House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

AGRI • NUMBER 013 • 1st SESSION • 38th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, November 25, 2004

Chair

Mr. Paul Steckle

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● (1105)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.)): Ladies and gentlemen, we want to call our meeting to order this morning. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are reviewing the activities of the Pest Management Regulatory Agency during the past six months. We want to do a review of what's happened over the past six months.

We've brought to the committee this morning as witnesses, from the Department of Health, Janice Charette, associate deputy minister, and from the Pest Management Regulatory Agency, Wendy Sexsmith, acting executive director.

As per our usual procedure, we will have the presentation take about ten minutes, if we could limit it to that. Then we'll proceed into the questions. We'll follow the normal seven-minute procedure in the first round, and five minutes in the second round. We'll be going for two hours, and I hope to see the clock at one o'clock when we finish.

We will proceed.

Ms. Charette, would you take the lead and follow through on your presentation.

Ms. Janice Charette (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Health): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. Thank you for the invitation to join you here today. I know that my colleague Wendy Sexsmith has been a frequent visitor to this committee, but it is my first appearance before you, so I thank you again for the invitation.

I'm pleased to be here today to speak to you about our solid commitment to protecting health and the environment from the risks associated with pest control products while at the same time increasing transparency and facilitating access to pest management tools. To this end, I will touch on a few areas particularly related to facilitating access to safe and effective pesticides, which I hope will be of interest to members of the committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chairman, for the benefit of the new members of the Committee, I'd like to begin with a brief overview of the pesticide regulatory system.

As you know, Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency, or PMRA, is responsible for the regulation of pesticides in Canada. The PMRA's first priority respecting pesticides is the protection of health and the environment.

Before a pesticide is registered for use in Canada, it undergoes a rigorous scientific evaluation to ensure that its use will not pose an unacceptable risk to either human health or the environment, and that the products are effective.

PMRA uses standards, tests and processes that are protective of public and environmental safety and are comparable to those used in the US, Europe and other OECD countries.

In addition, re-evaluation of these products is carried out once they have been on the market for some time to determine whether their continued use remains acceptable.

[*English*]

I'd like to emphasize that these scientific processes contribute to a safe and abundant food supply for Canadians while allowing effective new products on the market and protecting the health and environment of all Canadians, including agricultural workers and their families.

Let me turn now to the topic of minor use, which I know has been of particular interest to members of this committee. The PMRA recognizes that growers need simultaneous access to minor-use and reduced-risk crop management tools, which are available in the United States, with the same maximum residue levels, or MRLs, in order to stay competitive. In view of these priorities and challenges, efforts are ongoing within the agency to try to address these needs.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chairman, as in other countries, it is the responsibility of the pesticide manufacturers to develop new pesticides and generate the scientific health, environmental and efficacy studies that are required to support the registration of a pesticide in Canada.

● (1110)

[*English*]

In the case of minor-use pesticides, manufacturers have shown a reluctance to support the generation of data needed to carry out the risk assessment. In order to overcome this barrier, in 2002 the federal government provided $54.5 million—and I think we've given you a breakout here of how those resources are allocated on an annual basis. The $54.5 million are additional resources over six years. This is funding for a new joint initiative between Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and Health Canada's PMRA.

Under this initiative, AAFC holds an annual meeting with growers in the provinces, where the minor crop pesticide priorities are established for the year. AAFC then generates the necessary data for those priorities through field trials, and puts together the pesticide submissions. In turn, PMRA's role is to review in a timely fashion the submissions that are received and to determine whether the risk and efficacy are acceptable.

PMRA and AAFC are working closely together to enhance their coordination and communication as this important program is implemented. For example, a joint working group has been established as a mechanism for ongoing cooperation between the two organizations. This new Canadian program is similar to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's inter-regional project known as IR-4, which I believe is well known to this committee.

[*Translation*]

Recognizing that the program started in 2002, and that data had to be generated by AAFC, I am pleased to say that the first submission for registration from AAFC was received by the PMRA on October 24, 2004.

This same submission is also the first of four pilot submissions to be received by both the PMRA and EPA for joint review. This marks the beginning of what is considered an important program that will address the needs of Canadian growers.

[*English*]

It is hoped that through this process the joint data generation for products for minor uses will become routine, as well as the joint review of these submissions. This is another way for governments to improve access to minor crop pesticides for growers in the U.S. and Canada at the same time with the same MRLs permissible in food.

Let me turn now to the topic of joint reviews.

While the pilot for minor-use joint reviews is an exciting development, I think the broader benefits of joint reviews on new pesticides are also worthy of note. Since 1996 there has been a program in place for jointly reviewing new pesticides submitted to the U.S. and Canada at the same time. As of September 30, 2004, 55 registrations have been received under this program, of which 23 were for reduced-risk chemicals.

I'd also like to point out that many of the uses associated with these new pesticides have been for minor crops, and most of the MRLs that were set as a result of joint reviews were the same, therefore providing access to the same tools at the same time in both countries.

[*Translation*]

While no additional registrations of joint reviews have taken place in the last six months, 16 joint reviews and work shares are currently under way. Six are joint reviews that were submitted to Canada and the US in a completely electronic format, that is in paperless format. Typical submissions for new pesticides require up to 30,000 pages of scientific data, which is normally delivered in a paper format. We need trucks to transport the material.

Lessons learned from these electronic pilots will help establish how paperless submission may become the norm in the future. These pilot submissions, led by PMRA, resulted from working closely with the US EPA and the pesticide industry and represent another step forward in efficiencies and harmonization for both industry and regulators.

[*English*]

This activity is closely tied to PMRA's recent launch of the world's first Internet-based service for conducting pesticide regulatory transactions, which was launched by PMRA on September 15 of this year. This service will allow companies to submit pesticide applications over the Internet through a secure government channel and provides the potential for substantial cost savings for industries as well as efficiencies for PMRA.

Another grower concern relates to the loss of pesticide tools through PMRA's re-evaluation program when replacement products are not available. As you know from previous appearances by agency representatives here, the purpose of re-evaluation is to determine whether registered pesticides currently on the market remain acceptable for use using modern health and environmental risk assessments.

While re-evaluation is necessary from a health and environmental safety perspective as well as for public confidence in the pesticide regulatory system, the PMRA recognizes the importance of working more closely with all stakeholders. A meeting was held in the spring of 2004 to discuss with stakeholders how to work better in the area of re-evaluation.

● (1115)

[*Translation*]

To address the concerns of growers related to lack of replacement products and to improve the ability to interact with growers and other stakeholders on a more regular basis, the PMRA has put a number of mechanisms in place. For example, to consult and update stakeholders and accommodate those who have difficulty travelling, the PMRA is setting up conference calls during the year. These calls will be initiated in December, that is in approximately two weeks' time, and annual meetings will also be held if necessary and if wanted.

[*English*]

As well, ad hoc transition working groups are being set up to address concerns and develop transition strategies for pesticides that may be coming off the market as a result of this re-evaluation work.

The first transition group has been initiated by the Canadian Horticultural Council and apple growers on azinphos-methyl, an insecticide that is used on key fruit crops and is proposed for phase-out both in the United States and in Canada as a result of re-evaluation. This working group is comprised of PMRA, growers, and industry representatives. The purpose of the group is to work together to try to ensure that alternative products are made available in time to replace those that are being removed from the market.

Further to our re-evaluation, I can tell you that substantial progress has been made on the re-evaluation of older pesticides as a result of harmonization activities carried out between the U.S. and Canada. Where possible, PMRA works with the results of the United States re-evaluation reviews on products in order to make decisions on registered products in Canada. This allows for the efficient use of resources as well as for more timely decision-making.

I'm informed that in 2003-04 most of the decisions based on U.S. reviews were harmonized with the U.S. decisions.

[*Translation*]

Another way PMRA is improving communication with growers is through regular meetings with grower associations. PMRA, AAFC, and the Canadian Horticultural Council, the CHC, are meeting on a quarterly basis to discuss any grower issues. The third meeting with CHC on November 2, 2004, involved substantive discussion on issues important to all parties, such as new pesticides, minor use, re-evaluation, emergency registrations, buffer zones, and residue trial zones.

[*English*]

At this meeting, actions included a commitment from PMRA to consult further on buffer zones and residue trial zones and to have a meeting between growers, the bio-pesticide industry, and PMRA in order to encourage submissions from U.S. companies. In addition, at that same session PMRA discussed a recent initiative that has been undertaken with the pesticide industry whereby the acting executive director has been meeting with chief executive officers of pesticide companies to discuss ways to encourage submissions to Canada and to achieve more global coordination of submissions.

Industry's response has been positive. If there are further questions on this, I think Wendy would be pleased to give you an update on those discussions.

Another step taken to help improve growers' access to newer and safer pesticides is through our work with other NAFTA countries. For example, a common North American residue trial zone map was produced by the United States, Canada, and Mexico under the auspices of the NAFTA trilateral working group on pesticides. Under this map, it was agreed that pesticide residue data that were produced for a zone found in more than one country would be accepted by the regulators, regardless of which country the data were actually produced in.

This harmonized approach to residue trial zones reduces the number of trials that industry must carry out in order for regulatory authorities to be able to set MRLs or tolerances for pesticide levels in food.

[*Translation*]

Further, Mr. Chairman, the delineation of residue trial zones generated several sub-zones which currently do not exist in the US. Because these sub-zones can mean additional residue trials in Canada, PMRA has initiated a research project to develop empirical data for the zones in questions — zones 5/5B and 1/1A — to determine whether they can be merged.

● (1120)

[*English*]

An additional NAFTA project that is underway is exploring whether or not we can achieve a 25% reduction in the overall number of trials without jeopardizing the ability to set valid MRLs or tolerances produced by industry if all those zones are covered for a particular commodity within the U.S. and Canada.

Although PMRA has achieved substantial harmonization with the United States, it is committed to further maximizing Canadian regulatory efficiency, particularly through NAFTA, in line with the recommendations of the External Advisory Committee on Smart Regulation, which has been encouraging all departments to continue to pursue efforts in international regulatory cooperation. We think the results of these efforts will further facilitate access to new pesticides and increase the submission of joint reviews.

We're also making progress toward bringing a new Pest Control Products Act into force. Regulations have been published already in the *Canada Gazette* part I on the reporting of sales data, the requirement for safety information for workers, and adverse effects reporting. At the same time, we're working on the final key regulation and the existing regulations that have to be reviewed in order to bring the new act into force.

[*Translation*]

The new Act itself will enhance many aspects of the Canadian pesticide regulatory system.

For example, the current practice of higher standards of protection for children is in fact codified in the new PCPA. Additionally, re-evaluations of older pesticides must be completed 15 years after they are registered and transparency is enhanced through greater access to information.

[*English*]

In closing, Mr. Chairman, we're making important progress on a number of issues that I believe growers have raised to improve the regulation of pesticides in Canada. Using the science-based approach to the regulation of pesticides, we are going to continue to work with our partners in the United States as well as other OECD countries and our stakeholders to resolve differences, to continue the efforts to harmonize our regulatory approaches in order to bring new and reduced-risk products to market more quickly while protecting health and the environment.

Both Wendy and I would be pleased to answer any questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Charette.

At this time we'll go to our question period, seven minutes.

Mr. Anderson, for seven minutes.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks for coming today.

You mentioned the External Advisory Committee on Smart Regulation toward the end of your presentation. I'm wondering what you are doing to implement that or to expedite the application of that in your department or in your agency.

Ms. Janice Charette: The External Advisory Committee on Smart Regulation report was released this fall. This department is looking not only within the PMRA but across the department at how best to respond to the External Advisory Committee report.

One of the areas where I think PMRA was actually cited as a good example is in terms of the work that has been done on international regulatory cooperation. I believe you were provided, for the purposes of this committee, with a report of the NAFTA technical working group on pesticides, which shows the depth of cooperation and work. That's an area that is a continuing priority, and I think I spoke about it in my remarks.

Is there any other area we should refer to, Wendy?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith (Acting Executive Director, Pest Management Regulatory Agency): The other area that was of interest to the External Advisory Committee on Smart Regulation related to information technology, so our approach on using informatics to become more efficient is also a piece that's supported by the smart regulation committee.

Ms. Janice Charette: Particularly, I guess, the e-filing. Sorry.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: I mentioned the web-based filing using the secure channel. That platform, which has been developed now in PMRA, we are looking at. Other departments are looking at whether or not they can actually try to adapt that same kind of platform. In other areas it's the regulatory responsibility of the government.

Mr. David Anderson: I understand another part of the report actually dealt basically with the risk management approach to regulatory issues where the level of scrutiny should equal the level of risk. How does that affect you? Are you applying that, or is that a consideration in what you're doing?

Ms. Janice Charette: I think it's fair to say that decisions that are made within the agency are based on a risk management framework.

Maybe you want to talk more about that.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: No, I don't think I want to add any more to that. I think that's adequate.

Mr. David Anderson: I guess my concern is that in the agriculture community it seems to be that they feel at times you apply a far greater level of scrutiny than you need to for the level of risk that exists. I'm wondering if you have any comment on that.

Ms. Janice Charette: Under the legislation the agency has a responsibility to look at whether or not a product or a use is safe in terms of the impact on human health and the impact in terms of the environment, as well as to look at the efficacy of the product. I think what the PMRA attempts to do is ensure that in order to be able to come to a decision on a particular product, it goes through the necessary scientific and other processes to be able to render that judgment. I think it's in that process that the risk management framework is being applied.

● (1125)

Mr. David Anderson: As late as yesterday we were talking to producers and they were talking about the concerns they have with you removing older chemicals through the re-evaluation process but not approving the newer, narrower, targeted chemicals fast enough in order for them to remain competitive. There's a big concern out there that you are one of the major reasons they're becoming less and less competitive. I'd like you to comment on that.

We've been here before. I was on the committee for three years. I was off most of last year, but I see the same issues are here that have been here in the past. I'd like a comment on that. I'm coming at this from a producer's perspective. I see that's not your priority, but it is for many of our agricultural people.

Ms. Janice Charette: I'm not sure I wouldn't say that it's a priority. The mission in the agency is to ensure that there is timely access to these products but that the products are safe and effective. So we try to make sure those missions are being achieved.

I spoke in my remarks about the concerns that have been raised exactly around the re-evaluation process. The concerns of growers were that we take a product off the market as a result of a re-evaluation decision, or just the usage of that, to make sure there is a timely replacement. PMRA has put a number of mechanisms in place to try to improve interaction with growers around re-evaluations, in particular. One of the things that have been done, for example, is the tabling of the work plans on re-evaluation so that growers can tell what the schedule is for the re-evaluation of products and be able to forecast and work with us in terms of identifying where there may be replacement products that we'll have to make sure are also going through the process at the same time.

There has been a focus in terms of regular communications, as the evaluation decisions are being made, including the establishment of conference calls through the year, the offer to have an annual meeting to talk about re-evaluations, and the establishment of working groups around particular products. If in fact there is a re-evaluation decision that would see a product being phased out, a particular working group would focus on ensuring that there is a replacement available on a timely basis.

Mr. David Anderson: That all sounds very good, and I'm glad you've organized that, but that doesn't help producers when they go in the field and you've taken a primary chemical that they've been using for years off the market and they don't have anything to replace it. In terms of your re-evaluation, I think you need to make sure they have the ability to be able to protect their crops when they go into the field. I know what you're doing, but I also know what it's doing on the farm, and it really is hurting producers.

I would like to go to your joint review process. You say that you've had this process in place since 1996. In eight years, 55 registrations have been achieved under the program, which I think is probably indicative of how effective it's been. Why have there been no new joint review registrations in the last six months? Have people basically given up on the process? Why has that ground to a halt?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: That's true; however, we do have 16 joint reviews and work shares in our system. I think it's important to understand that when products come in, the timelines for review can be anywhere from 12 to 24 months, depending on the agreement we have made with the U.S. While in the last six months there have been no joint reviews completed, we do have a number in the system.

Mr. David Anderson: Given the number of chemicals that are used agriculturally, it seems to me that 55 in eight years and with 16 more coming through in the next two to three years is basically an indication that this program is failing. We've talked here many times before about the necessity to begin to harmonize our registration process with the United States. It looks to me like it has completely failed—in this area, anyway.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: With respect, I'd like to say that we don't really see it that way and neither does the U.S. We're working very closely together to encourage as many joint reviews as we can possibly get. Right now in our system about 50% of the new pesticides coming to Canada are either done through the joint reviews or through work shares, and many of those are agricultural. What that achieves for Canada is that we now see sooner products that are important, particularly in the horticultural area. Typically, Canada saw the western herbicides come here first, and now we're seeing those coming as well as horticultural crops.

I think Janice referred to initiating meetings with industry. This is the second tranche of meetings with industry. We initiated these in the early 2000 timeframe to try to encourage industry to work with us on this whole issue of joint reviews. We're taking a second step at this—myself and my colleague in the U.S.

● (1130)

The Chair: Your time has expired, Mr. Anderson. Perhaps we can pick it up on the next round.

Ms. Poirier-Rivard, seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I live in a market garden growing region and I'd like you to give us an overview of the PMRA's operations in Quebec? What are the principal sectors in which you are involved? What types of parasites and crops are you working on? What kind of pest control operations are you conducting and what type of products do you recommend be used?

Ms. Janice Charette: I'll ask Wendy to give you the details of the PMRA's operations.

[*English*]

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Just to make sure I understand your question, you asked who we work with in Quebec and on what types of crops and what types of pesticides.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard: Yes.

[*English*]

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: What I would say is that we work with all provinces and all stakeholders in Canada, including Quebec. Certainly in Quebec we understand that a lot of the horticultural crops are very important, as well as some of the larger crops like corn and soybeans. So we would work through our provincial counterparts on those issues with the Quebec growers. We also know that you have a greenhouse industry, so tomatoes, cucumbers, and peppers are important to Quebec.

We are not in the business of recommending pesticides. The pesticide industry develops the molecules and submits them to us. We review the information and make the registration decision that would in fact dictate how those pesticides can be used, and then growers and provinces would be responsible for putting that use into play.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard: Pest control practices are not limited to the use of pesticides. The public and consumers prefer natural alternatives to the use of chemicals. What natural products does your Agency recommend?

[*English*]

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Just to be clear, we don't really recommend specific pesticides; our job is to review the information that is provided to us by the companies. We make a decision as to whether or not that particular product is safe if used according to the label.

It's the pesticide companies that make the applications for specific uses. Consumers, as well as growers and other users, would be required to use the pesticides that are registered for use. For example, if you're looking at a herbicide to be used on lawns, you would look at the label of a pesticide and use the pesticide that is required for the pest management situation you have. If it's a herbicide, you might use 2,4-D or some other product.

We don't really make specific recommendations.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard: With respect to market garden production, do you think growers will increasingly opt to use natural pesticides?

[*English*]

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: We have certainly seen an upswing of interest in bio-pesticide

[*Translation*]

and other pesticides such as

[*English*]

the organic types of pesticides. We're trying to work very closely with the companies in Canada and the U.S. and

[*Translation*]

throughout the world.

[*English*]

to encourage those types of products to come into Canada.

The answer to your question is yes, we've seen an increased interest.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard: As far as restrictions go, do you think Quebec is opting more to use natural pesticides than the other provinces?

● (1135)

[*English*]

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: I'm not sure I could actually have a very good opinion on that. In some regions of Canada, and Quebec is one of them, there is quite an interest in organic types of pesticides. I would say that we've had a lot of interest expressed from Alberta and Saskatchewan, and from the eastern provinces, like New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. While I think Quebec certainly has expressed interest, I have also heard that interest from other parts of Canada.

The Chair: Thanks, Ms. Rivard.

We'll get Mr. Gaudet in the next round.

Ms. Ur.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, Lib.): Thank you for your presentation. I've waited with great anticipation for today, so I've got many, many questions, and I hope the questions can be as short as the answers.

What is the agency's definition of harmonization?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: We have defined it as the ability to work with another country in the area of reviewing and evaluating a pesticide. We do not think it needs to be identical.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: Do you consider Canada to be harmonized with the United States in regard to pesticide registration? That's a yes or no question.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Substantially.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: Yes or no.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Yes, substantially harmonized.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: If you believe Canada and the United States are harmonized, why are there so many disparities between the two countries—efficacy and worker exposure, to name two?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: I guess that's why I used the qualifier "substantially". We're well aware that we have some differences in the area of efficacy.

On the issue of efficacy, both the U.S. and Canada require efficacy, as do most OECD countries. Canada requires, however, the submission of the data and the review of the data, as do most OECD countries. That is a difference. We have initiated a meeting with our companies in Canada for the early winter timeframe, to work with them on this issue.

On the second issue, worker exposure, yes, there is a difference there. The U.S. and Canada have two different risk assessment approaches to worker exposure. At the June meeting of the NAFTA executive board, the U.S. agreed to work with Canada on this. A project has been initiated.

These are fairly gritty scientific questions, and we are starting to work on it together to see if we can come to a place where we do this in a similar fashion.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: Are our regulations higher than in the United States? Is that the difficulty there?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: In the area of worker protection, while the side-by-side analysis hasn't yet been done, it is seen that we are more protective.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: And why does Canada have a higher efficacy requirement than in the United States?

Ms. Janice Charette: I think there has been a view in this country that in addition to ensuring that the product is safe in terms of impact on human health, and safe in terms of the environment...that it's also the best product in order to be able to achieve the use, or that it's effective in terms of the use for which it's intended.

That is why, if you look in the new legislation, Canada has asked for the submission and the review of efficacy data. I realize that this is a different approach than is taken in the United States. It is true that countries around the world do look at efficacy, and our approach is slightly different. In this country, I think we consider it to be an important characteristic for it to be considered as part of the regulatory decision-making system, and that's why it's embedded in the legislation.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: Is that a PMRA idea, or is it pushed by a particular group?

Ms. Janice Charette: It's in the new Pest Control Products Act, and I believe it was also in the predecessor legislation, under which we are currently regulating pesticides.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: In 2004 the PMRA released its formulants program, which claims to be harmonized, similar in approach to and synchronized with the United States. PMRA has implemented a Canada-only requirement for list two formulants. Their legislation does not require disclosure in the United States; therefore, Americans will have access to the technology, and that will not be available to Canadians.

Why would the PMRA implement a Canadian-only requirement that provides no incentive for companies to bring technology to Canada or to keep products in the Canadian market?

● (1140)

Ms. Janice Charette: Let me take a crack at this, and then maybe Wendy can come in and help me.

I think it is fair to say that our approach on formulants is substantially harmonized with the United States, but again, it's not a black-and-white answer. I think it's true, if you look overall, our formulants approach would be considered to be more protective than that used in the United States. It is a new approach that has been put in place in Canada.

Under our new legislation, we've tried to balance a desire on the part of some parties who were looking for complete disclosure of formulants with the need to protect commercially confidential and obviously sensitive information. We have moved to an approach where we've gone through the process of looking at all the products that are considered formulants, trying to reduce that list down, working very closely with the United States, moving to the four-a-list process that I'm certain you're well aware of.

In Canada, there will be an additional labelling requirement. List two has to be listed, as well as allergens. We think that is appropriate in terms of being able to fulfill the mandate of the agency.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: Is my time up?

The Chair: No.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: Okay.

Where does the agency get its directive from, just Health Canada, or do the departments of agriculture and international trade provide some directive as well?

Ms. Janice Charette: The agency reports to the Minister of Health through the Deputy Minister of Health. There are memorandums of understanding, and the agency works in partnership and cooperation with other departments, including the Department of International Trade, Environment Canada, Agriculture Canada, DFO, and NRCan, but it is a reporting relationship to the Minister of Health.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: Do you not think it would be a better approach to include more dialogue with the agrifood and trade departments?

Ms. Janice Charette: I think what I tried to express, perhaps not sufficiently, is that from a reporting relationship perspective, it reports to the Minister of Health. There is a substantial amount of cooperation and work done in collaboration and partnership with those other departments, which is reflected in the memorandum of understanding.

I think the progress we've been able to make on minor use, for example, shows good progress in terms of the working relationship between Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the agency. But the agency was put together from a number of different departments. There was the view that by having all of the component parts together in one place, we'd be able to provide the best service for Canadians, including for growers.

That's the nature of the reporting relationship. I think the close working relationships and the cooperation are—

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: Unfortunately, you've been there for quite a few years now. From the time you've been there and the time to date, we've had the same concerns from day one. There doesn't seem to be any scale of improvement. When you speak to the producers, they are as frustrated as they've ever been.

It's frustrating for us as well. We come and listen to your presentations, and we have to go back and tell them all the good-news stories you're putting here. I'd love to spread the good-news stories, but there doesn't seem to be anything to spread.

Ms. Janice Charette: If there are particular areas....

I think one of the priorities the agency has been working on, and I tried to give you a sense of that in my remarks, is building relationships with growers—

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: It's not working.

Ms. Janice Charette: —making sure that we are open and responsive.

If there are proposals, whether it's on re-evaluations, in response to some of Mr. Anderson's concerns, or other areas where more can be done, I think we're very open to those kinds of proposals coming forward. If there are particular ideas or areas where we need to be doing a better job, we're open, and we will be responsive to those kinds of proposals.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will move to Mr. Angus, seven minutes.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Thank you very much.

I guess I would like to start off by asking some questions. One of the big tools we use in terms of pesticide control is antibiotics. I'm looking to find out who regulates that. Is that regulated by your department?

Ms. Janice Charette: Health Canada is responsible for the pre-market approval of therapeutic products, including prescription drugs, which would include antibiotics.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I don't know the numbers for Canada, but in the U.S. we have 22,000 kilograms a year being sprayed on fruit trees.

Ms. Janice Charette: Sorry, I'm talking about human therapeutic products.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I'm talking about pesticide control.

Ms. Janice Charette: I will defer to Wendy.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: In Canada we have one antibiotic that's registered as a pesticide. It's streptomycin, on apples.

We have been working with the growers and the registrant on this particular product. About three years ago we worked with the registrant and the growers to upgrade the label of that product to ensure more worker protection. The label is now at the same standard as that of the U.S.

We continue to work with the growers and registrants on looking for alternatives to this product.

● (1145)

Mr. Charlie Angus: I'm bringing it up because we've had a really large case of Vancomycin-resistant enterococco. People are blaming it on the use of avoparcin, which was never regulated in North America, and its heavy use in agriculture. There has been debate about whether it was illegally used in North America. It's a major concern, the use of antibiotics.

Can you give me any numbers on the streptomycin—how many kilograms per year, where it's being used, how it's being used?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: I can get you the approximate number of kilograms. I don't have the current number in my head.

It's primarily used in apple and pear production in Canada. It's a very important product for those producers, and we're well aware also of the concerns. That's why we've been working with them on alternatives, plus worker protection.

I will get the committee the approximate kilograms. It's not a large number.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you.

I note in here that you say there's a reluctance on the part of manufacturers to generate data to carry out risk assessment.

Ms. Janice Charette: I think what I was referring to was the fact that there are products for which there is a small market in this country, and that is why the minor-use program was put in place, in order to be able to bring products to market. There is a set of growers who require access to that, which is modeled on a U.S. process that has been in place, I believe, for about thirty years or so. Where a manufacturer may not see sufficient commercial benefit in bringing that product to market in Canada yet where there is still a demand on the part of growers to have access to it, how do we ensure we can make an informed regulatory decision on that product? That's what the minor-use program has.

We work in cooperation, then. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada does the trials in terms of the product, then we take that data, as we would from a pesticide company, and do the risk assessment for both human health and environmental exposure as well as efficacy.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I'm also concerned about trying to bring us a common North American NAFTA standard. We're talking about an across-the-board 25% reduction in trials. My concern is that it's one thing to talk about bringing it in line with the U.S. but another with Mexico. We've had nightmare stories about the conditions of farm workers and what they face. With my background in my church, I never ate grapes until I was almost 40 because of what had happened out in California. If we're going to first of all implement a 25% reduction and then go to a standard that's acceptable in Mexico, how are we going to turn around to Canadian consumers and ask them to trust us?

Ms. Janice Charette: To be clear, I referred to the research program that is under way, not a decision that has been taken, in terms of reducing by 25% the trials necessary in order to set MRLs on a NAFTA-wide basis. It is a research project that is under way and that is being done on a trilateral basis, and the results of that research will then inform a decision that will be taken by each of the three countries in terms of what volume of trials is required in order to set an MRL.

I think your point about the confidence in the regulatory processes and information on those other two countries is an important one. It's a critical underpinning of exactly all the work the NAFTA trilateral working group has been doing. In order for us to go through a joint review process with the United States, for example, there's been a significant amount of work done in order to ensure that in the same way they can rely on the integrity of our regulatory process and the data that's produced, we have to have the same kind of confidence. That process is under way for Mexico.

Wendy's been much more involved in those discussions, though, and can give you some more details.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Then I want to ask, who sits in on this to make sure, when we are bringing forward a standard protocol, that we're not going down to Mexico's level but that Mexico's coming up to the level our farmers work with?

● (1150)

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: I would like to make a couple of comments.

We've been working with the U.S. since pre-1996, and one of the first things we did was to do a parallel review with the U.S. to make sure we did things in a similar fashion. That was essentially our baseline for moving into joint reviews. What we've found as a result of our working so closely with the U.S. for so many years is that in fact we make better decisions because we're working together.

With regard to your concern about us moving to the level of Mexico, we are not going to be moving to a lowest common denominator. I know that has been the term that has been expressed. What we have found is that we're actually making better decisions by working together. I think it's fair to say we are working closely with Mexico, but they are not involved yet in the joint reviews.

As to the 25% reduction, based on the fact that we would be getting an enormous number of residue trials if all the trials for all the zones in Canada and the U.S. were produced, we're looking at whether that is going to give us a robust enough piece of information that we can reduce it by 25% and still have valid information. We would not be moving forward with that approach until we were certain the information was valid. We would be consulting on this approach.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Angus.

We'll now move to Mr. Bezan for five minutes.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): I'll just follow up on this joint review you're talking about and your being able to make better decisions. You're saying that as of September 30 there have been 55 registrations made. About how many submissions were there?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: It would be about 57.

Mr. James Bezan: So 55 out of 57 were actually registered.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Yes, and the two that didn't continue through were withdrawn by the registrant very early in the game, so it wasn't as if the decision was negative. They withdrew their products early.

Typically, what we find with joint reviews is that the registrations are positive and the MRLs are the same, and we make them very closely within our timelines—not completely, but I think the longest timeline we've missed was by 52 days.

Mr. James Bezan: So you're talking about 55 out of 57 since 1996. I find that number low, though, that in eight years all we've looked at is 57 registrations.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Yes, and I guess we may be doing ourselves a disservice because of the way we count our submissions. The number of submissions does not equate to the number of uses. The uses are far greater than that.

For example, I think there were 734 minor crop uses registered in 2002-03. The large bulk of those came from joint reviews. This last year there were 302 minor crop uses registered, and the majority of those came out of the joint review. So it's important to understand that the 55 represent an active ingredient, an end use product, and then quite a number of uses.

Ms. Janice Charette: We've given you some numbers today, and one has stuck, obviously, the 53, but I think what Wendy is painting is a slightly more comprehensive picture of the nature of work volumes under the joint work processes with the United States. I think it would be helpful if we came back to the committee with some more detailed information.

Mr. James Bezan: If you're going to get information like that, I'd like to know what the total number of chemicals used here is, whether it's full registration versus minor use or our registration versus the U.S.'s. But let's get hard data on what the discrepancy is, because if we're talking about having a policy here that is in sync with what's happening in the U.S., then let's take a look at how many farm-use chemicals we actually have available to us here versus what they have in the U.S.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: We publish, on about a six-month basis, the joint review update, and we can certainly provide you with that. It provides the information on the joint reviews, the end-use products, and the kinds of uses. We don't currently have that kind of information on all the registrations the U.S. would have that we don't have.

Mr. James Bezan: It's important that we do start putting together that information to make that comparison with the U.S. It comes back to what Rose-Marie was saying, that our farmers out there are thinking we're severely disadvantaged versus our American neighbours, and we want to know exactly what the discrepancy is.

● (1155)

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: We have a number of projects under way under NAFTA—one is on tomatoes and one is on pulses—looking at that very issue. This is a fairly big piece of work, and we're doing it on a pilot basis with tomatoes and pulses to see what the next useful steps would be. What I could provide the committee is the project plans for those two to give you an idea.

Mr. James Bezan: We'll take any information we can to continue to flesh that out. We're the ones who have to deal with producers on a day-to-day basis in our ridings, and we need to be able to talk intelligently to them about what the real shortfalls are in our system versus that of the U.S.

You also spent quite a bit of time promoting the idea of registering here in Canada to manufacturers in the U.S. You mention in here that you've been meeting with them. Why are they so reluctant to come and do their own research? We are now paying for it; we're subsidizing that research. Why is there such a big holdup in bringing these manufacturers onside?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Canada is a small market in the world when it comes to pesticides, particularly in the horticultural area. We are the biggest market, practically speaking, with respect to grains and oilseeds in the world, so we see those pesticides first, typically.

I think it's an important target to work with our companies, companies in the U.S., and companies more globally. This is really what we're trying to do, to understand better how they make their decisions globally and to help pass the message that if there are pieces of information that are not factual, we can make sure it's clear we have a regulatory system that's very similar to that of the U.S. We're prepared to work with them to see those molecules come to Canada, particularly reduced risk ones.

This is not a Canada-alone issue. Many countries in the world face very similar issues in the minor use area. Through both NAFTA and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, under which we have a pesticide working group, which I chair, we're looking at how we can work better together globally both on the regulatory side and in finding ways to work with industry. Our vision is really to have global coordination of companies so they can submit to a number of countries at the same time, not just the U.S. or Europe.

Mr. James Bezan: At the same time, you did say that—

The Chair: Your time has expired. We'll have another round.

Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, folks.

Before getting into some of the policy and efficiency areas.... I don't want to go into detail on this particular topic at the moment, but I do need to know what the hiring policy is for staff at the agency.

Ms. Janice Charette: Employees at the agency are public servants. The public service employment regulations and the Public Service Employment Act apply to the agency. It is not a separate employer. So the same rules, regulations, and legislation that apply to government departments apply in the agency.

Hon. Wayne Easter: That's all I need to know at the moment on that one. Thank you.

Mr. Angus asked the question on the apple industry. I had a meeting with the apple growers the other day, as well. They were very concerned about streptomycin, about not having it available. But they're concerned, as well, that the policy seems to be to renewed from year to year—they'll get a year's renewal. In their industry, if they're going to make the investment into these new varieties, and that's the only product that will do the job for them, they're looking at a 20-year investment. They can't make that investment based on one-year renewals.

Can you give me any indication when that might change? What we're seeing, I think, is a damper on economic investment in the agricultural community because of the regulatory regime at PMRA. Is there any way of dealing with that so they can have some confidence in making the investments they want to make?

● (1200)

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: We've been working very closely with both the apple industry and the registrants on this issue. Typically, the growers and the registrant meet with PMRA—the chief registrar on this issue—probably twice a year. The product currently has a temporary registration, which under our current legislation is limited to a year. We're working with the growers and the registrant to try to make sure they have access to this product on a regular basis.

In a recent meeting with the Horticultural Council we committed to waiting until the U.S. is ready to re-evaluate this product so we can work with the U.S. to re-evaluate it. They plan to re-evaluate it, I believe, in 2006.

I guess what I'm saying is we will continue to work with the growers to help make sure they have access to this on a regular basis, work with the U.S. on the re-evaluation. So we're working together on that with our U.S. partner.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I just want to emphasize the point, though, of 2006. We're in 2004. If I'm an apple producer and I'm going to my bank to borrow the kind of money to make an investment for 20 years, and I say to my banker we're sure of this product till 2006, and after that I have no assurances.... If you can't protect the value of your crop, you have huge problems. I just want to make that point and emphasize it.

One of the complaints I get consistently.... We do get a lot of complaints that products aren't available in Canada, but they are in the United States.

Are there instances when we're not allowed to use a product on a vegetable or a crop in this country, and the United States and/or Mexico may be able to use that product in their country, and that vegetable or crop from the United States or Mexico ends up on our shelves? Are there those kinds of instances?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: The requirement in Canada, as in most developed countries, is that if imported produce is coming in there has to be an import tolerance set, or an import MRL. That means if an insecticide used on bananas is going to be shipped to Canada and that insecticide is not registered here in Canada, the registrant of that product would have to submit toxicology and residue data to Canada. The PMRA, as the regulatory agency, would review that information and if the dietary risks were acceptable would set a maximum residue limit under the Food and Drugs Act.

Currently, however, we have a default MRL under the Food and Drugs Act that is set at 0.1. What that means is if that very same banana is coming into Canada with an insecticide and the residues are thought to be less than 0.1, there would be no requirement for that submission of data, the review, and the setting of an MRL.

The PMRA consulted on proposing to change that 0.1 default level in 2003. We received a number of comments, most of which were positive, but not all. There was a lot of concern about the how. We're currently—

Hon. Wayne Easter: I'm sorry to interrupt, but we don't grow many bananas here. My question relates.... Let me ask it directly.

Are there any products, crop or vegetable, coming from the United States or Mexico, ending up on our selves in Canada, which would make American and Mexican producers more competitive than ours because our farmers are not allowed to use the same product? Are there any products on our shelves in those instances? If there are, we have to find a way of making sure you're a heck of a lot faster than you currently are, or our farmers are at a competitive disadvantage, and we cannot allow that to continue.

Are there any of those products on our shelves?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Yes, there would be.

I was using bananas as an illustration only—if they can come in under 0.1.

● (1205)

The Chair: The time has expired. We will explore that question further as we go through the meeting.

Mr. Gaudet, five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

You cast your department's mission in a very positive light. Yet, I never see you working with producers. We want a profitable, first-rate agricultural industry, but we'll be facing a big problem if we fail to work with farmers.

You've painted a nice picture of farming. However, you never hear of the government meeting with producers and working with them. Why aren't you working with them?

Ms. Janice Charette: The document no doubt neglects to mention this. As I stated in my opening remarks, one of the PMRA's priorities is to work closely with growers.

[*English*]

Maybe I could ask Wendy if she wants to....

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Yes, I'd be pleased to answer that.

We work with growers whenever we possibly can. In fact, some of my people came back just last night from a meeting with the tomato growers. It wasn't in Quebec; it was in southwestern Ontario. It was a very good meeting on understanding what their issues are and looking at ways to improve our working relationship with them.

So PMRA is very interested in establishing closer working relationships with growers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: If you met only once with growers, surely you weren't able to come to an agreement.

There are environmental groups in Quebec — I'm not sure if it's the case elsewhere — that include agronomists who help growers every day. They are out in the fields at 4:30 or 5 o'clock in the morning checking the pesticides. Why are you not working with these environmental groups? I just don't understand it. There must be groups like this in Ontario and in the other provinces, since they do exist in Quebec.

I don't get the sense that you are too close to growers who are currently weathering a very serious crisis. You continue to impede their production efforts. What's more, the registration process appears to be far less complex in the US. Take, for instance, this spring's asparagus crop in Quebec and Ontario. The Americans and Mexicans got their crop in ahead of our growers who were left without any buyers for their produce.

The same thing happened with this fall's cabbage crop. I won't say that everything depends on your intervention, but surely something is being done wrong. If our crops come in later than those of other countries, is it because growers cannot use certain fertilizers that are not banned elsewhere? I don't know and I'd like you to answer the question for me.

[*English*]

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: There are two things. First, we do work with growers and we are working more closely with growers. We have a number of new programs in place, both agriculture and ourselves, where we're working with growers closely. This is beyond the minor-use program.

I guess on the issue of new pesticides to Canada, we have a number of mechanisms, and that includes joint reviews. That includes the joint reviews for minor uses. We continue to work with the pesticide industry to encourage it to come to Canada, and we certainly would be interested in any views that you and this committee have on how better to do this.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: In your presentation, you talked about rationalization. Putting together 30,000 pages of data in order to have a product registered must be quite a job.

Ms. Janice Charette: As I explained, that used to be the case, but no longer, since submissions are now in an electronic format. We no longer require a truck to haul the data.

Mr. Roger Gaudet: I agree with you there.

Ms. Janice Charette: This approach is more efficient.

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Quebec's *Association des services en horticulture ornementale* maintained that the Americans had access to more products than we did, because certain products registered in the US have not been registered for use here in Canada. Why are we lagging so far behind? That was the crux of my earlier question. If few products are registered because 30,000 pages of data is first required, then we have a problem and our growers are ultimately paying the price.

● (1210)

[*English*]

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: To be clear, the 30,000 pages we would get in Canada would be the same type of size of submission that any other country would get for a brand-new active, or brand-new pesticide to be used on food. Canada isn't demanding 30,000 pages and the U.S. isn't. We would be getting the same size of information.

As to the second part, because Canada is substantially a smaller market, particularly in the horticultural area, companies have not traditionally come to Canada first. The joint reviews have allowed companies to come to Canada and the U.S. at the same time. Our timelines for registration are not longer than those of the U.S. It's really related to when we get the submissions from the companies. What we're doing is working very hard with the companies and with the U.S. and other countries to try to make sure that Canada is first on their list, or at least at the same time as the U.S., when they come to North America.

The Chair: Your time has expired. We'll move to Mr. Kilgour for five minutes.

Hon. David Kilgour (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, may I give four minutes of the five to Ms. Ur?

The Chair: That's your prerogative.

Hon. David Kilgour: I might say, Ms. Sexsmith and Ms. Charette, everybody around the table has expressed enormous resentment and concern on behalf of producers with the way you do your jobs. I have the impression, and please tell me I'm wrong, that you'll go out of here and say "That's over, we don't have to go back and see those people for a while" and you're going to do nothing about what has been suggested to you here. Am I wrong on that?

Ms. Janice Charette: Mr. Kilgour, I hope that I indicated an openness, if there were particular areas, proposals, ideas, to pursue them.

Hon. David Kilgour: I heard you say that about six times, but I strongly have the feeling that you'll go out of here and do absolutely nothing about what happened today.

Ms. Janice Charette: Well, you have an undertaking from us.

Hon. David Kilgour: Okay.

Ms. Janice Charette: And I do believe we're invited back here on a regular basis.

Hon. David Kilgour: Every year, I gather, the answers are the same. For how many years?

This is on behalf of producers in Kenya. They tell me they can sell their vegetables in Europe but they can't sell their vegetables in Canada because of the pesticides. I take it it's you. How come Europeans can eat vegetables grown in Kenya but Canadians can't? That's my question.

Ms. Janice Charette: In this country we set maximum residue limits in terms of the food—

Hon. David Kilgour: We have all the background. Just give me the substance of the answer. My colleague has questions she wants answered.

Ms. Janice Charette: I was actually trying to do that.

The point is that we allow in this country products to be imported if they are safe, and that's our job.

Hon. David Kilgour: I can't make it any simpler—

Ms. Janice Charette: Why is it different from the Europeans?

Hon. David Kilgour: The Europeans will eat their vegetables but you folks think Canadians shouldn't eat their vegetables. Doesn't that seem a little stupid, aside from being quite difficult for the people with 50% unemployment in Kenya?

Ms. Janice Charette: Go ahead, Wendy.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Canada wouldn't have a particular issue with Kenyan vegetables in general. It may be that the registrants haven't come to Canada to have the MRLs set here for those vegetables and they have in fact been set in Europe.

Hon. David Kilgour: I think that's obviously what's happened. My point, again, I think is lost in the discussion.

Ms. Janice Charette: I'm not trying to be unresponsive, Mr. Kilgour—

Hon. David Kilgour: I've heard enough, thanks, Ms. Charette, please.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: I think Ms. Sexsmith said you had incentives. I'd like to pose this question to you then. Do you offer any incentives to companies to register their product in Canada? For example, I understand the United States provides an extra year of data protection if a company registers in the United States. They register for three years and the United States provides them with an extra year. Do we do those kinds of things here?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Currently we have a data protection agreement that is not in law, because our current act does not support that type of regulation. Under the new act, we will be able to have a data protection regulation. We're currently working with the companies to develop that.

I do not believe, however, that.... We haven't completed our discussions. Some of those issues have been put on the table with regard to further data protection. I believe, though, that the data protection you are referring to relates to registrations related to minor uses and major uses in the U.S.

● (1215)

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: Ms. Charette, you said you had an undertaking. I was pleased to hear you say that.

My question to you is, what is the role of PMAC?

Ms. Janice Charette: I think if you look in the documents that have been tabled with the committee you will see it's an advisory committee that provides advice to the minister to really try to foster communication and dialogue among stakeholders, including growers as a....

I have the membership with me here. We have a new chair of PMAC, Mr. Ambrose Hearn, who has been appointed, I guess, probably in the last six months, I think that's fair to say, Wendy. There's a cross-section of representatives on the council. It was very involved with shaping the new legislation and is involved now with the operations and the implementation of the act.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: I understand that the chair of PMAC wanted to define the job and the role of the group and to create a list of priorities the group hoped to accomplish. I understand that was never done because the rest of the group did not believe it was necessary. Is that true?

Ms. Janice Charette: Let me turn it over to Wendy. I have not had a conversation with Mr. Hearn about this.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: I'm not sure I understand your question explicitly. What came out of the last PMAC meeting was a number of recommendations that are currently being reviewed by the membership and will then go to the minister as advice. There were a number of action items that are in the process of being undertaken as a result of the last meeting.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: He was just looking for goals to be established and that seemed to not be a necessity. I find that a little unbusinesslike.

If PMAC provides recommendations and advice to the Minister of Health and PMRA, I believe they should at least have some kind of qualified knowledge or understanding of the issues related to pesticides. Their advice is obviously very valuable. That being said, is there any criterion for individuals who are hired to give this information back to the minister or to your agency? Do they take a course, say, a certified crop science consultant course, so they know what they're talking about? You would need that kind of information. I understand you can't be an expert on everything.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Are you talking about the members of the council?

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: Yes.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: The members of the council are chosen by the minister looking through the wide breadth of stakeholders who are involved in the pesticide activity. That naturally brings to the table people who are very closely involved with pesticides potentially, like growers, as well as environmental groups and consumer advocacy organizations.

The Chair: Your time has expired.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: Have you ever thought of ensuring these kinds of courses go to these individuals?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: One of the things that we actually proposed at the last PMAC meeting was an orientation course—actually, not a course so much, but an orientation. The council thought that was a good idea, so we'll put that in place. I think that goes with what you're talking about.

The Chair: Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you.

Could you tell me what triggers the re-evaluation?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Currently, PMRA has committed to re-evaluating all of the pesticides registered pre-1995. So that was a block related to our enhanced re-evaluation program.

Under the new Pest Control Products Act, all pesticides will have to be re-evaluated every 15 years. In addition, if an adverse effect report—which is something that will be in place under the new Pest Control Products Act—comes in and signals that there's an issue with the pesticide, that could trigger a re-evaluation. Information from other countries indicating that there may be an issue with the pesticide could trigger a re-evaluation. Or it could be triggered by knowledge that comes to us from other government departments, or our own looking at information and realizing we may have an issue. So there's a whole schema of approaches that are in place to initiate re-evaluation.

● (1220)

Mr. Charlie Angus: How many re-evaluations have been done so far, and how many have been flagged as worthy of pulling off the market?

Ms. Janice Charette: I think we've done 40% as of September 30. I think we gave some data to the committee on this. We've completed 40% of those.

Wendy, do you want to just remind me of....

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Yes.

I don't have my little table in front of me, but you have been provided with that information, I do believe. Here, I'll just actually go through it with you.

We've re-evaluated 161 in total out of the 401 that have to be re-evaluated because they're pre-1995. Of those, 71 have been withdrawn by the registrants, by the companies. This really means that there's been a company decision that they're not interested in supporting those products in Canada any longer.

There have been eight proposed for phase-out, or were phased out. Then there are a large number, somewhere in the range of 79, where registrations are continuing with some modifications, and three that are continuing with no changes.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Every now and then we get an issue in the media in terms of health concerns being raised. What kind of protocol do you have in place? If there's public concern over one of these pesticides, who sits at the table? What kind of planning process do you have in place to deal with consumer groups, health groups, and growers, or do you have that?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Yes. I'm trying to understand what kinds of issues. Do you mean an issue raised to us about a particular pesticide?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Yes, pesticide on an apple, which mothers aren't going to buy for their kids for school and we have to do a review of it. What do you do at that point?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: If in fact there's scientific evidence that there's an issue related to a particular pesticide, we would initiate a special review. Essentially, that would mean flagging the fact that we're doing this to the company to make sure they know. Then we would move forward with making sure we have all the information we need, review it, and take a decision.

It depends on what the issue is as to how fast that could happen. If it's a complete review, that could take a while. If it's an issue where imminent risk of harm is substantiated, either there's information from another country or the U.S. has let us know there's this particular issue, it's real, we would action right away.

Mr. Charlie Angus: In most cases we don't get something of immediate risk. My sense, though, is when we have instances when there's lingering doubt, there's a campaign building and it does take a long time before it gets to a regulatory review, but once that happens it's done a lot of damage to growers, to consumer confidence. Do you have an action plan for those events, or do you just review it as it comes?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: No. If in fact there needed to be a faster review, we would move it up in the priority. An example would be the cosmetic-use pesticides where we know there has been consumer concern about the use of pesticides used in lawn and landscapes. We committed to re-evaluate those at a faster pace. We have completed three of them. There are four more on their way and one more we will do after that.

I think it's important to say that these are not simple evaluations. They do take some time.

The Chair: Mr. Miller.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to follow up on what Mr. Easter was asking. There was a question that I had down here.

You mentioned there are a number of products the Americans have that basically we don't for fruit and vegetables, that kind of thing. I would like you to name some of them and I would like to know the quantity, the exact numbers. You may not have the numbers today, but I would officially request that this committee receive them ASAP.

The Chair: Noted. The chair will require of you people to provide those. If they are available, would you provide those?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: I have to say they're not available.

● (1225)

The Chair: They're not available?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: No. We will try to provide you with something. It is not a simple—

Mr. Larry Miller: Excuse me, I don't want something; I want an accurate list. I don't see why I shouldn't be able to have the names of them and the numbers.

Ms. Janice Charette: I think what Wendy tried to explain earlier is that there is work under way on a joint basis with the United States with respect to tomatoes and pulses in particular. In terms of getting the kind of information I think you are looking for, that information is not available, but I believe Wendy indicated earlier she would provide you with the project plans, which will make that information available. That is the objective of the work that is under way.

Mr. Larry Miller: So we are going to end up with it.

I want to clarify, too, that I did mean Mexico as well.

Ms. Janice Charette: Let me just ask Wendy about this.

Is Mexico involved in that work right now?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Indirectly. They would be involved indirectly, but we will have a look. They are involved in the tomato project. They are not involved in the pulse project. Tomatoes are a commodity that is grown in the three countries and pulses less so. Certainly on the tomato one there would be a Mexican piece.

Mr. Larry Miller: Further to that, of the numbers that you haven't given us yet, percentage-wise how many are currently under review or consideration for use here in Canada? I would also like that information.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: I actually don't have that information. We can certainly provide to you the information where the U.S. and ourselves are reviewing things jointly. We would have to see if the U.S. can give us what they are in fact reviewing that we might not have.

Mr. Larry Miller: You must have some idea being in the business, a pretty close idea of the number. Would you say that half of them, as a guesstimate, are under review, three-quarters of them, all of them?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Where we do have figures is on the reduced risk chemicals, because that has been an expressed interest of this committee, and there are a little less than 70% of those reduced risk chemicals registered in Canada that are registered in the U.S. We have been tracking those on purpose because of the expressed interest of this committee.

We can provide that to you with the uses. We are just working on the uses now. We can certainly provide that information to you, but it really relates to U.S. and Canada, because Mexico doesn't really have a reduced risk approach.

Mr. Larry Miller: I look forward to receiving that as soon as possible.

The new Pest Control Products Act has not yet come into effect, though it received royal assent in December 2002. Is the PMRA fully operational in terms of this new act? If it's not, when will it be? I would like to know the status of the regulations for the act. How many people do you expect are going to be hired to implement the new act?

Ms. Janice Charette: I will start with the response in terms of the status of the regulations.

In my remarks I indicated that there is a series of regulations that have to actually be passed before the new act can come into force. There are presently three—I think that's right—of the different regulatory packages that have been put into the *Canada Gazette*. One is for consultation. There are two remaining pieces that have to come forward. Once those regulatory pieces have come through, then we will be in a position to have the act come into force. Our working timeframe at this point is to be able to have the act come into force some time in the winter of 2005.

Mr. Larry Miller: How are those regulations going to affect agriculture producers?

Ms. Janice Charette: I think I have to give you that answer on a regulatory package basis.

The sales reporting data will allow us to have information about the actual market volumes for the pesticides on the market, which may be of interest to growers. The adverse effects reporting I think will be protection for workers in the agricultural industry and their families as well. I'll turn to the expert for the third one.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: The third one is the safety information provided to workers who are working with pesticides. Potentially, that is a positive for large farms where you have growers working closely with pesticides.

Mr. Larry Miller: More often than not it's the producer himself.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Yes. Some of the areas of the new act that I know are of interest to growers.... Part of the expediting of reviews for reduced risk products was entrenched in the new act, and we are already doing that. The second piece that I think is of interest to growers is that under the new act we will be required to put up some but not all of the application information that we receive. Growers will be able to see what the submissions are for. When they come into the agency, that information is currently not routinely available.

Some of the things we've already implemented relating to the new act—because they've been implemented by policy and are being codified in the new act—include similar safety provisions that were implemented in the U.S. in 1997. That relates to cumulative and aggregate exposure assessments as well as extra protection for children. The formulants program is part of the related activities to the new act, and that is in place, as we have heard. So those are some of the key issues.

The number of people who were hired—and that hiring has already happened, about two years ago—is somewhere around 130. We can get accurate numbers if I'm misspeaking here. That was done some years ago, and that's why my memory may not be accurate; if it isn't, we will make that correction.

● (1230)

Mr. Larry Miller: I'd like that number exactly, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Ms. Rivard.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard: From the very beginning of this meeting, you've been talking to us about tomato and pepper crops. Do you also work with broccoli and cauliflower growers?

[*English*]

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: We would, but we don't necessarily at this point have a specific project with the broccoli and cauliflower growers. We would be most interested in working with them. If we're talking these types of plants.... I know canola is different—it's a related plant—but we have worked for many years with the canola growers on a big project. We would be very interested in working with the broccoli and cauliflower growers. They can get in touch with us and we would be happy to work with them more closely.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard: Is the new PCPA fully operational, in so far as the use of pest control products is concerned? If not, when will the legislation be fully implemented?

Ms. Janice Charette: We hope the legislation will come into force in the winter of 2005, once some regulatory changes have been made.

[*English*]

[*Translation*]

Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard: Do you work with growers to ascertain what effect pesticide use can ultimately have, on animal products as well as on consumption? For example, it's a known fact that the incidence of cancer is greater in some areas. Do you take that into consideration? Are laboratory workers focussing on this fact? The public is becoming increasingly aware of cancer rates. In some regions that are home to large market garden growers, cancer rates are higher than they are elsewhere. Did you take all of these facts into account in your studies?

Ms. Janice Charette: I'll ask Wendy to field that question.

[*English*]

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: I want to make sure I understand your question. You're asking if we work closely with researchers and are knowledgeable about the research that would be available on cancer and cancer-causing pesticides. Is that the sense of the question?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard: Yes, but some research needs to be done to improve the situation. I want to know if you are working with them in an effort to improve things.

[*English*]

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: We do not do that kind of research. PMRA is a regulatory agency. The information that we receive is generated by the pesticide companies according to stringent data requirements and international protocols.

We would review that information to look to see if there are cancer end points in those studies that we receive, and we would certainly work with researchers in the U.S., Canada, and around the world who are knowledgeable about cancer-causing molecules and how one should be assessing these pieces of information. Just to be clear, we don't do the research ourselves, but it is really important that the toxicologists we have on staff stay current with the science, so they work with toxicologists who may do research in universities all over the world.

● (1235)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard: If I understand you correctly, you're telling me that you do work with these individuals.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Yes.

Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard: Thank you. I have nothing further, Mr. Chairman.

[*English*]

The Chair: Time has expired. I'm going to go to Mr. Anderson.

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Chair, there are a couple of issues I would like to ask about on behalf of some of the aerial applicators. You require a whole pile of additional studies and tests, compared to the United States, in order for them to get application to their labels. It often adds a lot of expense and time to the application process.

Basically each product has the same toxicity and impact on the environment. I think there has been the suggestion out of the prairie provinces that products be registered based on tests done on active ingredient, not on the application. I understand the EPA doesn't normally require extra testing for aerial application.

I'm wondering, why do you request that, especially in light of the fact that it makes Canadians farmers even less competitive than they are with their American counterparts? We've discussed that issue a few times.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: With respect to the issue of aerial application, we do require a small number of studies—and I can get the committee the exact number—to be able to establish the impact on the environment from aerial application as well as to establish protective buffer zones.

We do know that this is an issue for growers, and in a recent meeting that I had with the Canadian Horticultural Council we did discuss the issue of buffer zones. We're working on a more flexible approach for the setting of buffer zones, and we'll be working, and have been working, with the provinces on this issue, because the provinces also use buffer zones to mitigate environmental risk.

Mr. David Anderson: Could I address those two issues?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Sure.

Mr. David Anderson: I don't want to use all my time on this issue.

You talked about a small number of studies. Apparently it took Monsanto over ten years to get a permanent aerial application label for Roundup. That's not a small number of studies or a short period of time. How does that coincide with what you said about the small number of studies required?

In regard to buffer zones, on virtually all chemicals you could set maybe two or three buffer zones, depending on the chemical, and that would cover all chemicals being applied by aerial application. You don't need a different buffer zone for each one.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: I have a comment on the Monsanto issue. Time taken to generate a study does not indicate necessarily that it is many studies. The second issue is that the size of the buffer zone reflects the toxicology of the particular pesticide as well as what it is you're trying to protect. Not all pesticides have the same type of toxicity related to killing fish, hurting plants or windbreaks, or that kind of thing.

At the same time, though, we do recognize that this is a concern for growers. It is a concern for other stakeholders with regard to protecting the environment, and it is a concern for the provinces. What we're trying to do is work closely with the provinces, and then we will be working with all of our stakeholders, including growers, to look at this more flexible approach, which we hope may in fact be seen as a positive step.

Mr. David Anderson: The aerial applicators have come to you, or they feel they've come, and offered basically their expertise in application in things like calibration and efficacy of product, and they feel you've shown very little interest in working with them. Why would that be?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: I'm not sure why they would reflect that. We meet with the aerial applicators at least once a year, if not more frequently. In fact, we have had just recently some people out west working with the calibration issue. So we work as closely as we can with these stakeholders, but it's important to point out that it's the companies that give us the information, not the aerial applicators.

Mr. David Anderson: I'm interested in your comment about how a ten-year study doesn't mean that it was necessarily a large study. What are you implying with that? It may not have been a large study, but it certainly took an awfully long time.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Yes. What I'm merely trying to say is if we have a data requirement and it isn't filled for ten years, that doesn't mean it wasn't filled appropriately for ten years. That doesn't mean it was a large study or many studies; it just means we didn't get what we needed.

● (1240)

Mr. David Anderson: You need a fair amount of information, then, or what? The objection here is since it's not required in the United States, they don't feel they should have to be doing a whole pile of additional work in Canada.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: I really can't speak for Monsanto here. I'm familiar with this situation. We do require some information in order to be able to establish buffer zones. That information is set out, and all registrants in Canada would have to provide that. Most of them do, and in a timely fashion.

Mr. David Anderson: It's the most popularly used chemical in western Canada; I think you'd have had the information.

The Chair: We will go now to Mrs. Ur.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: I believe, Ms. Sexsmith, you were saying that the United States, Canada, and Mexico were working on the tomato product and you said you were very pleased with the progress on that application.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: No, with respect, what I was talking about was a NAFTA-initiated project to look at tomatoes in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, and to look at the products and the MRLs available for tomatoes in the three countries, to use that as a pilot to analyse where the differences are and whether there are issues related to those differences.

So it wasn't a product; it was a broader issue looking at, really, all of the pesticides registered in each country and focusing on the MRLs. Because the idea of the project, using this as a pilot, was to look to see if in fact there are trade irritant issues related to some of the potential differences that exist on registration status in each of the countries.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: It was my understanding that you received this information roughly 18 months ago and you started working on it two or three weeks ago, or the file came to you two or three weeks ago. It went through two or three people in PMRA.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: I'm not sure if we're talking at cross-purposes. What I'm talking about is a project. It was initiated some time ago, and we've been working with growers in all three countries on this.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: That was 18 months ago, and you're just looking at it.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: No, we've been looking at it all the way through the piece. I think one of the pieces potentially that you're getting at with me is—

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: Three different people have worked on this since you started with it.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: That's certainly possible, and there would be many more people in the U.S. working on this as well.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: Yes, three people worked on it, but it wasn't until the last two to three weeks that actually someone started working on it.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: I don't think that's true, but that's fine.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: The United States was going to pull out until the Canadian farmers went and exercised their great concern as to what was happening here, and that's when things started to move. I find that rather uncomfortable, coming from the farmers once again. Their hands are tied, and this happens continually.

Also, I have another question before I run out of time. Would your agency consider extending the scope of URMUR in order to attract more products and companies to provide growers with the tools they require in a more timely fashion?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: On the tomato issue, just to be clear, what we were waiting for from the Canadian tomato growers was a letter of interest to participate in this project, which we have had now for some time.

On the URMUR issue—for the committee, this is "user requested minor use registration", which is a program that was put in place some years ago to provide to Canada a 12-month review period for new pesticides—if all the reviews were provided from another country where it was recently registered and it was sponsored by a user group, what we have said is we'd be happy to work with grower groups on looking at what else we could do to attract new pesticides to Canada. We have a sort of pilot project in the works right now that we're treating as a pilot, so if there were some specific interests or issues you would like to put on the table with us, we would certainly discuss them.

● (1245)

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: You indicated that the one-year evaluation service is the standard for URMURs. I've had information that for this type of regular submission 27 months is basically the turnaround time, not the 12 months you're speaking of. There seems to be a discrepancy between your timing and what I'm hearing from the producers.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: I guess what I would like from you are specific examples. Then we can sit down with the grower group, yourself, and the registrant and talk about those, so that we can make sure we have the facts.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: The thing is—and this is where I go back—people do not want to come to the agency anymore, because they're very frustrated, and so their venue is through the committee to try to find some solutions, so that we don't have to have these kinds of discussions every six months but can have a more positive discussion.

I had another group through this week. Monsanto, for instance, can't go out if there's something that comes through in the media as a challenge on a product, because it looks as if they're a bit biased about a concern that is raised by the public.

How much work does PMRA put into communication of science-based information to correct the misinformation, should there be misinformation? Do you do any of that to alleviate concerns among the public?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Yes, we actively communicate, particularly when there are issues, and we are working towards a more proactive approach. We communicate routinely on issues.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Gaudet.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

How many people are employed at the PMRA?

Ms. Janice Charette: As of November 1, 2004, the Agency had a staff of 491, 68 per cent of whom worked in a scientific capacity of some kind.

Mr. Roger Gaudet: I don't understand. Earlier, you stated that no products had been registered in the past six months. Why is that? Did the employees go on strike?

Ms. Janice Charette: I was referring to the joint review process. I can quote some other figures for you. During the fiscal year that began on April 30, the PMRA received a total of 1,731 submissions and made 1,490 regulatory decisions. That's a summary of the Agency's activities since the start of the fiscal year.

Mr. Roger Gaudet: You say that you often meet with producers via your regular meetings with producers' association. Who actually meets with them? Who is getting together exactly for these meetings?

Ms. Janice Charette: I'll let Wendy answer the question.

[*English*]

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: We meet with growers at many levels. We meet with the Canadian Horticultural Council and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. We have people in the regions who meet with individual growers or grower groups on a regular basis. We work with our provincial counterparts, who of course work with growers very closely. So we meet with growers at many levels.

What I would like to say is we would like to work with them more closely on some of the new projects we have in place, and some we have just finished. For example, a Quebec project we were involved in allowed us to work with the cranberry growers all across Canada, and that really meant Quebec, B.C., and the east. Some of my agency people were working very directly with growers in Quebec on that issue. That is just one example.

● (1250)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Does their opinion count for anything? We need a sustainable, environmentally friendly and robust agricultural industry. We mustn't be working at cross-purposes with growers, otherwise the situation will be untenable.

[*English*]

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Yes, of course we take the growers' views and concerns and issues into consideration. I think Janice Charette's remarks tried to put a few of those cases on the table where we have heard issues, and we're reacting to them as much as possible.

I guess the other comment I would make is it's really important that we work with both the growers and the pesticide industry. The pesticide industry are the groups that generate these pesticides and the data that supports them in most cases, and so to work effectively with growers we need to work also with that pesticide industry. That's really the type of working relationship we're working on building, because for us to meet with a grower and to be able to react to their issue if it involves a pesticide, we need to have the pesticide industry at the table, because they're the providers essentially, if you will, of those pesticides.

So it's a three-way relationship we need, and we need to build better.

The Chair: Mr. Anderson and Mr. Miller, would you share your time and whatever time it takes to...?

Mr. Larry Miller: I will start off, Mr. Chairman.

After the new act was given royal assent in 2002, your budgeting from then to 2003-2004 went up between $8 million and $9 million.

I guess where I'm leading on that is it appears to me this increase went solely to implementing the act. I want to know for sure whether that is true.

In the future, once the act's in place, do you perceive that we'll still get the same amount of funding for it?

My point, and the reason I'm asking this, is that to me the increase in budget should be going to more efficiency in getting these products approved for agricultural producers so they can compete on a world market.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Your observation is correct, that a lot of the resources we received went into and go into the development and implementation of the new act.

However, there were resources that did go directly into the review of reduced-risk products. The $4 million we received related to minor use goes directly into the timely review of minor use and reduced-risk pesticides. That's one piece that goes.

Then the other piece is resources we received related to the implementation of reduced-risk strategies. Half of those resources go into the review of reduced-risk pesticides.

Mr. Larry Miller: A timely review of any application should be a normal process. It shouldn't take more money or a change in strategy or policy.

I guess what I'm hearing is that there really is not any improvement at all. It's just basically that the money all went toward implementation and nothing else.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Well, the resources were put to reviewing reduced-risk pesticides faster, and that has been implemented. So, for example, if the review timeline for a conventional chemical pesticide is 18 months, the review timeline we have for reduced risk pesticides is 15 months. That is an improvement in the timelines.

So the answer is you are getting more timely reviews with those extra resources.

Mr. Larry Miller: Thank you.

Ms. Janice Charette: And the minor use program wasn't in existence prior, so these are new resources for a new process.

Mr. David Anderson: I want to ask a couple of questions on some data you just gave a minute ago. You said you had 1,700—I assume this is applications for registration—in the fiscal year and 1,490 that you had completed. What were those figures?

Ms. Janice Charette: We had 1,731 submissions.

Mr. David Anderson: For what?

Ms. Janice Charette: It was for a variety of categories, whether for new actives, different uses.... I think that's correct, Wendy?

● (1255)

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Yes.

Mr. David Anderson: And you completed 1,490?

Ms. Janice Charette: Yes, 1,490 decisions were made.

Mr. David Anderson: How many of those were approved?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Typically it's about 85% to 87%.

Mr. David Anderson: So what does that put it at? Would it be 1,000, or 1,100?

Ms. Janice Charette: Fourteen hundred.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Yes.

Mr. David Anderson: How many of those are minor-use products?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: For minor use, altogether there were 30 minor crop uses registered in the last six months.

Mr. David Anderson: Okay, that's not since fiscal year, but—

Ms. Janice Charette: Yes, it is.

Mr. David Anderson: What were the other thousand then? Were these mainline crop products? What are you doing?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: We have a very structured submission process. It's segmented into new pesticides, new uses, small changes, minor uses, and some other types of submissions, and then research permits. So the count relates to all of the submissions we would receive in that segmented approach.

Mr. David Anderson: Can we get that breakdown? Since you don't have the numbers here, would you mind giving us the specific breakdown and delivering it to the committee, please? Then we'll have a better understanding and maybe next time we can nail that down.

Just in conclusion, I've been here before and you folks have come through before. I hear the same sincerity in your voices that I did before, but the same problems continue.

We have problems with joint review. That's obvious, I think. We have problems with the re-evaluation process, where people are losing chemicals that they need and the new ones aren't there to replace them. We have problems with turnaround times, as Rose-Marie pointed out. And we have huge problems with producer satisfaction and industry satisfaction out there. Those are the ongoing issues that have been on the table at least the four years that I've been here and I think several years before that.

I have the same concern I've had before. You sound sincere, but I can't tell if you're going back to your offices in tears because you haven't been able to quite do the job as well as we'd like, or if you're going back there and sitting down and having a glass of whiskey and a chuckle about the agriculture committee. You have a lot of work to do to gain some credibility with the agriculture committee; it continues. You have the same job to do in the agriculture community.

Ms. Janice Charette: Before I turn to Wendy to answer, this is my first appearance before the agriculture committee. I have listened with interest to the concerns and issues that have been expressed, particularly in terms of responsiveness, and the kinds of concerns that have been raised in terms of the replacement products on re-evaluation, and the turnaround times. I think we will go back, neither to cry nor to drink whiskey—although perhaps later in the evening we might revisit one of those decisions—to look at what as an agency we need to be doing to address the concerns you're raising.

There are different views. About those, what we have to do, I think, is make sure that we have forums for open, transparent, and timely discussions, and a willingness to respond to valid issues that are raised. My undertaking to you is if there are particular areas or specific proposals you think the agency should be more responsive to, then I'm willing to look at those. We will go away and think about and talk about some of the macro-relationship issues that you've raised and try to address where improvements might be made.

I'll also turn it over to Wendy, who is the acting executive director.

The Chair: Okay, that time has expired. I see the clock is at ten to one. We have another ten minutes to conclude this meeting.

Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to come back to your point, Ms. Charette. I know how you're looking at it, and I don't question your sincerity, but I've been asked to look into the reason for the long-term decline in farm income, why it's happening.

George Brinkman told us at a CFA symposium that the return from the market to producers last year was minus $2 billion. Now, if you're a farmer out there—and all I want to do is paint a face on this.... There's a farmer and a farm family somewhere—maybe an apple producer who can't get streptomycin—who's wondering how he can improve his productivity so that maybe he can turn around some income for his family for the next 20 years.

You're not the whole factor by any means. You're a very small factor in that equation. But I'll tell you, farmers are finding it tough. If somebody in your office has to work 18 hours a day, that doesn't bother me a bit, because there are farmers out there working 20 hours a day and losing their whole life's work. I'm saying that you guys have to get your act together.

I go back and I look at what somebody gave me the other day—I wasn't here at the committee then—on efficiencies. In 1997, PMRA stated that they would have a 40% efficiency gain with electronic submissions by 2002. That would keep the budget the same. In 2000, PMRA stated that the 40% efficiency gain would be achieved by electronic submissions and harmonization.

You present in your brief today, on the streamlining. The fact of the matter, if you sit where I sit—and worse yet, if you sit where a producer sits out there, who can't get a product, yet as we've already determined earlier, there's a product on the consumer's shelf that a producer in the United States or Mexico was using a product on that our producers can't get.... Yet that product is still on Canadian shelves, and our farmer can't compete. We have a problem. We have a huge problem.

What I'm saying in all earnestness is you'd better find a way to fix it, because this goes back to 1997. Now it's seven years later. Something's wrong. Let's get it done.

It may not be a question, Mr. Chair, but I certainly believe it definitely has to be done. Why are those efficiencies not happening in the system? I don't know. I know I get a lot of calls on PMRA. There are always two sides to a story, I know, but by golly, we have to do better than we're doing.

We can take some political heat, yes, but I'll tell you, for the individual out there on the farm whose economy is going down the drain, who's maybe sixth generation, that extra product that makes his commodity more competitive might at least give him a little hope.

● (1300)

Ms. Janice Charette: I appreciate the picture you've painted for us.

The Chair: Okay, I'm going to take the liberty as chair to conclude with my remarks. I have just a few questions and then a closing comment.

Earlier on, Ms. Sexsmith, I believe you mentioned that the people who have cosmetic needs and concerns in terms of registration or minor use somehow get a priority. I found that rather disturbing, that there was a degree of urgency on cosmetic chemicals. In other words, that lawns, gardens, and golf courses may somehow have a priority over agriculture gives me a great deal of concern, and I'm sure that's true for everyone around this table.

I don't know if I misunderstood you or whether you actually said that. If you did, I want some clarification.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

What I was trying to say is that because of the concerns expressed related to registered pesticides used in lawn and landscaping in 2000, PMRA committed to re-evaluate those already registered products on a priority basis. It wasn't registering new products. It was taking on the re-evaluation of eight key pesticides that are used in lawn and landscaping.

That's what I was saying. They're currently under re-evaluation. We've completed a number of them, and we're in the process of completing the rest of them. They were not competing with evaluation of new pesticides for agriculture.

The Chair: I'm going to summarize what I've heard this morning. I've heard it so many, many times, and I think we have been very patient. Not only have we as a committee been patient, our agricultural people out there, our farmers, our producers, have been more than patient. I think we've reached the point where we can go no further without having some affirmative action.

Until products can be replaced with a better product, a safer product, or a product with greater efficacy, I don't think a product should be taken out of the marketplace. We should not leave our farmers, our producers, without a product, and I want that understood. If a product was good in 2004, it will be good in 2005. I realize there may be a better product, but until we can find a better mousetrap, let's use the one we have. That's one comment.

Earlier today Mr. Bezan talked about having a comparative list of data from the United States. I believe we need to have, before we come back six months from now....

Before I make that last comment, I want to ask one question, and this is to you, Miss Charette. Why did Health Canada ignore the recommendation of this committee to have both a minor-use adviser and an ombudsman? And would you ever consider having both a minor-use adviser and an ombudsman? Of course, the ombudsman would be responding to the Minister of Health and not be linked to PMRA.

As a bit of an aside to that question, do we currently have a minor-use adviser, and is there a plan to continue on with the current PMRA adviser if we in fact have that minor-use adviser?

● (1305)

Ms. Janice Charette: Thank you, Mr.Chair.

With respect to the minor-use adviser in particular, the agency did follow up on that recommendation. They did put in place a minor-use adviser. Concerns have been raised about the minor-use adviser and they are currently under review by the agency. Concerns have been raised about the effectiveness and the function of the minor-use adviser, so we have put the function temporarily on hold. There is an investigation under way, as I said.

What we've tried to do as a replacement for that is to institute regular forums for discussion with some of the key grower groups—for example, quarterly meetings with the Canadian Horticultural Council—in order to discuss these issues of interest on a regular basis. Although I shouldn't speak for the council, I'm given to understand the council has found it to be a productive and worthwhile exchange with the agency in terms of addressing the issues around minor use.

Once the investigation has been completed, we will then be in a position to make a decision about whether or not to return to the staffing of the minor-use advisory position.

The Chair: Is that person, the minor-use adviser, currently in place and being paid as we speak?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: Her duties have been reassigned temporarily until the investigation is completed, and this was really at the request of the growers and the provinces.

The Chair: Why was our request for an ombudsman ignored—or rejected, I guess, as is more likely to be the case?

Ms. Janice Charette: I don't know the answer in terms of detail. Can I ask Wendy if she can answer that?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: When the request for those two positions was reviewed both by Agriculture and by Health Canada, the decision was to put in place a minor-use adviser and ombudsperson position that mimicked the position that existed in the U.S. EPA Office of Pesticide Programs. So it was a combined role.

The Chair: Do you think that was an effective way of dealing with it? Wouldn't you agree there should be an independent ombudsman in the role who acts generally as an independent adviser or listener on both sides of the issues and then responds to those issues?

Ms. Wendy Sexsmith: No. I know the minor-use adviser and ombudsperson approach in the U.S. works effectively, and we certainly would be continuing to work with growers on the particular issue we have now.

The Chair: You haven't given me what I want, but I think I expected that answer.

My last comment would be this. I've heard commitment to undertakings today. On behalf of the committee—I did not consult with the committee, but I'm making this directive to you—I want an undertaking from you that before we have another meeting in six months and when we come back in six months, whenever that six-month period is, we will have a measured program report that will show exactly where we've gone. I'd like you to go back more than just one year, perhaps even to 1997, and show where we have come.

I'd like to know whether we have been effective, whether we have seen measured success in the last six months or in the last year as measured against two years ago, because I'm almost positive the results have been very slow in coming forward over the last number of years. It has to change.

I don't want to come to another meeting, whether as chair or as a committee member, and have to listen.... I believe you people try to be sincere, but as many have questioned today, are we really coming together? Are we going away from this meeting committed to coming back with a better result than we've had in the past? So I'm asking you for that undertaking today on behalf of this committee.

● (1310)

Ms. Janice Charette: We will obviously respond to the request of the chair in terms of going back and trying to do an assessment and writing the kind of program report you talk about. I think it would be useful—if you're agreeable to this, sir—that there be a conversation among your clerk, staff of the agency, and us to define and make clear what the parameters of that review are so our work can be productive in terms of responding to the issues of the committee. I think that would be helpful.

Effectiveness is a bit in the eye of the beholder, as you can understand.

The Chair: No problem. We will commit to that. Our committee will do that through our clerk.

Thank you once again. Our time has expired. Thank you once again for coming, and thank you, committee members, for sharing in this morning's meeting.

The meeting is adjourned.

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Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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