, requiring country-specific questionnaires and on-site audits. This work is an essential part of the preparedness and emergency disease response activities. The current arrangements with the United States, the European Union, Vietnam, Hong Kong, and Singapore cover almost 45% of Canada's pork meat exports in 2023 (in terms of volume). The CFIA is engaging with South Asian countries, such as Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines, in securing acceptance of Canada's ASF zoning to verify that trade can continue from disease-free areas in the event that ASF is detected in Canada.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 5**

**That the Government of Canada review the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's compensation policy, when the destruction of animals is ordered, to include all cleaning and disinfection costs.**

The Government acknowledges this recommendation and recognizes the important role that compensation plays in encouraging early reporting of animal disease and protecting against animal biosecurity risks. Under the HAA, the CFIA may order the destruction of animals or "things" (e.g., feed, cages) affected by a disease. During animal disease outbreaks, producers may be compensated for animals and "things" ordered destroyed, as well as the disposal costs associated with destroying and disposing of the animals and "things". The CFIA-administered compensation is intended as a risk management tool, used to encourage reporting and to enhance cooperation between producers, owners, and government officials in the event of an outbreak. It is not intended to address all costs incurred or loss of future revenue, which can be better addressed through other business risk management tools and private insurance.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 6**

**That the Government of Canada ensure Canadian border and inspection services: have the necessary resources to verify compliance with import requirements that address biosecurity threats to Canadian livestock – including adequate training in agricultural and agri-food matters – while facilitating international trade by keeping Canadian border crossings and points of entry operating efficiently and safely; enforce penalties to encourage compliance with the Health of Animals Act's requirements for imports of food and animal goods and**

**consider increasing penalties for offenders; and enforce the reciprocity of standards between countries.**

The Government supports the first part of this recommendation, as the intent aligns with existing policies and processes. The CBSA verifies compliance with import requirements through a variety of tools, including the Automated Import Reference System (AIRS). This system is a searchable database of the CFIA import requirements for all products it regulates (animals, plants and food). The system is regularly updated as requirements change. It includes information on biosafety requirements for the CFIA designated terrestrial animal pathogens (CD-TAP) under the HAA and its regulations in live animals, animal products, and animal by-products, including foods of animal origin. Through a series of questions and answers, the system leads users through applicable regulations and policies to information on all the CFIA import requirements. The CFIA Office of Biohazard Containment and Safety (OBSC) regularly updates and maintains the biosafety requirements for these imported products. The CFIA import requirements are carefully prepared for the purpose of preventing diseases of plants and animals from entering Canada and infecting Canadian populations.

The Government also supports the second part of this recommendation on encouraging compliance with the requirements in the HAA and its regulations for imported food and animal products by enforcing the associated penalties. The Canadian border is an important gateway for international trade and provides inspection staff with the opportunity to verify that imported animals and foods meet import requirements, which is aimed at preventing the incursion of disease and assuring the biosecurity of the Canadian agricultural sector.

The CFIA, or the CBSA acting on the CFIA's behalf, responds to cases of non-compliance of imported food or animal products at the border. There are a variety of enforcement actions that can be taken, including removing, seizing, detaining, disposing of live animals or food items, monetary penalties, and/or prosecution.

The Government supports in-principle the second part of this recommendation to consider increasing penalties for contraventions of the HAA. Canadian border inspection points are a critical control point in the approach to biosecurity for the Canadian animal agricultural sector. As risks to the Canadian herd, economy, and public increase from contraventions of the HAA and its regulations, the penalties for offenders should also increase. When there is sufficient evidence of an alleged contravention, the CFIA can recommend prosecution to the Public Prosecution Service of Canada. The HAA establishes the maximum possible fines for an offence, and a sentencing judge would determine the amount based on the facts of the case. However, any increase to the maximum possible fines for an offence under the HAA would require a legislative amendment.

The Government acknowledges the third part of this recommendation on enforcing the reciprocity of standards between countries. The CBSA and the CFIA ensure that the officers and inspectors at the border and inland are well trained to inspect imported goods entering Canada to the standards. The Government adheres to Canada's obligations under the World Trade Organization and its free trade agreements that support fair and predictable trade in agri-food products. This requires Canada's import requirements to be transparent, not create unnecessary barriers to international trade, and be justified for the protection of health and safety including animal and human health. These international trade obligations require Canada to base its import requirements, amongst others, on international standards while affording the right to be more stringent if the assessment of risk is scientifically justified and if the measure is consistent with the requirements applied to domestic agri-food products.

The CFIA and the CBSA verify that inspectors are qualified and the HAA provides inspectors with the tools necessary to complete inspections of imported goods and determine if those goods meet the requirements to safely enter Canada, while protecting Canadians and the Canadian herd from the associated risks.

## **RECOMMENDATION 7**

**That the Government of Canada review its regulatory requirements for the disposal of Specified Risk Material to allow Canadian beef producers to compete more effectively in international markets and to increase regional beef slaughtering capacity, while ensuring that any changes it makes neither jeopardize biosecurity nor compromise Canada's negligible risk status for Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy.**

The Government supports this recommendation. The Government is exploring a review of its regulatory requirements for the disposal of Specified Risk Material. The CFIA is currently working with the cattle and beef sectors to gather information to inform a careful analysis of any potential risks to human or animal health in order to, amongst others, verify control programs which may help promote trade and commerce between Canada and international markets. This analysis and subsequent review will enable the CFIA to identify what changes, if any, may be considered to bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) regulatory controls in Canada. The Government continues to engage industry to understand the challenges associated with implementing BSE control measures and is committed to restoring, maintaining, and increasing market access for Canadian cattle and beef products.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Government extends its gratitude to the Members of the Committee, and the witnesses that appeared before it, for their work to identify ways to address Canada's animal biosecurity risks.

The Committee Report and the federal initiatives detailed in this response highlight the importance of the Government's role in supporting the ongoing efforts in animal biosecurity. The Government values its work with federal partners and other stakeholders to enhance Canada's protection against animal biosecurity risks.