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## **Subcommittee on Food Safety of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Wednesday, April 29, 2009**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Larry Miller**

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Wednesday, April 29, 2009

•(1600)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC)):** Okay, we'll call this meeting to order.

Thank you very much to our guests.

Mr. Minister, thanks for coming today.

We also have Ms. Swan here, from the CFIA, and Mr. Mayers, Mr. Baker, Mr. Evans, and Mr. Prince. Thanks very much for making yourselves available today.

I presume, Mr. Minister, you'd like to make some opening remarks, so I'll turn it over to you.

**Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Of course, it's a pleasure to be here. Thank you for the opportunity to have a dialogue with you today.

By anyone's definition, what happened last summer was a tragedy. On my behalf, and that of the CFIA and the Government of Canada, I would again like to offer sincere condolences to everyone touched by this tragedy. Our thoughts and prayers continue to go out to those families.

Each of us has a role to play in food safety. All levels of government work together to build food safety systems and policies. Governments work with players throughout the food chain to make that system work, from farmers to processors, to retailers, to our own kitchen counters.

The Government of Canada accepts its share of responsibility for what happened last summer. Protecting Canada's food supply is an important part of my job, as minister responsible for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

Food safety is important to me on a deeper level, as it is to you. As a father and a grandfather, I want to know that we're serving safe food to our families. That's why our government is working so hard to learn the lessons of last summer's outbreak. In fact, there have been four lessons-learned reports that are already taking a hard, introspective look at the situation to find ways to improve. We're going even further by appointing an independent investigator to give Canadians confidence that we are leaving no stone unturned.

I would also like to thank this committee for redoubling its commitment to identify opportunities to strengthen Canada's food

safety system. By adding extra meetings and sitting longer, you're going to make sure that Canadian consumers have the answers they need this spring, instead of waiting until next December—and I thank you for that. It's good to see that opposition members are willing to join government members to go that extra mile and complete this work as quickly as possible.

It can't be said enough that nothing is more important than maintaining and strengthening our food safety system. The government's most important role, as you know, is to deliver the resources and to establish the policies necessary to keep our food supply safe.

Although the CFIA is part of my portfolio as the Minister of Agriculture, it is a science-based regulatory agency with its own statutory powers. In fact, its Office of Food Safety and Recall operates independently, with protocols to act immediately when there is a confirmed link between food and illness. Every Canadian, including those who are personally affected, has this government's pledge that we will continue to strengthen Canada's food safety system.

Even prior to the events of last summer, our government announced \$113 million for the food safety action plan, and introduced amendments to toughen the laws under the Food and Drugs Act.

During our first two years in government, we've hired 200 new food inspectors. The CFIA has increased its staffing by more than 13% in that timeframe. In fact, the CFIA has more resources and inspection staff than ever before, because we've allocated record budgets. This government is also investing \$250 million this year in Canada's laboratory facilities.

As you know, you can't see, taste, touch, or smell many food safety risks, including the listeria we faced. That's why this government has increased monitoring for listeria. Having food inspectors simply walk around and watch the production lines is just not good enough. As technology changes and ingredients are sourced from all over the world, we must continue to improve.

Canada's food safety regulations are now tougher than ever before. Unfortunately, in early 2005 environmental tests were no longer required, and even if a plant did its own testing, there was no requirement at that time to report the results. Last summer's recalls made it clear that the cancellation of that particular requirement under a previous government was a huge mistake. That's why this government has implemented Canada's toughest environmental testing requirements. Processors are now required to meet stringent and consistent end-product and environmental testing standards. These tests are reviewed on a regular basis by CFIA inspectors. If a plant finds any positive test, they are now required to immediately report that positive to the CFIA. These results are immediately submitted for further laboratory testing. In fact, results from those accredited labs will be sent back directly to the CFIA, not the processor.

Our government is going even further by reinstating the CFIA's own comprehensive environmental testing regime. CFIA inspectors will now perform their own environmental tests to provide another level of oversight. This not only rebuilds the environmental testing regime that was cut in 2005, but it also goes above and beyond it with new and stronger requirements.

• (1605)

As you know, enhanced listeria testing is only one example of our continuing work to strengthen Canada's food safety system. In 2005 it became mandatory for processors to implement hazard analysis critical control point programs, also known as HACCP.

HACCP programs are an internationally accepted scientific standard for minimizing risk at key points in a production line. Sometimes this requirement has been incorrectly characterized as turning over inspection to industry. Nothing could be further from the truth. Canada's world-renowned chief veterinary officer, Brian Evans, made this point very clear to this committee. HACCP is not privatization and never will be privatization.

In reality, HACCP identifies the most critical stages in food production where problems are most likely to occur. That way we can prevent problems by focusing extra safety checks on those specific points. This helps inspectors catch potential problems sooner and fix them, rather than waiting until the end of the line.

Canada's food inspection system builds on the strength of the HACCP system. The compliance verification system, or CVS, was designed in the same year, 2005, and became mandatory in 2008. CVS complements HACCP by ensuring that inspectors consistently complete specific tasks on a checklist within certain timeframes. Some critics have mischaracterized CVS as another level of paperwork, or a weakening of the actual enforcement. Once again, nothing could be further from the truth.

Canada's food safety standards, regulations—

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, point of order.

Mr. Chair, does the minister have a copy of his remarks translated? The minister has the full resources of the department. This is a committee looking into listeriosis that caused 22 deaths. Surely the minister has a copy of his remarks before this parliamentary committee, does he not?

**The Chair:** I can ask him for that.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** This is technical stuff. I would think the department would have it for us. Do we not have copies available for members now?

**The Chair:** There are none available that I'm aware of, Mr. Easter, and I don't believe that's a point of order.

**Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC):** This is the first time that Mr. Easter has brought this up during the subcommittee hearings. He has not asked for the other witnesses to have interpreted remarks.

**The Chair:** Point taken.

Mr. Minister, go ahead.

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** Mr. Chair, if you would like us to retire and have translation done and have copies made, we can come back at another date, if that would be more suitable for Mr. Easter.

**The Chair:** I think for the rest of us, Mr. Minister, your comments will do for the time being.

Proceed please.

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** Thank you.

I was talking about CVS. Canada's food inspection system builds on the strength of HACCP. The compliance verification system, or CVS, was designed in 2005 and became mandatory in 2008. CVS, of course, complements HACCP by ensuring that inspectors consistently complete specific tasks on a checklist within certain timeframes.

Some critics, as I said, have mischaracterized CVS as another level of paperwork or a weakening of enforcement. Once again, nothing could be further from the truth. Canada's food safety standards and regulations and CFIA's enforcement mechanisms all remain intact under CVS. As I said earlier, CVS was designed in 2005, then was pilot-tested and became mandatory throughout Canadian processing plants in 2008. CVS was not new. It's a standard procedure for Canadian food inspection.

As we continue to strengthen Canada's food safety system, it's important to look back at what happened last summer. As I've said, the outbreak was a tragedy by anyone's definition. All of those affected deserve a detailed account of what happened and a renewed effort to strengthen the system to prevent future outbreaks.

Last summer's outbreak brought together numerous government agencies—the Public Health Agency of Canada, Health Canada, provincial governments, local health units, the private sector, and of course the CFIA. Toronto Public Health first told the CFIA on August 6 about two cases of listeria at a nursing home. The CFIA then coordinated a sampling blitz with Ontario health and long-term care and Ontario health units. Accurate scientific sampling was essential to pinpoint the source of the problem and rule out other potential sources, such as improper handling and food preparation.

Within 24 hours of being informed of the initial two cases, the CFIA conducted intensive investigations to look for links between other listeria cases that might identify products causing the illnesses. The CFIA intensively investigated, beginning August 7, confirming listeria on August 16, and verifying the specific DNA fingerprint on August 23. At the same time, CFIA food specialists traced implicated products back to a specific production location. As soon as those trace-outs were done, the CFIA scrutinized production and distribution records from the affected Toronto plant to find and search for the products in question.

Late on August 16, the lab results were definitive and the science-based evidence identified a Maple Leaf plant in Toronto as the source of the tainted meat. Recalls of the tainted products started immediately in the early morning hours of Sunday, August 17. Those voluntary recalls were closely directed and supervised by the CFIA; therefore, mandatory recalls were not necessary in this specific case.

The CFIA alerted the public and recalled a total of 192 Maple Leaf products. The recall remained voluntary because Maple Leaf was prepared to act quickly and cooperatively, but mandatory recall powers were always in place if necessary. The CFIA conducted 30,000 effectiveness checks to make sure the recalled products were pulled from the shelves. These effectiveness checks included on-site visits as well as direct contact with retailers on Maple Leaf's distribution records.

After this summer's outbreak, the government took quick action to further strengthen our food safety system. On September 5 new directives were immediately implemented to require industry to more thoroughly and aggressively sanitize slicing equipment beyond even the manufacturer's recommendations.

Further product and environmental testing programs have been reintroduced and enhanced. You heard Dr. Brian Evans confirm that test results are being constantly reviewed, and the CFIA has reintroduced its own environmental testing as part of the inspection tasks, along with continued government end-product testing. Both processors and the CFIA can now more accurately analyze environmental testing results to spot trends and hopefully prevent outbreaks of the magnitude we saw last summer.

We continue to work with all of the government agencies responsible as well as industry leaders to find new ways to strengthen our food safety system. That's why the Prime Minister appointed Sheila Weatherill to lead the independent investigation into last summer's outbreak. Canadians know Ms. Weatherill is an extraordinarily qualified individual who has served as the CEO for one of Canada's largest health regions. Not only does Ms. Weatherill have extensive experience in public health, but she has also

assembled a team of experts from a variety of backgrounds to work with her to independently examine the factors that contributed to this outbreak. She has the resources and wide-ranging mandate necessary to conduct a thorough and comprehensive independent review.

• (1610)

I've made the commitment to her that everyone involved will continue to cooperate fully. Contrary to statements made by some members of this committee, Ms. Weatherill and I will meet. As Ms. Weatherill has told this committee, everyone has fully cooperated with her during her investigation. When her report is completed this summer, it will be made public. I'm looking forward to studying that report, and we're committed to further strengthening our food safety system based on her recommendations.

Ladies and gentlemen, we all know that the events of last summer were triggered by a previously unidentified risk harboured deep inside a piece of slicing equipment. But we recognize that there's always room for improvement in everything we do. As new information and technology becomes available, we will continue to implement new ways to strengthen our food safety system. This government is giving the CFIA the resources necessary to make those improvements. We are committed to acting on the lessons learned and on the recommendations the independent investigation brings forward early this summer.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today, and I look forward to your questions.

• (1615)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Minister.

Before we go on, I'd just like to welcome members of the media and the public. I'm very happy to have two members from my own riding here today, Dan and Brad Keifer. Welcome. They're sitting in for a few minutes.

I would suggest, with the time allotted, if everyone's agreeable, that we go to five-minute rounds. So everybody....

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** No, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** No? Okay, we'll have seven-minute rounds.

We'll go to Mr. Easter.

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

First, Mr. Minister, you are the minister with responsibility for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Is that correct?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** Yes.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Minister, I will admit, looking at the schedule, and we've talked about this, that I'm actually shocked by the fact that you're giving this committee just an hour of your time. When all parties of this Parliament of Canada have determined that this examination into the worst food contamination in Canadian history.... You're the minister ultimately responsible, at the end of the day, and you only have an hour's time for the interests of Canadians and for your responsibility and those with you in that dilemma?

What are you doing at five o'clock tonight?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** This afternoon, Mr. Easter, I have a prior commitment with the cabinet committee.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** You have a prior commitment.

Mr. Minister, I just find it shameful that the minister of the crown has only an hour's time—

**The Chair:** Point of order, Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** Mr. Chair, in light of what Mr. Easter's saying, I'm confused that he's using half his time to complain about the lack of time. If he wants to get to the issue, I'm sure he can do that.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I'll get to the issue, Mr. Chair, and we know that the government members are here to provide interference.

You admitted during your remarks, Mr. Minister, that Ms. Weatherill has not interviewed you as yet. Don't you find it kind of strange that the very first witness she wouldn't hear from would be the minister that has overall responsibility?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** Well, I guess there are a number of ways of looking at that, Mr. Easter. As the independent investigator, the timeframe is hers. I made myself available to her from the beginning. She has chosen to hold me towards the end of her witness list, for whatever reasons she has. I will leave that up to her, but I will certainly make myself available to her when she asks.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** In your remarks you indicated, and she did as well, that her purpose is to examine the factors that contributed to the listeriosis crisis. She made no reference to examining ministerial responsibility or the machinery-of-government responsibility. Is that your estimation of her so-called investigation as well?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** Well, she is completely independent from me, Mr. Easter. She's completely independent from the government. She will decide, at the end of the day, what will be in her report. I know that she has millions of documents to go through. I know that she's had a tremendous response from everyone she has called forward to make presentations. She is quite excited by the response, in that everyone is looking to get to the bottom of this, as we are—you as a committee, me as a minister, and of course the CFIA in their involvement. I look forward to what she reports.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I'm very glad that she's excited, Mr. Minister, but as each day goes by we seem to be finding new documents. The one I asked you about in the House today and my question, at least in this round, concerned whether there was political involvement that may have extended the timeframe for some of these actions we're taking. We do know that in your conference call, which has been reported on widely in the media, you seemed to be more concerned about the political damage—or that's what was reported—than about the safety of Canadians. We also know that the Prime Minister knew there would be an election called, when none of the rest of us did. Was that a factor? Did the fact that there may have been more concern about political spin and damage control have any impact on the CFIA or other departments and agencies getting to the core of this problem as rapidly as they should have?

● (1620)

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** For my part, Mr. Chair, I can honestly say I never did politically interfere in the operations of any of the agencies involved. I can also say that I think Mr. Easter is being a bit mischievous with some of the facts in front of him. Having said that, I would certainly have my colleagues from CFIA, who were involved in those calls and involved in the daily meetings we had, comment, if they care to, as to whether there was any political direction.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Chair, we'll get to those folks at another time. We had them as witnesses the other night, and we will have to be calling them back, I'm sure. We have the minister here today for only an hour.

On September 3 it was reported that you were ordered by the Prime Minister to do a press conference on the crisis. I have two questions. Were you ordered by the Prime Minister to hold that press conference on September 3, and were you also involved in preparing the terms of reference for Ms. Weatherill?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** I'll answer on the last issue first. No, I was not involved in the terms of reference for Ms. Weatherill. That would not be appropriate at all. I have not had a discussion with Ms. Weatherill other than a welcome-to-Ottawa visit that we had. It was about ten minutes long. I assured her that she should follow wherever the evidence takes her and come back with a report, and she agreed to do that.

As to the September 3 press conference, Mr. Easter, I'm not sure why you're singling that one out. We did daily press conferences for some two weeks or better, so I'm not sure exactly what specifically you are targeting on the September 3 one.

**The Chair:** Your time has expired. If you can answer that in five seconds, I'll allow you to, but other than that, your time is up.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Certainly I can answer it in a very short time. The fact of the matter is that it seems the minister was very ill-prepared for that press conference, was unable to answer questions on the investigator, and one of his former communications directors had reported that. That goes to the heart of my question, which is what about political responsibility here in what happened or didn't happen?

**The Chair:** You can follow up with that.

Mr. Bellavance, you have seven minutes.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Minister, during today's Question Period, you were asked a question concerning an inspector who produced a report following the detection of listeria bacteria in the Toronto Maple Leaf plant. You then responded that it was not your responsibility but rather that of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and that this question should be directed to the President of the CFIA. The inspector in question had been asked to add written notes to a report. This would normally be done within a few days of the publication of the report, but several months, a request of this nature is much more surprising. Basically, you are washing your hands of the matter, no pun intended.

This is a matter for the committee to deal with. Who has the guts to assume some responsibility for what happened during the listeriosis crisis? Mr. McCain of Maple Leaf was the first to testify before the committee and he accepted full responsibility. We asked him why, and he answered that it was because it was produced in his plant. It was very noble of him, of course. Furthermore, I am convinced that people appreciate a CEO who assumes responsibility instead of pointing fingers at other parties.

Furthermore, he agreed that the responsibility for food safety is after all a shared responsibility. We also heard from other witnesses, including Ms. Swan from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. It was very difficult to get her to admit that food safety is a shared responsibility, and as far as the listeriosis crisis itself was concerned, the agency was not prepared to accept any responsibility whatsoever.

We took note of Dr. Butler-Jones' testimony and that of other public health officials stating that the Ontario and Toronto health systems were much more to blame, in their opinion, because they had sent samples to the wrong place. The buck was passed to others in this case as well.

You were in charge when this happened. As I said the other day, it was not a joke, the health minister at the time Mr. Clement was attending the Democratic convention in Denver, and he did not return. So then, it was up to you to assume responsibility for this crisis. From the outset, we have never heard you state that the government had learned from what had happened, that the government was accountable for what had happened and that the food inspection system must be reviewed in order to avoid a recurrence of this type of tragic event.

Today, you have the opportunity to admit some responsibility, even though we do not have the means to carry out a true inquiry, with a judge sitting all day. We had to strike this subcommittee to make up for the fact that you have commissioned an inquiry that is meeting behind closed doors and in secret with Ms. Weatherill. Despite all her amazing qualifications and abilities, we do not know what she is doing or what is transpiring at the inquiry.

You will receive the report and you will make it public if you wish, when it suits you. At least here, it is a public hearing before television cameras. You have the opportunity to state tonight to the public that you are responsible. You are the Minister of Agriculture. You should have accepted responsibility for this issue when it regrettably occurred. I really haven't heard you say that you accept some responsibility for the incident. You have the opportunity to do so tonight before this public forum.

I would like to know if you feel that you do have a responsibility to the public, both as the minister and as a member of the government.

• (1625)

[English]

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** Thank you for that intervention, Mr. Bellevance.

What I responded to Mr. Easter in question period today was that I am not responsible for the day-to-day operations of CFIA. That falls under their mandate. They are the ones who operate day to day. I am their conduit to cabinet. I am their conduit to budget changes. I am

their advocate when it comes to changing regulations, and so on, at the government level. The day-to-day operations fall within the purview of this management team. Overall they do a very adequate, very good job.

As to accountability, certainly Mr. Easter likes to talk about ministerial accountability. I certainly agree with that, and that's why I'm here with my colleagues from CFIA. That's why you've had interventions from the Public Health Agency of Canada, Health Canada, and all the other players within this.

When the listeriosis situation broke out, there were a number of agencies involved, some provincial, some municipal, some federal. At that time, when it came to the federal level, the work was to be done by the CFIA, which has the recall powers, if required—the province called them in. We have lab capacity to do the proper testing to find listeria. As I said, it's odourless and tasteless. You can't touch it; you can't feel it; you can't see it; you can't taste it. CFIA is well versed in tracing those types of things, and they did do that.

One of the lessons learned is that when you have that many different levels of operation involved, communication and coordination become paramount. One of the lessons we have certainly learned very quickly is to have a lot better communication in between, and we did develop a lot better communication and coordination in our daily meetings and briefings, and so on, as it went along.

I was proud to be the lead minister on that. Of course, it kept me awake at night listening to the cries of Canadians as to how to get to the bottom of this, of families who were involved, one in my own riding. There were a lot of people in my own riding who became ill. I've talked to them since and during the crisis. Yes, I am accountable. Yes, I am responsible, as the lead minister. But our responsibility, as is yours as a parliamentarian, is to make sure the agencies we represent at the federal level have the resources—the human resources, the people, and the money—to make sure they are able to do the job.

**The Chair:** I'll go to Mr. Bellavance, for a quick question.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Regarding the issue of accountability, at a certain point, you have to take the bull by the horns and say, after this kind of crisis occurs, what should have been done and what's going to be done.

I have to admit that as far as the handling of this crisis is concerned, we did not get the impression that you really wanted to accept the fact that... You simply said that Mr. McCain admitted it was Maple Leaf's fault and that you wanted to try and put this behind you. Moreover, you struck a commission or launched an inquiry chaired by Ms. Weatherill—a secret inquiry. The whole thing left a bitter taste in the mouths of Canadians and it gave them the false impression that you had accepted some responsibility.

• (1630)

[English]

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** I differ a little bit on the idea that Ms. Weatherill is not serving a public good or a public need. I think she has the tools. She has said so. I think she will come through with a great report. I look forward to it. There are tough lessons learned.

Nobody is pulling their punches on these, Mr. Bellavance. We want to get to the bottom of this. We want to make sure what we offer Canadians is a safe and secure food supply.

It is a shared responsibility. There is no doubt about it. All the agencies I've talked about, from municipal levels on up through to the federal government, as well as industry itself, have a stake and share the responsibility of making sure what we serve Canadians, and export for that matter, is top quality product.

I would not want to predetermine the outcome by second-guessing what's going to happen. Certainly things got slowed down by an election. There is no doubt about it. Having said that, we're making up good ground with the hearings you are having at this committee, with the work that's being done at public health and Health Canada, and of course at the Ontario health committee as well.

I think at the end of the day we'll have some responses and some results that will benefit Canadians, and we will put them into play.

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

Mr. Allen, you have seven minutes.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, and welcome to those from CFIA.

Mr. Minister, I'd like to touch on the CFIA website. It is actually their mission statement that says, and I quote, "Dedicated to safeguarding food, animals and plants, which enhances the health and well-being of Canada's people, environment and economy." Under "Who Are We", it says CFIA will "protect consumers through a fair and effective food, animal and plant regulatory regime that supports competitive domestic and international markets". Those are quotations from CFIA's website.

Under testimony earlier at the committee, Mr. Minister, Ms. Swan had talked about the government's responsibility for setting strong standards to monitor the industry and holding them to account, and that the industry is really responsible for safe food in this country. That was her testimony at this committee.

Dr. Evans, on the other hand, said in a letter to the editor on April 29, 2009, that protecting the health and safety of Canadian families is the number one priority for the CFIA.

So let me frame it this way, through an expert panel report commissioned by the CFIA, as well as Health Canada, from the Royal Society of Canada. It says:

If the same government agency that is charged with the responsibility to protect the public health and environmental safety from risks posed by technologies also is charged with the promotion of that same technology and if its safety assessments are, by official policy, balanced against the economic interests of the industries that develop them, this represents, from the point of view of both the public and the industrial stakeholders, a significant conflict of interest.

Mr. Minister, I think none of us would disagree here that most Canadians actually believe that food safety is the ultimate responsibility of CFIA—not quite what it says as its mandate.

What I guess Canadians are looking to us, the ministry, and the CFIA for is that not only do they have the technical ability and the competence and the people and the resources to do the job, but indeed that's its sole mandate. But clearly—and I'm talking about the

Canadian public—the CFIA mandate is a dual purpose one. At its core it says public safety and economic viability for the stakeholders.

If you could, comment on that sense of how we balance the two. How do we on one hand have the same group look after our safety, and at the same time, the same group—not different people—goes out and promotes the industry as a whole to make sure that it actually can prosper? Is that really the way we should be doing it when it comes to public safety?

• (1635)

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** Thank you, Mr. Allen.

I think you are paraphrasing what Ms. Swan said in her testimony. I've actually had a chance to review and read a lot of that. I question the way you've worded it. So I would suggest you go back and read it again.

You are quite right, in that there are a number of players involved in food safety. It depends on what you're talking about, where you're talking about it, and so on. There are a number of different players, including whoever is working with that chicken on the kitchen counter before it goes on the barbeque. That's a major, major component of it.

A lot of what CFIA does and did over the years is reactionary. They came in to mop up after the spill. Some of the new regulatory powers and policies that have been asked of them, designed by government and implemented by government, ask them to be more proactive when it comes to inspecting produce coming in from offshore, or inspecting different things at different levels.

You would also recognize the fact that Canada is not an island in a global community. The situation that we face as a government, and that regulatory bodies like CFIA face when it comes to economies of our industry, is that we have to make sure that our regulations are not burdensome. They have to get the job done without adding extra layers of cost and time delay when we're talking about "best before" products and so on, whether it's meat, vegetables, or so forth.

You're absolutely right that there is always that quandary. I've heard this from producers when it comes to an export situation and they'll ask me, "Who the heck does CFIA work for? Because they are tougher on me." Well, that's the nature of being a regulatory agency. Sometimes you do have to be tough to enforce those regulations.

I think we have learned a lot from this, as we do from every situation. CFIA always does a retrospective report whenever there's a situation such as this or even lesser situations. They always do that and then they always adjust. They come back to government to say we need this addressed, we need this policy changed, we need new regulations in this area, and then we go to work as a government. Most of those things come back through the agriculture or health committee and we strive to build a better system. It's never a done deal; it's always a work in progress. We can consistently work day and night to do a better job.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Since you said I should go back and make sure of what I said, let me just quote from the transcript of the meeting, because I have it in front of me:



**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Who is ultimately responsible for food safety in this country?

**Ms. Carole Swan:** Government is responsible for setting strong standards, monitoring industry, and holding them to account. Industry is responsible for producing safe food in this country.

That's exactly what I read to you, Mr. Minister, initially. But we'll leave that as it is.

Let me put it this way. You talked about time and cost to the industry; I believe that's really part of what you—

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** Ultimately, it would be time and cost to consumers—

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** No, I understand you want to answer that, but let me just finish the question. Then you'll be able to answer the whole question.

So time and cost are things that industry is concerned with. The consumer ultimately may be; if it costs a few pennies more to buy that bologna or those wieners or whatever the product happens to be, then, no question, that may indeed be a concern of theirs. But looking back at the death of 22 Canadians, I would ask you to comment on time and cost versus public safety.

Is that really what part of the mandate for CFIA should be, to look at time and cost for industry, or should it ultimately and only be concerned with—perhaps we need a separate regulatory body that talks about the other pieces, Mr. Minister—and be about what Canadians believe it's all about? In other words, “Canadian Food Inspection Agency” tells Canadians, “I'm not thinking about time and cost, or how to enhance an industry, when I say CFIA; I'm thinking about public safety.”

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** Yes, and you make a good point. The ultimate role for CFIA, and for public health, provincial health agencies, and so on, is public safety, to make sure that the food supply is safe.

There are always concerns as to extra regulations being added that overlap. We have departments in this government, committees that meet, that look at scrutiny of regulations to make sure that we're not overburdening any particular body within our governance and causing them to add extra costs, or creating crippling regulations.

We constantly do that in the food supply as well, Mr. Allen. We strive to produce the best-quality, safest-quality food we can. There are always lessons learned. Cost is a minor factor when we come down to that. It is a social good. It is, as you said, something that consumers have come to expect in Canada, and they have been served well.

• (1640)

**The Chair:** Mr. Shipley, for seven minutes.

**Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister and others, for joining us today.

When you opened, Mr. Minister, you talked about what happened last summer as a tragedy, in anyone's definition. I don't think anyone would disagree with that. I want to talk a little bit about the investments I think we have made, not just then, but now. If I get a chance, I may talk about some of the responsibilities, because as you said, all levels of government work together to build food safety

systems and policies. The government also works with players throughout the food chain that make the system work, from farmers to processors, retailers, and to our kitchen counters. That is the full value in terms of trying to understand food safety from start to finish, to the plate, most basically.

Minister, I'm going to talk about some of the investments we've made and I'll ask you to expand on those. I think Canadians appreciate not only what you have done, but what the Prime Minister has done in terms of some of the steps that were needed to be taken to improve food safety, not only in the past but for all Canadians now. I too am a father and a grandfather, by the way, and every day, as your grandchildren now make their lunches and often use packaged meats, these are concerns—not only for the elderly, but certainly for us who are a little older who have a very young generation following us.

I'd like touch on a few concerns in budget 2008, where you allocated, Minister, \$113 million for food and product safety. I understand part of that included the hiring of some 200 new inspectors. In 2009 you allocated \$250 million for improving our federal labs, and I think that's significant; we hear this from others. In fact, some of the panel members have told us how important the improvement of our laboratories is. CFIA has taken some criticism, but they have also introduced mandatory environmental testing for listeriosis.

Minister, that's something you brought back in. When we listen to all the complaints on the other side, actually it was the Liberals who cut that. They took it out in 2005 because they really didn't think food safety was important. When I listen today in the House, when they talk about creating all their surpluses, well, in fact this is how you create surpluses, Minister. They cut out the security of food safety for Canadians, along with other things. We've not done that. I want to thank you for introducing and bringing back that testing.

CFIA has also increased its testing and training. I think we need to talk a little bit about the training and how that all fits in. You originally signed agreements with the provinces for a new “growing forward” framework and for an agricultural policy that includes an almost unprecedented federal investment of almost \$100 million for food safety systems. I think the next part is the traceability initiatives. Also, in budget 2009, through your initiative, we added another \$50 million. Although it may seem on the side, this was for slaughter capacity. That money is meant mainly to help improvements in technology and food safety.

Mr. Minister, as we listen today I'm wondering if I can get you to help all Canadians. It is about the past, but the past brings about a new future in terms of what we can do and what we can help to do to help prevent another situation like the one that happened last summer. I'm wondering if I could get you to expand a little bit in terms of some of those commitments, particularly those you had the most initiative in bringing forward in terms of food safety.

• (1645)

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** Thank you, Mr. Shipley.

You're giving me credit for things I really can't take a bow for. The allocations for those budgetary items are by my good friend, Jim Flaherty, the Minister of Finance. I was excited to work with him in putting forward those programs and policies, which are much-needed.

Even in tough economic times, food safety is still paramount, and we have to start allocating the right resources at the right time. I am looking forward to the reports and all of the interventions that will come to us in the next short months that will give us a better definition of where to spend money. We're not just going to throw money at the target, Mr. Shipley, but we're going to make sure that it hits the target and actually helps us get the job done.

I think we've had a good track record in that. I know that CFIA, after years of struggling under a mandate that has called on them to do a little bit of everything and to take responsibility for everything, has been burdened. In the meetings I have with these good people up here at the table, we are constantly working through their budgetary process to make sure they have what they need to continue the battle to make sure that food is safe for Canadians.

I've been proud to be part of the process that has reinvested resources, both human and fiscal, into CFIA. It is a world-renowned organization; and as we work to open up trade flows around the world, CFIA does play a huge role.

One of the things that you neglected to mention—and I won't go back over the list you went through, on which you did a good job—is the market access secretariat. For us as a trading nation, that secretariat is very, very important, and CFIA plays a huge role in it, giving us the credibility to go into those new and emerging markets and to start to bring our product there. The secretariat has helped us very much to open new markets.

Everybody here would agree with me that Dr. Brian Evans was the major salesman during BSE. I'm not sure he was home that much; I know I've seen the travel stickers on this briefcase. He did a fantastic job for us, and continues to. There's a tremendous amount of credibility here in the world as well as in Canada.

Certainly we've suffered a black eye, but when I talk to farmers, when I talk to processors, when I talk to consumers across this country—because I am the Minister of Agri-Food as well—they all tell me that they still respect and support the CFIA and the work they're doing. They all tell me to get past the politics of this issue and to move forward with the proper and practical application of what CFIA does in this great country.

We are expanding the testing capacity in our laboratories, and we are finding some tremendous slippage, as I'd call it. New equipment

is required when you look at trying to identify the DNA fingerprint of listeria. I wasn't that great at chemistry in high school, and I don't think most of you were either, but the ability to do that, the quality of people we have and that we continue to have, just amazes me. We have to keep building that system.

**The Chair:** Okay, thank you very much, Mr. Shipley. Your time has well expired.

Mr. Easter, for five minutes.

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

We were led to believe the other night by Ms. Weatherill that her office is located on Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada property. Is that correct?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** I found out about that when you found out, Mr. Easter. I had no idea where she was housed. It was up to my department to find her space. They've done that.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Are there any staff, that you're aware of, seconded from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to the independent investigator's office?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** I have no idea who's on her staff, Mr. Easter.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Well, maybe she'll get back to us on that, because I'm beginning to believe that the only way to get to the bottom of this is to have a full judicial inquiry.

In any event, your remarks, Mr. Minister, lead me to believe that you do have confidence in the compliance verification system—which comes back somewhat to Mr. Shipley's point—which was implemented as a pilot project in 2006, and implemented nationally on April 1, 2008.

I have two questions, really. One, was there an evaluation done of that pilot project, and have you seen it, and can it be tabled with this committee?

Two, can you explain why your government failed at the same time to implement any kind of mandatory environmental test reporting system?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** Mr. Chairman, those are very technical issues. I would turn those over to Cameron Prince. As director of operations, he'd be able to answer those for you.

• (1650)

**Mr. Cameron Prince (Vice-President, Operations, Canadian Food Inspection Agency):** Was there an evaluation of the pilot projects? Yes, there was an evaluation. It was a constant evaluation. I'm not aware of any specific document that can be provided. We could certainly go back and have a look at the ongoing work that took place throughout those pilot projects.

We have to keep in mind that this was a very lengthy process, a lot of work with industry, with the pilot plants themselves, with our inspectors, with the scientists involved, so it took quite a while to perfect the system. By the time we reached April 1, 2008, we were very, very confident in the effectiveness of that system.

We will be undertaking a thorough review in the next short while of the compliance verification system. Like any new system, there are opportunities for improvement, but overall we're quite satisfied with the effect of the enhanced food safety that's come about as a result of the implementation of the compliance verification system.

I'm sorry, Mr. Easter, I didn't quite catch all of your second question.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** My second question relates to why there was no mandatory environmental test reporting system as well.

When you do a pilot project—and I believe the pilot project was introduced by the previous government—isn't it normal for a summary report to be done and tabled with the minister, who ultimately makes the decision on whether you move ahead with what was being piloted?

I'll let you hold that for a minute, Mr. Prince, because I do have a question that I have to get on the table. We didn't get an answer from the minister today. Maybe Mr. Evans or Ms. Swan would be able to answer this question.

On the documents I raised the question on, the verification report at the plant, 097B, these verification reports range from February 11—I have seven of them here—until August 6. All seven of them had handwritten notes put in them dated August 26, 2008. This is after 12 deaths had been confirmed. Why?

I can understand an inspector changing a report a day or two after he thinks about something else. According to the agricultural union, the inspector who signed off on the amended reports was directed to do so by his superiors at CFIA.

Why were the reports amended, and why were they amended up to five months late? And can you give us the name of the inspector who was involved?

We will be asking questions of the agricultural union as well, on this matter.

Mr. Minister, I don't think—

**The Chair:** Your time is up, Mr. Easter.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** It's not up.

**Mr. Cameron Prince:** Yes, I'll answer the question about what occurred with respect to the inspection records at the plant.

There were two inspectors assigned to that plant, on two different shifts. Every day they did the compliance verification. There were inspection records. So we're talking about a lot of records, on a daily basis, on two shifts, over an extended period of time.

After the events of August, it was clear, as per our policy, that we had to implement an in-depth listeria review. That in-depth listeria review was undertaken by our food safety experts who look at all plants in Ontario and across the country, as specialists. They went in as a team and uncovered every rock and every stone and looked at every element of what was happening in that plant for the period of 2008. In the course of that work, they came across some records. They interviewed the inspectors involved, and overall, in this very small percentage, there was some additional information put on the

record to clarify. And this was done at the suggestion of the senior food safety auditors who were at the plant.

The purpose of this was not to alter or change in any way. The purpose was to provide further clarification and be completely in line with the recollection of the inspector at that time.

● (1655)

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I'm not done, Mr. Chair, but who's next?

**The Chair:** You are done.

Mr. Storseth, for five minutes.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I agree, Mr. Easter is done.

Mr. Minister, I want to thank you for coming in today. This is not the first time you've come before the agriculture committee. You've always been very accessible to us, and we appreciate that. We also appreciated your blunt honesty when it came to some of the questions today.

I want to start out by asking you some questions about the independent investigator. She is a lady who I believe is of great qualification. She has spent a good deal of her career in our capital health region in Edmonton, bettering our health services in that community. But it seems that every time the opposition comes to these committee meetings, in particular the Liberal opposition, they tend to ask questions about her and bring her qualifications to note. It is something when *The Toronto Star* isn't even agreeing with Mr. Easter any more. In fact, I'll quote an article from *The Toronto Star*:

The critics are overreaching. Weatherill's past experience can only aid her search for best practices. And it's not clear to us that Canada needs another costly and lengthy forum for lawyers to cross-examine those involved in the outbreak. All indications are that the main players will co-operate.

We heard from you today, Mr. Minister. The first question, as I've asked all our witnesses, is do you believe that Ms. Weatherill's qualifications are above reproach in this and that she has the qualifications to do an excellent job? Secondly, I would like you to put on the record once again that you have agreed to meet with Ms. Weatherill.

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** Absolutely. I first met Ms. Weatherill when she was asked to take this task on. It is a formidable task to go through millions of pages of documents and come up with a report that actually builds a stronger food safety system in this country. I know she has the time, the talent, and the qualifications to do this. I only met her for about 10 or 15 minutes early on when she was just getting settled in. I have not talked to her since, but I see through media reports and the committee hearings that she's had a good response from everybody. She has not had a problem in getting access to anything and everything she wanted. She has asked me to meet with her in the coming days. I have told her, "Absolutely, let me know where and when and I will be there". I'm quite excited to chat with her about this.

Having said that, I'm quite concerned when I keep hearing that somehow there's been political interference. I know that question has been asked of Dr. David Butler-Jones, of the CFIA, and of Sheila Weatherill. They have all denied that. All independently have said that there hasn't been any. In fact, Dr. Butler-Jones said that if this had ever happened he would have walked away and gone straight to the media with it.

I have a lot of respect for these people. They put their talents, time, and integrity on the line by dealing with politicians. If the public has any concerns out there at all, it's that politics will override the good work done by some of these investigations. That's my major concern.

I think Ms. Weatherill will weather the storm. I think she will do a great job. I'm not going to predetermine the outcome of her reports, but I can pledge to this committee and to Canadians that the recommendations that come forward through the lessons-learned reports and through the report that Ms. Weatherill will table will be followed up on and will be implemented.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Thank you, Mr. Minister.

I think there are some very important things during a crisis like this. Your leadership was front and centre during this crisis throughout August and September. I think it's important that the Canadian public sees, as we have heard from you, the compassion. We've heard about the action this government has taken. Another thing that's important for the Canadian public to see sometimes is the perspective of how these things actually work out.

I'd like to ask you a little bit about the press conferences and the communications plan that you had. Maybe you could give us a bit of perspective as to how often you were having press conferences at the end of August, beginning of September, and what some of the communications plan was from your point of view.

• (1700)

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** It was a changing plan—I will say that. Every day there was new information coming in. By the time we actually—how can I put this so that it doesn't get misinterpreted—got rolling with information to Canadians, a lot of the damage was already done. Of course, we didn't know that. I know Dr. Evans showed you a chart, and I know Dr. Butler-Jones did as well, as to how the timeline unfolded. As we strove to do the recalls and so on, the cases were actually waning, which was a good thing. I know the chart that I saw, which Dr. Evans presented to this committee, is very dramatic in the way that it shows how this climbed and then just stopped because the product was recalled. Everybody out there, with the help of the media, Internet, and everything else, and with the great work that Public Health and CFIA did, got around the fact that they had to get this product out of their freezers.

We actually did a second push right after Labour Day, and just before Labour Day for that matter, because we knew people were going to go up and close their cottages. It was actually Dr. Evans who brought this point up at one of our morning brainstorming sessions when we were wondering what we were missing. That's what we kept thinking. Is another shoe going to drop? What are we missing? How do we get ahead of this.

Out of the blue, Brian said people were going to their cottages that weekend, and they were going to open the freezer and have this product in there and not recognize it. They were going to use up whatever it was. So, again, we put out another push to make sure that people, when they went to their cottages, went through the freezer and didn't use that product. It was the same thing when they came back. If they'd spent the last two weeks on holidays in August and came back to their condominium, or house, or whatever, we wanted to make sure that they hadn't missed the media and hadn't missed the recalls. That was always uppermost in our minds.

Our days usually began in the 6:30 to 7:00 a.m. range because of time zones across the country. We were talking with provinces and territories. There was information coming in. We quarterbacked it out of my department, out of my level of the farm building there. Public Health, Health Canada, the provincial folks, CFIA, and all of us were on these calls. They were almost unmanageable because of everyone wanting to know what was happening and how it was happening, and everybody wanting this information at once. That's why we started doing the daily press conferences.

I think they were exceptional. I give a lot of credit to the stamina of the folks around me, and of course the folks involved from PMO, PCO, and Public Health. Everybody involved did a fantastic job in making sure that information got out to Canadians on a timely basis.

It was disheartening at times when we talked about the people who were involved, those affected. Also, the death count, as it kept going up, was disheartening. At the end of the day, looking back in hindsight, I'm looking forward to these reports because I think they will give us a new basis to build a better system.

**The Chair:** Okay, thank you very much, Mr. Minister, and to all your company. Thanks very much to the rest of the witnesses from CFIA and what have you. We very much appreciate your time here.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** On a point of order, Mr. Chairman, we had requested that this committee receive documentation from the minister and all notes, etc. We haven't received that, or certainly I haven't had a copy of it as yet.

It just came now? It just came by e-mail now.

Mr. Chair, I'm certainly going to issue a complaint. I'm told that it just came by e-mail now. If we're going to—

**The Chair:** If you have it, then—

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Listen, Mr. Chair, if we're going to do a proper investigation, any investigation provides documentation before a witness is here. For us to have the minister here, not having the documentation beforehand is unacceptable.

**The Chair:** Are you talking about his opening remarks?

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** No, I'm talking about the documentation that we asked for as a committee. How come that documentation wasn't here before today?

**The Chair:** If it's the stuff that I'm thinking of, you got it two weeks ago.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** No, we didn't have the documentation. It came in at 4:57 on e-mail today. You committed that we would have a binder of all information, etc., with the minister's correspondence, e-mails, etc. We haven't received that as yet. Now, if you've received it, I haven't. Have any of the other opposition members received it?

**The Chair:** On a point of order, go ahead, Mr. Storseth.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, we have witnesses before us. I think this is committee business that Mr. Easter wants to talk about. If Mr. Easter would like to bring this up at the appropriate time at the end of the committee while we're discussing other committee business, I think that's the most appropriate forum for this, as this has nothing to do with the witness we have before us.

• (1705)

**The Chair:** That's right.

The meeting will be recessed for five minutes before our next witnesses.

• \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

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• (1710)

**The Chair:** Order. Can members take their chairs, please?

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Mr. Chair, on a point of order before we start, I don't actually count for quorum, so you don't have quorum at this point in time.

**The Chair:** We now have quorum.

I'd like to thank our witnesses, Ms. Bergsma, Mr. Riddell, and Ms. Lammens, for attending our subcommittee study on food safety. We can begin with opening remarks for a maximum of ten minutes from each organization.

Who is first?

**Ms. Theresa Bergsma (Chair, Farm Food Safety Committee, Grain Growers of Canada):** Is there a particular order in which you would like us to speak?

**The Chair:** Ladies first.

**Ms. Brenda Lammens (Chair, Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association):** I'm pleased to be able to attend today representing horticulture and on-farm food safety for the fresh fruit and vegetable growers of Ontario. I am Brenda Lammens, the chair of the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association, which represents 7,500 producers of fresh fruit and vegetables. I am also the chair of the Ontario Asparagus Growers' Marketing Board.

My husband and I have been growing asparagus in Norfolk County in southern Ontario for 24 years, which hopefully qualifies me to speak today from the producer's perspective about a program we've been involved in since the late 1990s.

The Canadian Horticultural Council has developed and administers the on-farm food safety program we subscribe to, with the focus on minimizing the risk of contamination to produce grown in Canada. The OFFS program that CHC has developed must complete a review by the Canadian Federal Inspection Agency, and many commodities have completed that review already, such as green-

house, tree and vine fruit, potatoes, and small fruit, but a few are still waiting for the review process to be completed. For example, asparagus is expected to be reviewed in June, along with sweet corn, legumes, bulb and root, fruiting vegetable, and leafy vegetable.

The review by CFIA brings credibility to our programs, and we trust that the Canadian government will continue to actively promote this program nationally as well as internationally as our marketplace expands. The Canadian Horticultural Council, in preparation for that global expansion, has recently trademarked this program as CanadaGap.

Even though our commodity, asparagus, is still awaiting review, we are fully implementing the program on our farms in order to meet the requirements of our customers and provide a service to the Canadian consumer at no cost to them.

I would like to walk you through what happens on our farm on a daily basis during our harvest so you can understand exactly the steps we take. I don't mean to be too simplistic, but I don't think a lot of people really understand the actual steps that are taken with on-farm food safety, the completeness of that program, and the commitment we as farmers have made to protect our customers and our farms.

We've integrated our OFFS program with our current facilities, and have been attempting upgrades and remodelling as finances allow. These are increased costs to the farmer that in all likelihood would not be realized in the marketplace, but Canadian producers are doing an honourable job. It would be greatly appreciated if the federal government would consider assistance to help Canadian producers implement and sustain the on-farm food safety program and the upgrades that are needed on Canadian farms.

On our farm, the day starts with the cutters heading out to the field, equipped with not only knives for harvesting but hand sanitizers, as standard requirements of each asparagus rider machine. The fields they're cutting in have port-a-potties with wash stations located for their convenience around the field. Each employee undergoes a training session before they start working on our farm, which includes a video and emphasis on proper hand-washing procedures.

The field containers in which they place the harvested product are washed before they go to the field, and again before they are returned to the field after being emptied at the pack shed. The product is delivered to the pack shed and washed with clean water to remove any soil and then placed in a hydro cooler with clean water for further washing and cooling. The hydro cooler water is delivered by a licensed water service from our local municipality and undergoes regular testing at point of pickup and in our pack shed, as part of our program. All sources of water in our operation undergo testing before and during the season. The chlorine levels of the water are monitored on a daily basis to maintain required levels and balanced PH and temperature. These levels are predetermined and outlined in our manuals.

Samples of product are taken by our food safety service providers at three different points in our grading and packing system for testing for signs of bacterial contamination, and at random times throughout the season.

● (1715)

The asparagus is then run down a grading belt, which is washed down at the end of every day in preparation for the next day. Again, it is staffed by employees who have undergone the same training as previously mentioned. The asparagus is graded into different diameters and grades and packed accordingly before it's stored in cold storage. The employees wear acceptable food-grade gloves and have hand sanitizers available at all positions.

If illness occurs with respect to an employee, it is recorded and suitable steps are taken to ensure that they do not return until fully recovered. Our manuals, which we maintain as a regular part of our daily activities, cover all aspects of our operation, and there are thousands of these manuals in place in farms across Ontario and Canada.

You will get a copy of the compendium of the forms that we do have to complete on our farm, and at that time you'll see exactly what detail is covered. It's everything from cleaning and maintenance of the building, all of our agricultural chemicals, agronomic inputs, maintenance and calibre of our sprayers. We have to record training sessions. Visitors have to be signed in, pest monitoring for the buildings, all our water treatment controls, water temperature, the transportation of the product to the marketplace, harvesting and storing, packing, and any corrections or deviation actions that are taken are recorded. When you do get copies of these documents you can see what is expected. It's adapted to all of the commodities that are covered by the Canadian Horticultural Council programs. It is quite detailed. We do take great efforts to monitor all these things, and those are the forms that are in our manual.

Signage is placed strategically around our facility with respect to hand washing, illness, and denied access to certain areas. We also complete a check-off sheet at the beginning and end of every day, as self-discipline and accountability for our program. As producers, we can request a review of our on-farm food safety program, to assess how well we are doing and where areas of improvement might be recommended. Also, a requirement of the CHC program is that we are subject to a complete audit of our program every four years by a certified auditor at a cost to the producer. This certification component of our program became available in the fall of 2008 and provides more credibility to our efforts.

Many of our operations have become more sophisticated, with more emphasis on innovative packaging and adding value to the products that we produce. This, as well, brings many challenges to the safe handling and storage of the end product. For example, fresh-cut leafy vegetables are becoming a very popular product, and fresh-cut vegetables.

Many questions have yet to be answered with respect to the changes in handling of fresh produce, and investment again is needed to advance studies in this area.

It's very timely that today we are investigating the food safety practices of Canadian producers and processors, when swine flu is

creating a very anxious population. It also exemplifies the absolute need for recognition of a very conscious effort on the part of Canadian producers by implementing on their farms food safety at no extra cost to the Canadian consumer. I can speak for Ontario producers today and tell you that we're doing a great job on our farms, considering the financial restraints we are operating within, but we recognize that if we wish to remain competitive in our marketplace, we have to implement on-farm food safety.

I also wish to stress that more research needs to be completed with respect to fresh production and food safety issues. The steps we are taking on our farms need to be recognized by government and society. We are in the stages of developing our traceability program, which is the next step to complete the full on-farm food safety programs. Some commodities are in more advanced stages of development, but it is on the agenda of all commodities. Many of our sales are direct to our customers, but the span of deliveries is ever-changing, so the need is obvious.

I trust that I have been able to provide you with a simple snapshot of what is happening on farms in Canada, and particularly in Ontario, and at the same time impress upon you the importance of what we are implementing with respect to on-farm food safety in the bigger picture.

I would be pleased to answer any questions and provide any material you may need to better understand the program we are implementing.

Thank you very much.

● (1720)

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

We'll now move to the Grain Growers of Canada, Ms. Bergsma.

**Ms. Theresa Bergsma:** Good evening, everyone. My name is Theresa Bergsma, and I am the secretary-manager for the Manitoba Corn Growers Association.

The MCGA supports and represents over 800 corn farmers in Manitoba, and it is a member of the Grain Growers of Canada. The Grain Growers of Canada consists of 13 member organizations, representing over 80,000 farmers in the country, from every province except Quebec.

Although we believe that Canada's grains, oilseeds, and pulses sector provides some of the safest product in the world, the Grain Growers of Canada recognizes the need to have a food safety program in a ready state for a national on-farm food safety program. It should cover all grains, oilseeds, and pulses in Canada so that we can meet the needs of our customers today and into the future. For that reason, we have been working with many other groups, from our membership and beyond, to put together a practical and effective on-farm food safety program under the guidance of the Canada Grains Council.

My role here today is as the Grain Growers representative on the management committee that is overseeing this program. With me today I have Dale Riddell, who is the project manager for this Canada Grains Council initiative. Dale has worked with the management committee extensively, and he has an excellent knowledge of the basic principles of the program.

For a bit of background, in 2001 the Canada Grains Council, encouraged by industry, and with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada funding, formed a management committee to create a national on-farm food safety strategic plan for grains, oilseeds, and pulses. It was recommended that it be HACCP-based, that it examine a post-farm plan, and that there be no implementation until the marketplace demands it. Producing safe food and feed and protecting it from hazards would be the primary focus. It would be built on scientific data to give farmers and their customers extra assurance that the grains—cereals, oilseeds, pulses, and special crops—are produced, handled, and stored on the farm in the interest of food safety. It was recognized that Canadian grain is safe and that any program would simply provide extra assurance for customers and consumers.

Modules have been completed for the farm and beyond the farm, for truck, rail, elevator, terminal, lake freight, and transfer elevators.

With respect to what we have currently, most elevators in Canada are now ISO or HACCP-based certified.

The food safety initiative for farmers has a producer manual based on a scientific generic model. The producer manual details and lists the safe production practices, plus a process for record keeping that demonstrates appropriate steps, at the right time, were put in place by the farmer. It is being used selectively today for niche markets and industry production contracts.

A management plan has been compiled that details how the initiative will be managed nationally, how technical competency will be maintained, how farmer compliance will be managed, and it sets out a process for training farm auditors and managing the audit process.

Both the producer manual and the management plan have been approved in a technical review with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

For the future, the management committee plans to set up a non-profit incorporated entity with a national board, representing grain-related farm organizations, commodity groups, industry, and regions, to direct the initiative. It will be known as ExcelGrains Canada. There will be provisions for selecting the directors, and it will be farmer directed and controlled.

The purpose will be to provide a government approved on-farm HACCP-based food safety certification to Canadian grain farmers. It will maintain technical currency; maintain integrity of the national program with a provincial implementation system, as indicated in the latest "Growing Forward" recommendations; and provide training to producers and auditors that meets standards set by ExcelGrains, a technical committee, and CFIA. It will develop a database of certified farmers and qualified auditors, schedule and perform audits, and it will do production contracts and whole-farm HACCP-based certifications. It will participate in multi-commodity food safety initiatives, and it will provide advice to governments on food safety policy.

On the funding side, we would like to facilitate the transfer of the program from the Canada Grains Council to ExcelGrains and to maintain the management committee to manage the national direction and administration. There must be some federal funding for start-up assistance that will utilize the work done to date by farmers, CFIA, AAFC, the scientific community, and grain organizations.

● (1725)

With the involvement of both provincial and federal governments, the management committee and the Grain Growers of Canada feel it is crucial that the initiative be coordinated nationally and recognize that this will involve considerable communication with and oversight of provincial activities to ensure the Canadian program does not become fragmented and ineffective.

Initially, we see a need for government support for the national board and its related activities. Eventually, as the program grows, participating farmers, marketers, and value-chain participants will assume a higher percentage of the costs. Government funding is justified, as food safety is in the interest of all consumers, and visible programs are being demanded by the public.

Provincial government funding will focus on program implementation such as producer and auditor training, and farm audit costs.

The management committee is currently compiling an application for federal funding support. Without this support the program will falter and risk the investment made by farmers and governments thus far. We have built a world-class farm food safety program for Canadian farmers that will be available as the market demands. It would be a great loss to the Canadian public and the grains industry if the work done to date was lost due to a lack of funding to bring it to fruition.

In summary, Canadian farmers have an excellent record of producing safe grains, and they consistently meet and exceed standards set by our customers and the Canadian Grain Commission. Canadian grain farmers do not need additional government regulation. ExcelGrains will provide the extra assurance for grain customers with a science-based, industry-led, HACCP-based program that will be respected worldwide. Its adoption must be based on market demand.

We appreciate the opportunity to present. If you have any questions, we will do our best to answer them.

• (1730)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Bergsma.

I should point out to the committee that our witnesses today came at very short notice because we had some cancellations, and we really appreciate it. We would have had some open time here at committee. So thank you very much for that.

We will move to Ms. Coady, for seven minutes.

**Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.):** Thank you very much.

I echo the chair in thanking you for taking time away from your very hectic and important schedules to come to the committee today. Indeed, this is an important topic for all of us as Canadians, all of us who enjoy your work and efforts on our tables in the evening. We certainly want to have safe food and we certainly want to have an abundance of it. So I thank you for your efforts.

I have a couple of questions with regard to the OFFS program.

First, Ms. Lammens, could you please tell us what percentage of your farmers are participating in the OFFS program now? Is it highly taken up?

**Ms. Brenda Lammens:** The numbers are more in the acreage. Looking at the uptake of the program, I would say 80% of production is being covered, because the larger producers certainly are on record as being on the program. That pretty well covers all commodities. The uptake by the larger producers has been very good, so that takes into consideration the larger percentage of the acreage of horticulture that's being produced.

Many of our retailers and customers won't buy from us now unless we can prove we have an on-farm food safety program that can be audited and certified.

**Ms. Siobhan Coady:** You're coming to my next set of questions.

You mentioned you're not getting any monetary value per se for your products because you're using the OFFS program. But I was wondering if there was any kind of premium. And I think you

answered my question in your last remark, in that a lot of retailers now won't accept without the OFFS program.

I'm more concerned about the 20% of production, or some of the smaller farms, I think you've indicated, without an OFFS program and the possibility of food safety issues in that. Do you think the program should be mandatory, or do you think it should remain a voluntary program?

**Ms. Brenda Lammens:** I believe the program will be market-driven.

In terms of making it mandatory, I certainly would support that, but that is not going to happen because of the nature of the producers. Somehow, some way, not all will be on the program. But because it is market-driven, it will happen eventually.

This year I'm seeing much more pressure from retailers to have audits done, which in some ways is becoming a little more than we anticipated. Audits are very expensive. But through the Growing Forward program all the provinces have been allocated so many dollars for on-farm food safety, and part of that money can be used for implementation of a program and for audits.

**Ms. Siobhan Coady:** Are foreign foods coming in from other countries subjected to the same kinds of programs OFFS has? Do you think this offers an opportunity for Canadian producers, or because of the lower costs, I'm assuming, that it is negative towards Canadian producers?

**Ms. Brenda Lammens:** I'll be very honest with you: I did have something in my presentation about imports, and I removed it because I didn't want to be acting in a derogatory way, because we do resent the fact that we feel we do a much better job with our on-farm food safety programs. As to our competition that's being imported, I understand some countries are implementing programs now, but as to what standards these imports are meeting when they come in, I have no idea. They are not under any obligation that I'm aware of to belong to such a program to be in our marketplace.

**Ms. Siobhan Coady:** Thank you very much.

I'm going to talk about the farm food safety program. Could you give us some illustrations? Have you any examples of reduced food-safety problems because of this program?

I'm addressing this question to either of you.

**Ms. Theresa Bergsma:** On the grain side, we have never had a food safety issue—not that we're aware of, in any case—that directly has responded. We're just in the very initial stages of getting this program up and running.



● (1735)

**Ms. Siobhan Coady:** Excellent. Do you know of any?

**Ms. Brenda Lammens:** I have not been exposed to any. Historically, I was wondering the same questions as I was putting this together. I think there was a problem a few years ago with some sprouts that were grown in a controlled area. It wasn't a massive production, but it was an incident with bean sprouts or something. Other than that, we have not had any issues.

**Ms. Siobhan Coady:** Okay, I see. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Point of order, Mr. Chair.

I wanted to wait until the end of Ms. Coady's round, as I didn't want to interrupt her.

For Standing Order 119, there's no issue with anybody being at the table, but I was hoping I'd see sign-in sheets just to clarify, so we know who's voting on either side.

As we know, Mr. Easter is off with the cameras and Ms. Bennett is not here. I was wondering if we could know who actually are the voting members here.

**The Chair:** I believe you and Mr. Shipley are down as voting members on this side. I presume Ms. Coady and Ms. Duncan are both sworn in.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Andrew Chaplin):** I have substitution sheets for Madam Coady and Madam Duncan. I have none for any Conservative members.

**The Chair:** Does that answer your question?

As many members can sit at the table as they like. When it comes to the vote, it's only those who are sworn in who can vote.

We'll now move to Mr. Bellavance for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much for your testimony. I will begin with you, Ms. Lammens.

First, it is clear that, in my capacity as Bloc Québécois critic for agriculture, I have had many discussions with fruit and vegetable growers in Quebec. I have travelled with the committee to other parts of Canada, and I have also spoken with members of Canadian associations as well. I would like to know whether, in Ontario, you are also experiencing some of the same problems as our producers in so far as the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is concerned.

In fact, two issues come up regularly. The first concerns the number of inspectors available for the inspection of food exports. Of course, most of our exports are sent to the United States. I imagine that in Ontario, many of the producers who are members of your association export their products. But before products can be exported, they have to be inspected by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, which is as it should be. However, the lack of inspectors often leads producers to lose contracts. If an inspection cannot be carried out in a timely manner, it is quite possible that a buyer will decide to purchase his products elsewhere. This is especially true for food products, because they can go bad quickly.

Every time we've asked the Agency, the minister or government officials about this, we were told that there are enough inspectors. They say they are always hiring, except that when we speak to the producers directly, they report that they don't see inspectors come around anymore. It's become even more difficult to ensure that inspections are carried out in time. So we have to speak out, as we did during the 2008 holiday season. No inspector was available to inspect a significant number of shipments. MPs had to speak out before the shipments were ultimately inspected.

I'm telling you this so you can tell me how it's done at your end. Do you encounter this type of problem?

[*English*]

**Ms. Brenda Lammens:** Yes, there have been concerns about the role of CFIA. The technical review that has to take place for the certification of our on-farm food safety programs has been delayed many times. There are five categories. Four have finally passed. It has taken many months. I don't want to say "many years", but it seems like it has been a long time. And we're still waiting—I think in June—to go through the final category for review, so we've lost a full year pretty well of that program as far as it being fully certified.

With regard to exporting and inspection at the border, there have been issues. The perishability of the products that we produce is a huge issue, because we can lose that quality if it's sitting at the border waiting to be inspected.

I'm not really versed well enough in the issues. I personally have not heard too much. At the national level, the Canadian Horticultural Council, which I believe will be presenting to you at a later time, works more closely with CFIA because it is a national program. They probably will be able to give you more information with regard to issues at the border. I know there are issues. I have heard it from producers, but to personally speak to that issue, I don't feel I am well enough versed to do that. But it is a concern.

● (1740)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I often hear about another problem. Ms. Coady also mentioned it earlier, and you gave a brief overview of the issue. It has to do with products coming from abroad.

For a long time now, we have been making representations to all governments. I was elected in 2004, and at that time, the Liberals were in power, whereas now, the Conservatives are in power. This is a recurring problem that we hear about again and again. Sometimes we feel—and producers are under this impression—that we do not necessarily carry out the same kind of inspections for imported products as we do for domestic products.

I can name a number of products, pesticides and others, that are banned in Canada but not in the United States, China, India and other countries. These products manage to make their way onto our markets and compete with our products. Consumers are increasingly aware of this and, fortunately, they no longer feel that they have to choose the best-looking apple the best-looking tomato. It is as if we were creating visually attractive food products, whereas in the past, when my grandparents had a farm, the carrots that came from the garden were sometimes funny looking, but they were much better than many of the carrots we find on our tables today. I am talking about imported carrots, because our local carrots are still very, very good.

While appearance might be a consideration, nonetheless, consumers seem to be much more aware now and they want to buy local products. However, the government is also responsible for such matters and it must see to it that when products are imported from abroad, they meet our local standards.

Some officials once laughed at me because I asked why we are not doing on-site inspections to see how people go about growing their fruits and vegetables. Perhaps they thought that I just wanted an opportunity to travel, but I do not think my question was outlandish. The Japanese, for instance, come to our slaughterhouses to verify how we prepare the meat because they want to know what they are buying, how the product is made, how it grows, what additives it may contain, and so forth. The government has an important responsibility here.

I would like to know whether you think it is important for us to meet each others' standards and whether the problems you encounter are the same as the ones that are regularly being brought to my attention.

[*English*]

**Ms. Brenda Lammens:** Imported products are always of concern to us, because they are our competitors. When we ask the retailer why they purchase product that we don't feel has met the same food safety standards that we have been expected to comply with, there's not a lot of communication. In fact the retailers I think sometimes have positioned themselves as being above reproach.

With regard to how we handle something like this and whether we go to other countries, I have travelled to other countries, and I have sat down with exporters and talked about the type of on-farm food safety programs they have, and it seems that people in other countries are attempting to develop programs. But we still feel that possibly—and I don't mean to be finger-pointing—a country like China maybe is not competing on the same level as we are with food safety, yet they are probably one of our biggest competitors with regard to many of the fresh fruits and vegetables. It is a concern, and we certainly would appreciate the government possibly having higher expectations of the retailers here to put more emphasis on food safety and have the same expectations.

The local consumer is very anxious to buy local. I cannot believe the response we have right now. People want to know where their food is coming from. They're asking the questions. We're trying to educate the consumer to ask the retailer where food has come from, and we want to buy local. It seems that it's working, although we still have a long way to go. But when the supply is low, it seems as

though all standards fall off the shelf. When they can't get a certain amount of product in the retailers, it doesn't matter what food safety plan is being used; they want the product on the shelf. So the standards are kind of based on supply and demand.

• (1745)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Lammens.

We now move to Mr. Allen, for seven minutes.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for coming on short notice. We greatly appreciate it.

I was interested in Ms. Lammens' take on cutting asparagus, because I know we don't pick asparagus, we cut it.

**Ms. Brenda Lammens:** It's growing as we speak.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Yes, indeed it is. It actually was the very first job I ever had as a youngster, cutting asparagus, so that's why I know we don't pick it, we cut it. That was up by Collingwood, just outside Nottawa, which a lot of folks don't know about, up in Nottawasaga.

But let me get back to where you just finished, when you were talking about the standards seeming to evaporate for the retailer when they see the product diminishing on the shelves, in the sense that they need to have something there to fill that shelf to ensure that consumers coming through their doors can avail themselves of the product.

If consumers knew that it was substandard—and that's my word—from the perspective of what we're asking you and other farmers to do at the farm, to come to a certain level of standard, then to simply put product on the shelf... It seems to me that's something we ought to be telling folks. Or at the very least, perhaps we should have a standard that's identical, and if we're not able to ensure it at the farm gate, perhaps we can ensure it when it reaches our border, before it comes in.

I wonder what your thoughts are around that. I'm a great believer in locally grown produce, and I'm a great believer in markets. And by that I mean the farm market and the farm gate, where I actually buy most of my produce in the growing season. I live rurally and I'm fortunate to have four markets in my area where I can go on different nights, which is fabulous for me and fabulous for those farmers, who enjoy retailing their product at that point.

So that sense of standard is really what I'm looking at—how our farmers, through your association, view that. Do they see it as being part of the process, or is it unfair, are they annoyed? How do they feel about it?

**Ms. Brenda Lammens:** They are annoyed and they do feel it's unfair. Yes, we certainly would like to see standardization. If we're going to all be selling in the same marketplace, let's have a level playing field. We've been saying that for many years.

We don't want to beat the retailers up too much, because they are the people who buy our product. We need them. But we need to be working together and communicating more on what they're putting on their shelves and we need their support with what we're doing.

So yes, it is unfair, and we would like to see more fairness in the competition and in the standards we're expected to comply with.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** And I would agree with you on that, by the way. I'm not suggesting we point the finger at the retailer who is trying to provide food in a retail capacity. That is their role in the food supply chain. We can't all get to the farm gate the way I do, nor do I think you want everybody at the farm gate anyway, because there is not enough room for us all to be there in the first place.

But it seems to me that if we're going to set a standard, if we're going to set the bar, wherever we set it the bar ought to be the same for everyone. That includes those who are importing, because it isn't some farmer in some foreign country who has shown up at our door with his truck. He's not showing up in a half-ton pickup. It's an import organization that's bringing it into the country, and they have their company registered here. So it's not as if they don't understand or are not aware of the rules. Clearly, they're using that as a competitive advantage, and that, in my estimation, isn't where we ought to be taking this. Standards ought to be clear across the board.

If we have to inspect for that, it seems to me that's our burden as government, through the CFIA. It's not the burden of the farmers.

You indicated two things. One is the additional cost to the farmer, and the other piece is about traceability. I'm really interested in the traceability aspect, because it allows us to look back and find a situation like we had last year much more quickly, so we can trace back in a very quick way. I know your group and others in Ontario are doing other things, especially in the greenhouse business, where they're looking at the traceability aspect of their products.

Could you just speak quickly about the cost to you and how you'd like to see that shared in a different way, and about that aspect of traceability? I think folks would be interested in how you see that traceability working through the overall safety system.

• (1750)

**Ms. Brenda Lammens:** Presently, there are many different ways the products we produce are packaged. Some are done in a very sophisticated way through electronic grading. They have the ability to be computerized where everything is logged into the computer. They have the stickers on the product. They can simply look at the sticker and find out exactly what day and almost what tree that apple or that peach came from. Then we go to the other extreme where we have smaller farms that are packing and shipping directly, but they probably could trace back because they're only maybe shipping to two or three different buyers. So traceability could happen in whatever manual way they might do it.

What we need to do is make sure that everybody is doing the same thing, so we have something that has accountability and credibility, and if there ever was an issue, we could trace it back.

Those steps are taking place now. As I said, that's kind of step two that we're following. We have the programs in place, so now we need to get the traceability. It seems a hard one to work with. I don't know if people can't get their heads wrapped around it, or think, "Oh well, it's not going to happen to me". We have to get over that and realize that it could very easily happen, so we are working on it.

At this time, we do have different organizations that have been set up specifically to work with traceability. Maybe it's becoming another market item out there that people want to help with, providing the technology to make that happen. As I said, it is

something we are working on. I know a lot of the supply management groups have completed it, because they're looking more at the location of the piggery or the chicken farm, whatever, and that can be done through a lot of GPS mapping. But with horticulture, once the product is on a truck, you don't know where it has gone. But it is something we are working on and trying to figure out how to do it so it's not a burden. If it gets too complex, people will not want to do it.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Allen, your time has expired.

Mr. Shipley, seven minutes.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for coming out today.

I want to chat a little bit, likely with Ms. Lammens. She's from Ontario, I'm from Ontario. Actually, I have an agriculture background, and some of my neighbours are very much into horticulture and are vegetable growers. I understand completely the significance of the food safety issues. I was in dairy for many years, and it wasn't a choice. Inspections were the norm, unpredictable stop-ins by inspectors to not only assess the inspection of the sanitization of our equipment, but also the aesthetic value, in some respects, of how you simply looked after your farm and your buildings.

I'm sort of interested to find out a little more from you in terms of it likely being market-driven but you would like to see it as mandatory. Has there been any movement, whether it's the Ontario fruit and vegetables or the Canadian, to take that step to see certification? You said, I think, 80% of your producers are participants in it or members of it.

• (1755)

**Ms. Brenda Lammens:** I would say participants, because the audit process is something that happens every four years. Or they can be random audits also. It's 80% of production, not necessarily the number of producers.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Okay. Can you give me any idea of the number of producers? Because you were concerned that the producers may not pass it but the larger ones may. Has there been any groundwork done, knowing the benefits of it, not only for the food safety part—that's the priority part—but because it becomes part of the marketing tool? It becomes a marketing tool in terms of the consumer. My family now, more than we did actually, watches the label, watches where it's coming from, and are more concerned about that than they used to be, and I think for obvious reasons. Is there initiative to move ahead on that?

**Ms. Brenda Lammens:** There is not any initiative I'm aware of to make it mandatory. You must realize that there are a lot of what we call mom-and-pop farms out there, family farms where maybe the mother and father and some of the kids are growing cucumbers or peppers or something, and they are not aware. Maybe they have heard at a grower meeting or something that they should be implementing an on-farm food safety plan. We've been looking at best agricultural practices to at least get them doing something that is creating some kind of accountability.

No, it's not mandatory. As grower groups, we certainly are encouraging all our producers to get involved. I believe that the marketplace will create that demand. We are encouraging our brokers to not accept products unless they have an on-farm food safety plan attached to them. At this point in time, that's about as much control as we have to force people to do it.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** I'll get a little more in-depth in a minute.

One of the things I'm interested in is that we're very seasonal. That's Canada, I guess. Certainly, through the good weather, the summer.... These markets are going to start to open up in another month, and will stay through to October or November, some of them. What is the attitude of the people who come? Is it because they feel that they want to buy local? Is it because they feel safe about buying local? At these markets, there are not just fruits and vegetables; there's actually meat and all sorts of produce sold at them. Do they talk about that to you?

**Ms. Brenda Lammens:** Yes, they do. They want to know where their food is coming from. They feel that they're getting fresher, safer food when they come to the market or to the farm gate to buy that product. That, I guess, would cause a bit of concern, too, if you're looking at an on-farm food safety program, because that could be a bit of a misconception. Generally, I believe that most of the producers are doing a good job in what they're doing, but they need to be on a program so it can be certified.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** I appreciate so much that comment. HACCP is basically a program that will give you the traceability right from the start. If it's chickens, it's from the day the egg is hatched until the day it hits the slaughterhouse. I don't know that, actually, even in the feather industry it is mandatory. I can take you to farm after farm after farm that, if they don't now, they likely would have the option at some point in time. It's protection for them. In some commodities, it's a premium to know that you have the certification.

I realize that in most of yours, much of what you have is marketed domestically. Certainly once you cross a border, once you start to move some of that, which many in the greenhouse industry have, which is a little different from you but is under the big blanket, you need to have that traceability or you'll have markets you can't access. I would just encourage as many people as possible, in terms of your organization, to consider it. Because there are vast benefits, not only for food safety but certainly for the marketing part. I think people are going to start to be more questioning about being able to trace this back only if something is wrong. I don't know if you agree with that.

• (1800)

**Ms. Brenda Lammens:** I certainly agree with it. As I say, traceability is the next step, and that's where we are driving our commodity groups. Certainly the fruit and vegetable growers are supporting traceability. Many of the commodity groups—you've cited the greenhouses—certainly have traceability. As I say, more of our sophisticated growers certainly have that already implemented on their farms.

There just is always that pocket we have to keep working with. It takes more work to try to get them on the programs and to get traceability in place. We certainly are working, and there are programs available to help them get on board too.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Your time has expired, Mr. Shipley.

Mr. Easter, you have five minutes.

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

Welcome, folks. I'm sorry I didn't hear quite all your presentation. Mr. Anderson and I had to leave for a minute.

This hearing, as you know, is really about how we can improve the food safety system based on the sad experience of listeriosis last fall that eventually ended up in 22 deaths. Certainly I'm concerned about the investigator and whether or not we're going to get to any political or government responsibility on that end, but we do have to do what we can to improve the system.

My colleague raised some questions earlier, so if I ask you a similar question just tell me so, because, as I said, I had to leave.

In the fruit and vegetable industry, Ms. Lammens, you had talked about and explained, I think, very well all the things that you have to do on the farm. There's no question you produce a high-quality product that is safe and gets on consumer shelves.

I was in Nova Scotia the week before last, and I learned there, in terms of their horticultural industry, that where in the 1970s they were producing 17% of the horticultural products that ended up on the shelves, today they're producing 8%. The problems are low returns, high costs, competition from other countries' product that is ending up on our store shelves that doesn't have to meet the same requirements that you have to meet.

I wonder what your views are in that regard. One, if the Government of Canada paid the costs of the Canadian food inspection program as it relates to you on the ground, as is done in the United States, what's your view in going in that area? It's allowable under the WTO, it's protection for consumers, and the United States covers a lot of their costs that we don't. Secondly, on the horticultural side, shouldn't product from other nations that's ending up on our shelves have to meet exactly the same standards as we do, or higher?

**Ms. Brenda Lammens:** Starting with your last question, we have discussed that. We did discuss the fact that, yes, they should meet our standards, because it doesn't create a fair marketplace for us. So we have discussed that.

With respect to the responsibility of the government to make sure that we do have on-farm food safety and that the program and the audit process are available so that we can be certified, there are funds right now. They were supposed to be announced yesterday. I hope they were announced today. Under the Growing Forward program, for on-farm food safety there are two streams of money. One stream of money would be to help to implement a program and allow for an audit process, and the other was for any type of upgrade you might have to do in your facility, whether it would be more stainless steel or a different type of grading line or whatever, to help bring you up to the standards that would be required to pass an audit. The only problem is that money is first-come, first-served, and it's shared with the processors, who are pretty big guys compared to a lot of 50-acre farmers.

There is money, but it's something we have to compete for. So if you don't get it, I don't know where you're going to find funding to do this. That's the way the program is set up today.

Yes, we need some help. You're talking about how there's less and less domestic product on the shelf. We've become a very privileged society, in that we can have food from all over the world, and we've become very accustomed to that. I think we need to take a look at what we grow seasonally in this country and enjoy it in season and start to understand that if you want to protect your Canadian farmers, you'd better start eating what we produce when we produce it.

• (1805)

**The Chair:** Your time has expired, Mr. Easter.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Good point. One of the problems is these guys make announcements but never deliver.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Easter.

I would like to thank our witnesses very much for coming, especially on such short notice. There never seems to be enough time. But we very much appreciate your coming here, and we look forward to seeing you again. Thank you very much.

We'll suspend for a few minutes.

• \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

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• (1810)

**The Chair:** I believe we now have quorum at the table.

I'd like to again thank our witnesses, Mr. Ron Osborne and Mr. Rick Holley. Thank you very much, gentlemen, for coming here. As is our usual procedure, I ask each of you to keep your opening remarks to ten minutes or less, and then we turn it over to questioning.

Who's first?

Mr. Osborne, you go ahead.

**Mr. Ron Osborne (Food Safety and Quality Systems Specialist, As an Individual):** Thank you very much for the privilege and honour of appearing before this subcommittee to share some of my thoughts on food safety. I've included—and I guess it will go with the transcript—a little biography, because I didn't want to take up too much time, but I do have to mention that I'm a professional meat scientist and also work in food safety and quality. I should mention that I'm one of the few PhDs in the country, and that stands for “packing house doctor”.

I have more than 50 years of experience associated with the meat industry, most of that in Canada. I actually learned to cut meat and butcher, make sausage, cure, and all that at a university, something that is hard to do in this country. I've worked both in academia and in industry. I worked in industry for the last 15 years as vice-president of food safety and technical services before I retired in 2004. And I retired not by choice, but our company was bought by a large multinational.

I continue to do food safety audits and evaluations and advise on the related problems.

So what I'm going to try to tell you—it's a little different tack here—is a little bit about Caravelle Foods, the company I worked for, because it has some unique characteristics. Initially, Caravelle Foods went to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada—at that time, in 1989, there was no CFIA—and we asked for help in finding high-quality raw materials for our hamburgers, which we made for our one customer, which happened to be McDonald's. We made all the hamburgers for McDonald's in Canada. We had trouble finding high-quality raw material, and one of the reasons was that in the summers of 1987 and 1988, MAPAQ, which is the department of agriculture, fisheries, and food in Quebec, did some surveys on some of the hamburgers at McDonald's restaurants and found that one year they were high in salmonella and in another year they were high in E. coli. This information got back to McDonald's, who went to the owners of Caravelle Foods and told us to clean up our act or they were going to find another supplier.

Anyway, we asked for several meetings with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, and over a seven-year period we had many discussions with them. I have no proof of this, but I have a feeling we were probably the major player here that sort of pushed Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada at the time into developing a food safety program, and this is in the early nineties.

So my story is about Caravelle Foods. We had these discussions, and interestingly enough, a lot of this was taking place before the jack-in-the-box situation that happened in 1993 in the U.S. Caravelle Foods was the first plant recognized in Canada by CFIA for its food safety enhancement program. I'm sure you've heard of FSEP and you know what that is from previous discussions. In fact, we were the first meat plant in North America to be officially recognized with a HACCP plan. We did much of the early testing and, for Mr. Easter, we did pilot program work over a four-year period with CFIA, and our program was recognized in November of 1996.

I'd like to give you some highlights of our program, which impacts some of the activities that have happened over the last year. We started with a well-organized and effective manual of operating procedures, which included a sanitation monitoring program. This was not required at the time, but we decided we needed to do this, because we did find some of these organisms in our drains, on tables, and on other contact surfaces. We analyzed and monitored trends from the data we collected. So we were doing this in the middle to late nineties to identify problem areas on a regular basis. These results were reported and discussed at weekly management meetings—that is, with our top management, and they wanted to know if we were having any problems. As well, we discussed these in production meetings. Deviations were corrected as quickly as possible. We also met with our sanitation chemical supplier, who we found to be a wealth of information in solving some of our problems.

•(1815)

We required all our raw material suppliers to have a HACCP program. And remember that we didn't cook our product, so our finished product was only as good as our raw material. So we had to have high-quality safe raw materials in order to produce a high-quality safe finished product, even though it was cooked at the McDonald's restaurants. At that time there were over a thousand in Canada, and sometimes there were problems in getting standardized cooking procedures. They've worked on that, and that takes place now. I personally audited all our suppliers. We started out with 28 suppliers in Canada and, a sign of the times, when I retired we only had six suppliers. We notified our suppliers when there were deviations in raw materials and expected them to correct the deficiencies in a timely manner.

We notified our CFIA inspector when we had a result that significantly impacted the quality or safety of our raw material or finished product. It was understood that our inspector, who was responsible for several plants—and you've heard this before, that one inspector has several plants—would know that we would contact her even if she was not present in our plant.

Our one and only customer, McDonald's, spent less and less time in the plant over the course of the 15 years I was with the company because they knew our food safety and quality program worked and was successful.

A food safety culture was established at Caravelle Foods. You need a well-written and executed program. We have these in Canada, but you have to have the support of all employees. This is where the employees participate and take some responsibility in executing the program. This took some time to establish but was key in the development of a successful program. I've listed some of the attributes, which included supportive and committed management; excellent leadership with a value of trust; consistent behaviour among all employees; education of employees, which is very important so they know why you're doing things as well as training them to know how to do it; team effort.... We worked together for example in cleaning our patty machines, which were as complicated as the slicers, and we had a team of maintenance, production people as well as our sanitation crew, work of these on a nightly basis to make sure the equipment was cleaned properly. We had empowerment and engagement of all employees who shared responsibilities and ideas and communicated openly and freely. Of course, we had cooperation; we had open and effective communication. And we had a rewards system to recognize performance and support. Praise is the grease that kindles the human spirit. It went a long way to contributing to the success of our program, and it doesn't cost much.

The crowning feature was Caravelle Foods was recognized with the Black Pearl Award for outstanding commitment to and achievement of corporate excellence in food quality and safety in 1999. This was presented by the International Association for Food Protection. It was the very first company in Canada to win this award.

What do we need to improve Canada's food safety system? I'm sure you're all waiting to hear what my comments are on that.

We need to encourage the development of a food safety culture in all our plants as well as in the CFIA organization.

We need better-trained inspectors. We used to train our inspectors by either sending them into the plant to work a while or they used to have short courses throughout the year. I remember training some inspectors in how to clean a band saw and how to make sausage so they had hands-on experience. This is very important, I think, if you're going to do a good job of inspecting. It would be advantageous for all of us to have a post-secondary educational background, but all need not be veterinarians. There should be opportunities for animal scientists, food scientists, microbiologists, and biologists. Some could also be graduates of community colleges in specially designed technical support programs for the food industry.

Baseline studies are needed to measure the occurrence of indicator and pathogenic organisms in our raw materials and finished products. This will help us evaluate our food chain food safety systems, such as on the farm that we've heard about, all the way through to the consumer, and would include traceability.

•(1820)

**The Chair:** Excuse me, Mr. Osborne. Mr. Anderson has a point of order.

**Mr. David Anderson:** I'm just wondering, can you go over that point again? I was writing it down and I got behind you there. Just the beginning of your third point.

**Mr. Ron Osborne:** Baseline studies.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Thank you.

**Mr. Ron Osborne:** How am I on time? I'm almost done.

**The Chair:** You're actually out of time, but I'll give you a bit of leeway.

**Mr. Ron Osborne:** Baseline studies are needed to measure the occurrence of indicator and pathogenic organisms in our raw materials and finished products. This will help evaluate our food-chain food safety systems, including traceability.

Summaries of epidemiological data—type of pathogen, number of cases, where outbreaks occur, and commodity type—following the model of Dr. Ewen Todd, formerly of Health Canada, are needed. Unfortunately Dr. Todd's program was never carried on after he left for work in the United States. This will help us evaluate how our programs are working to combat food-borne disease and allow continuous improvement in an already well-designed program.

Better coordination and cooperation in food safety activities among the various jurisdictions are needed.

Finally, bigger is not necessarily better. Smaller plants often do a better job than larger plants in both producing quality products and food safety. We need a system to support a range of types and sizes of meat processing plants. Discussions should continue with the federal-provincial-territorial committee on developing an outcome-based meat safety system, with recognition of provincial programs like Ontario's HACCP advantage program.

Food safety is a journey; it is not a destination.

Thank you.

• (1825)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. Mr. Osborne, maybe you can provide those suggestions to the committee.

**Mr. Ron Osborne:** I have submitted my notes to be transcribed.

**The Chair:** You're one ahead of me. Thank you very much.

Mr. Holley, you have ten minutes or less.

**Mr. Richard (Rick) Holley (Professor, Department of Food Science, University of Manitoba, As an Individual):** What do you mean less? I'm a university professor.

**The Chair:** I'll give you a one-minute warning, how's that?

**Mr. Richard (Rick) Holley:** God bless you.

Ladies and gentlemen, it's a pleasure for me to actually walk the halls of this building. It's been a long time since I've been in this building.

By way of background, I've been at the University of Manitoba as a professor in food microbiology and food safety for going on 15 years now. I had a little bit of industry experience with Labatt's. I was fighting listeria in dairy operations in the northeast U.S. for five years. And I worked for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada for well over 12 years in Saint-Hyacinthe and also here in Ottawa.

I come to you to encourage and participate in this debate to improve the level of food safety in this country. I will take advantage of any and every opportunity I have to address issues associated with food safety.

When I heard that we had an "independent" investigator appointed to look into the issues around the listeriosis outbreak, I was extremely disappointed that it might represent a partisan approach by the federal government to address that particular issue. I've since met with Ms. Weatherill and was very pleased to understand that her interests also lie in uncovering as much information about deficiencies in the food safety system in this country as she can within the allotted time available. I am going to be very disappointed if at the end of this process, at the end of the activity of this committee, we continue to have serious needs with respect to solving food safety issues in this country.

The barn door is wide open, folks. I just sat here and listened to on-farm food safety systems. On-farm food safety systems don't work. They don't work. And they don't work because we don't control the recycling of pathogens from animal feed to animals. They're building up in the animal supply. I have numbers. I can give them to you. I'm sorry that I don't have a brief to present to the committee, but if there's any interest in having written words from

me, I'd be more than happy to provide them to you—that's on-farm food safety issues.

The animal feed industry is a very large lobby and a very big industry. They are very concerned about specified risk material being fed to ruminant animals and then raising the whole spectre of the transmission of mad cow disease. Mad cow disease is not a food safety issue. That's not blasphemous; it's true. There's no solid evidence. A number of us believe that the organism that causes BSE does not cause vCJD in humans.

Where have interventions been useful in terms of preventing recycling of pathogenic organisms in animal feed to animals and then along the food chain to humans? It was as early as 1955, when it was decided, wisely, not to feed pigs uncooked feed. Cooking of feed has prevented large numbers of people from getting ill as a result of trichinosis. That's one example of what can happen. I have many others that I can give you, but time just won't allow me to do it.

The main issues associated with food safety in this country are the following. Dr. Osborne referred to one of them.

On food-borne illness surveillance systems, we don't have one that works. We have two systems in this country. We have the national notifiable infectious disease reporting system, and we have the NESP, the national enteric surveillance program. They don't capture the information that is generated when outbreaks occur.

• (1830)

The NESP pools laboratory reports from people who got sick from drinking water and eating food and puts them all together in one place. I can influence the results of those data simply by sending the laboratory some isolates that I get out of food, and it skews the results. The national infectious disease reporting system varies across the country. All organisms that cause food-borne illness in British Columbia, and I think in Quebec—and I can be corrected on that—are reportable.

At the federal level, food-borne illness that is caused by *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Costidium perfringens*, which are number five and number six in terms of causing food-borne illness, aren't reportable. When people get sick with reportable diseases in six of our provinces, the data are pooled together, they're aggregated. Other provinces don't aggregate the data. They come to Ottawa and you can't make any sense of them. We don't know what makes us sick and we don't know what foods containing those unknown organisms cause greater frequencies of illnesses. We can't say with any realistic certainty that we know what foods are more risky than others. If we don't know what the risk is, how in God's name can we manage the risk?

Food-borne illness surveillance programs need to be re-established, just as Dr. Osborne said a few minutes ago. We did it back in the late 1980s, early nineties, and we stopped doing it. It cost money. You have to make an evaluation on the basis of how important it is to you as the people who have decisions on where money is spent by the government. Food-borne illness costs \$10 billion a year in this country. One out of three or one out of four people will come down with food-borne illnesses. We don't know how many die. We have no idea. We just use American data.

If we want to continue to do that, that's fine, but we eat different things from what the Americans eat. We have a different ethnic population background.

We have two tiers of food-borne inspection in this country that operate at the provincially and federally registered plants. We also have municipal governments and we have departments of health that are involved in inspection of food service. The standards are different, the level of training is different, and the result is utter confusion. There are gaps and overlaps in the system that are an embarrassment. We're not alone, because the Americans have a worse system. They do exactly the same kinds of things that we do. It's the same with the Mexicans.

It's time for better coordination among the various groups that are responsible for food inspection in this country. We don't need more inspection. We may need more inspectors in some instances, but we don't need more inspection. We need smarter inspection. We need better-trained inspectors who understand where the problems are in the food process. They get their hands around that.

Food-borne illness outbreak management... If you have cared to take a look at the reports, the lessons learned that came out last week, they are a repetition of the kinds of sabre-rattling and political gesturing at the federal-provincial levels that occurred back in 1999, when Schneiders spread salmonella-contaminated cheese from one end of this country to the other and caused—and get this, folks—820 illnesses, and many of those were kids.

Thank you very much for your attention.

•(1835)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Holley.

Mr. Easter, seven minutes.

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

Thank you, gentlemen.

I hardly know where to start, to be honest with you.

Anyway, let me start with you, Mr. Holley. You've said that the lessons learned are basically a repetition of the past. We don't need more inspectors; we need smarter and better inspection. I'm not going to disagree with that. Food safety is certainly in everybody's interest, be it government, be it the food industry, be it whoever.

On the points that you're raising on food-borne illnesses in Canada and how we handle it here and the approach that you're saying we need to take—and this could be a question to both of you in your experience in the industry—what countries around the world do food safety inspections in the way you're proposing to do them? Are there other countries that do that? From your perspective, why have we

gone the way we've gone in this country over the last 20, I think you said, years?

**Mr. Richard (Rick) Holley:** Please don't misunderstand; I don't think we do a bad job in Canada in terms of food safety. I don't have a problem eating either domestically grown food or food from other countries, too, for that matter.

I think we want to do food inspection in a mature and intelligent fashion in Canada, but historically, the way in which inspection has been done.... It makes it easy, because it's very measurable, that food inspection is done against standards. You're able to calculate compliance.

The things that are easily measured, such as label type size, label information, fill weights, and species identification, are the kinds of things that get addressed first. They're the economic issues. The food safety issues are far more complex. They require training in terms of food safety systems, such as HACCP or the CVS, compliance verification. The inspection takes longer and requires a greater understanding of the systems.

Dr. Osborne was saying how, in his day, he was actually an employee who was training the inspectors. I think the CFIA has developed programs that attempt to address these issues. I don't think it would be too terribly difficult to do a better job than they do in the United States.

Both Ron and I sit on the academic advisory panel for the CFIA. We've asked these kinds of questions—i.e., what training programs have you got going? I sense that there's significant interest in making sure that the new generation of inspectors who are coming online are given the kind of training that goes beyond label compliance and the economic features and that addresses the food safety features that get into the mechanics of manufacturing the food.

•(1840)

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** You raise an interesting point, and I've made note of it. Inspection for label compliance versus inspection for food safety—those are two huge, different issues that maybe we need to drill down into at some point.

Mr. Osborne mentioned as well having better-trained inspectors. We do know of an incident here recently when CFIA decided to change the monitoring for listeriosis. It was found out that the inspectors were not trained. They had to be sent back to Ottawa to be retrained. In fact, Maple Leaf found out, in terms of watching them, observing them, that these folks didn't really know what they were doing.

So that is a problem, although not intentional. Is part of the problem there that inspectors within CFIA now are not specialized in one area, that they will...? I don't know what you'd call it; let's say they inspect different systems, or commodities, I guess. Would it be better to have them more specialized?

**Mr. Ron Osborne:** I'd like to address that.



Of course, you have different plants. I have no problem with veterinarians inspecting in slaughterhouses, because they're trained that way, but they're not trained in processing. Those trained in Canada are lucky to get half a course in any type of food safety. Those inspectors who go to processing plants like Maple Leaf should have backgrounds in meat science, food science, so that they understand the science of inspection. That's what I'm saying.

Or, if CFIA chooses to do some training, then the training should be done in the plants. You don't bring them to Ottawa. You take them out to the different areas and train them out there. I think each area should have a trainer out there responsible for training the inspectors out in that area.

**The Chair:** Your time has expired, Mr. Easter.

Mr. Bellavance, for seven minutes.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Thank you very much, gentlemen, for your testimony.

I would like to tell you about some comments I read in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* when the listeriosis crisis hit. In fact, the editorial was written before the crisis was even over. You have worked in the field for a long time and have expertise not only in the area of listeria but also, in your case Mr. Holley, in biology. I would therefore like to ask some questions that are somewhat more technical.

The editorial states that the Government of Canada had agreed to national standards for listeria that were lower than those in many other countries. It also stipulated that Health Canada tolerates up to 100 bacteria per gram of ready-to-eat foods at the start of the product's life, even though the dose of listeria ultimately ingested may be higher.

I need your expertise here because I am not really that knowledgeable about this issue. We are being told that the bacteria can replicate during the product's life, even if it is refrigerated. We have agreed to this standard of 100 bacteria per gram, at the start of the product's life, even though we know that the product may contain more bacteria by its expiry date, or in other words, during the product's stated shelf life. In contrast, the United Nations and the World Health Organization Codex Alimentarius Commission tolerates 100 bacteria per gram, but only at the end of the product's shelf life.

The United States government is tougher still and tolerates no bacteria at all. I would like to ask you a specific question on this last point and I would also ask you to respond to other comments made in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*. Would it be possible to have a policy of zero tolerance as is the case in the United States? I always thought that listeria was in the soil and that we could not eradicate it completely.

So I would first of all like to hear your comments on the fact that this standard is being enforced in the United States and, secondly, I would like to know whether you feel that our standard is really lower than the one enforced by other countries.

• (1845)

[English]

**Mr. Richard (Rick) Holley:** Your question is very perceptive.

The issue of permission with respect to 100 listeria per gram is generally qualified with a statement that the listeria cannot grow in the products in which 100 are allowable, so whether it's 100 at the beginning of shelf life or 10 days later, it's only going to be 100. For those products in which listeria can grow, the Canadian regulation is exactly the same as the American regulation—zero.

Now, as of the first week of February 2008, the USDA published in the *Federal Register* a notice that it would allow the presence of 100 listeria in ready-to-eat products in which the organism would not grow. In the United States, as you well know, they have two agencies responsible for inspection. We only have one, thank God, at the federal level, the CFIA. They have the FDA and the USDA. The USDA is responsible for meat and poultry, and the FDA is responsible for dairy and fish, so in USDA-approved products, or registered products, you can have 100 listeria per gram, but not in FDA products.

As for the threat associated with that number of organisms, I think the Canadian position was far more mature, because when you consider a zero tolerance for listeria in food, it's just as you said: wherever you look, you'll find listeria. In fact, if we have more than 10 people in here, one of us—well, maybe more than one of us—is carrying listeria. What?

You know, this really annoys me. We are moving more and more and more towards end-product testing. We cannot inspect safety into food. We can't test safety into food. We have to synthesize it into food. We have to produce the food that we know is safe. The American car manufacturers learned a long time ago that preventive programs that they put in place—the Japanese learned it very well—yielded cars that were safe when they hit the road. That's the way the food has to be produced, by using HACCP programs. That way, you know when the product comes off the line that the product is safe to eat.

In terms of end-product testing, when you have an organism like listeria that occurs in foods at 0.1%, in order for end-product testing to be of any value whatsoever, you have to test at least a thousand in order to find one.

What the devil is that going to tell you? Stop the problems from developing in the food safety system, so that the end products are safe to eat. When you don't suspect there's a problem, you're not going to be able to test those products and get any indication of what proportion of the total is likely to be contaminated.

This traceability issue is another one that's not an excuse for laxity in food safety systems. Recalls and traceability are after the fact, folks. Let's build safety into the food we manufacture, each and every day.

Did I answer your question?

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Your time has expired, Mr. Bellavance.

Go ahead, Mr. Allen.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Holley, I think what you articulated, unfortunately, is what most Canadian consumers, who aren't as well versed as you and Dr. Osborne are, think is actually in the system and that it's doing what you've suggested it ought to do, but what, I would suggest—again, perhaps putting words in your mouth—you're saying it isn't doing at the moment.

I agree with you, by the way, about traceability and recall. That is after the fact. We're trying to go find something that's occurred and where it came from, so we can actually tell folks they shouldn't eat that item. We saw that with Maple Leaf Foods, where we absolutely had to wait until we found out the exact plant. I'm not so sure we had to wait exactly that long, but that's a debate for another day.

So if consumers think the system actually does what you've just said it does not, it raises the question of how many questions and how loud a voice should Canadian consumers be raising about a system that, according to you, is not nearly as safe as what they're led to believe it is—or indeed in which they actually have a belief?

I say this because the system really is based, I believe, and I think consumers believe the same thing, on a matter of trust that's built up over a period of time. At one time, it might have been the corner butcher or the corner grocer—and, as Dr. Osborne said, bigger isn't always better. But we are now faced, unfortunately, with a situation where we have huge manufacturers of food, as I call them, because places like Maple Leaf Foods truly are manufacturing facilities. Their end-product simply is food that we consume. These are huge places; they aren't the corner store that we once had a lot of faith in. And we don't have that sense any more.

If you could speak a little more to that, I'm going to allow you to have some more time to talk to that sense of trust and faith of Canadian consumers. Is it misplaced?

• (1850)

**Mr. Richard (Rick) Holley:** I don't think it is. Whether they're small or large companies, these companies are in business to stay in business. In those cases where they're either federally or provincially registered plants, they're working with food safety programs that are founded on the basis of experience, and it's in their best interests to do so. There is always going to be an undesirable element that is going to want to cut corners, but it's in the companies' best interests to operate these programs so that the products, at the end of day, are not going to make people ill. I think Mr. and Mrs. Consumer can have a reasonable level of confidence that those in the industry who are in the business to stay in business—who are, by and large, almost all of them—are doing things to the best of their ability.

I express that confidence publicly, but there are going to be accidents that occur. There has been over the past 15 to 20 years an evolution in terms of the organisms causing these problems. Now, I don't know if this has been spoken of by any of the witnesses you've called in the past, but if you take a look at the food-borne illness statistics, such as they are in Canada—and they are woefully incomplete—you will see there's been a major change in the organisms causing food-borne illnesses. We don't see the frequencies of illnesses being caused by staphylococcus we used to, but we know why. We know it's because we're using better refrigeration systems; they're available to us now and the industry does use them.

This organism, quite unlike listeria, cannot grow at refrigerator temperature. But guess what we've done? We've replaced the organism with listeria, an organism that's perfectly adapted to growing in our meat plants. So we have to address that. I'm confident we can do that as we move forward.

But if rules and regulations are brought in to demonstrate that government is doing something, and little other than that, it is very, very wrong. That's my concern, because we're faced with a situation where if you take a careful look at those new listeria guidelines with respect to end-product testing, we're going to see more of these regulations come down in the fall. There's a working group with industry that's making new regulations for non-food-contact surfaces. Those are walls and ceilings, folks, in the whole bloody plant. Yes, you're going to find listeria. Well, I'll tell you right now that you're going to find a lot of other organisms that mimic listeria biochemically—and those are the tests that you use to find them. So it's just going to be a quagmire. We're going to be caught up in circles of analysis, and the food is going to be rotten before we can get it delivered.

I think this kind of activity is going to disenfranchise, or invalidate, or make industry distrust HACCP. I think HACCP can work. I think these food systems that we have in place can be improved so they do deliver what they promise. They don't always deliver what they promise, but I think they can. But sure as heck, if we start testing end products and swabbing anterooms for listeria monocytogenes, the guys in the plant are going to say “Here comes the inspector, and he doesn't know sweet diddly”. That will be a loss of confidence, and that is what's happening in the United States of America, folks. So if we want to emulate them, let's just go forward and do it. But it's a waste of time.

• (1855)

**Mr. Ron Osborne:** I'd just like to add that we have to put more effort into training our plant people, too, in human resource development, as I talked about in terms of culture, because that's what's going to get the job done. That takes place before the end product goes out the door. Everybody has a responsibility in sanitizing, cleaning, and checking how the product is handled, how they dress, and whether they wash their hands or not, and whether they come to work sick. But employees have to be trained and be told why what they have to do is important.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Osborne.

Mr. Anderson for seven minutes.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Thank you.

Mr. Osborne, I have a couple of questions for you. You talked about the fact that you don't think the inspectors all needed to be vets. I'm just wondering how that's received in the industry and by the union, and what comments they would have on this. The union has been fairly aggressively involved here, and it seems like they're trying to make some political points and are trying to establish their ground, but I'm wondering how they receive that kind of information.

**Mr. Ron Osborne:** I haven't talked to the union.

I don't think they're all vets in the union, unless there are two unions. I think there are a lot of inspectors who are not veterinarians. All I'm saying is why would you go to vet school to learn physiology and pathology and how to do surgery and all that to become a meat inspector? I think we need some, but in order to raise the bar, in terms of training and understanding, we need to include others in that pool.

A lot of inspectors were former butchers, and I'm not sure if they're just out of high school. That might be a question to ask the CFIA, what qualifications you have to have to be an inspector. So I really don't know what the vets think about that.

I do have to tell you that I was on the advisory committee to the dean's council at OVC, but this topic didn't come up.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Okay.

I want to talk a bit about the systems that you're talking about. First, you said that there were summaries of data that were developed early on. I think you said Dr. Todd was the person who developed the framework, and then it was set aside.

Do you want to tell us a little more about that framework? You seemed to think it was an important one.

**Mr. Ron Osborne:** Yes, Dr. Holley mentioned pooling a lot of data.

He got beyond the pool and actually was in touch with many of the public health jurisdictions across the country to find out where outbreaks occurred, whether it was in a school or hospital or church dinner. He found out what the food was, whether it was wieners or potato salad, and the number of people who were ill, that kind of data, which he published. I think it's in the *Canadian Institute of Food Science and Technology Journal*. So it is published. Actually, I used this data in teaching, when I was at the University of Guelph, to show what the hazards were, what kinds of foods had the highest hazards, what kinds of organisms, that type of thing.

**Mr. David Anderson:** One of your points was that bigger is not better. We've talked about this a couple of times at committee here with a couple of different witnesses, and we actually challenged Mr. McCain on this.

Do you have any vision for how we can ensure that some of the smaller companies are able to participate? If we're going to see through some of the things that you folks are talking about, it seems we're talking about a pretty comprehensive system, and often the smaller firms can't afford those kinds of costs.

● (1900)

**Mr. Ron Osborne:** One of the things I mentioned in my remarks was having it outcome-based. We used to put a lot of emphasis on standards for building materials and the like, but the modern thinking in inspection is to have it outcome-based. As was mentioned before, we don't want to make people sick, we want product to leave the plant without the hazards in it.

A lot of times, I think, for the smaller plants—because they know their employees, it's easier to do training—once they see the results of their program, they can produce a better product. It's a lot easier for them to do it. Everybody speaks the same language, for example. Often there are family members working together.

In the larger plants, language can become a problem if you are hiring different ethnic groups. To train them you have to go to quite an extensive program and make sure it's in all the languages so they'll understand.

I guess we maybe have to put some parameters around “bigger” and “smaller”. They often refer to them as SMEs, which are small to medium enterprises, as opposed to the larger plants. But it seems that in Canada we're getting a consolidation of our meat plants, not only the slaughter plants, which are becoming fewer and fewer, but also some of the processing plants.

I've heard some of you mention that you go to the farmers market. There's often very good product there. Now, whether they follow the food safety standards, we don't always know, because they're not federally inspected. It was mentioned before that this should apply to all plants, but don't forget that CFIA deals only with federally registered plants, they don't deal with the provincial plants. What they do doesn't necessarily affect the provincial plants. I did mention that if a province develops a program, like they did in Ontario—the HACCP advantage program—and it is equivalent to CFIA's FSEP, there should be some recognition of that for the provinces.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Mr. Holley had something to say.

I also want to know.... Do you think, then, Mr. Holley, that all plants should be under the same standard, or is it acceptable to have provincial standards that work, primarily because those plants are serving a much smaller market? Or do you think everybody should have the same requirements?

I'm asking both of you that, I guess.

**Mr. Ron Osborne:** I think that's a challenge, because you will put a lot of the smaller plants out of business. One of the requirements, of course, is that if you export, you have to meet certain requirements. In order to do that, then, you need the same standard. But I think there are market opportunities in provinces, like buying local, whereby you do have a safety standard, which I said was equivalent to the federal standard, in that they have a HACCP program.

They have good manufacturing processes, but they may not be enforced to the same degree with the records. They can produce meat to sell, even within the province, but there are a lot of retail chains.... We heard earlier about the retail stores not giving much attention to the producers of produce. This happens in the meat industry too. There are a lot of chains where, if you're not federally inspected, you can't get into those stores. On the other hand, they do violate that, because it's often hard to buy federally inspected lamb. I know in Ontario you can buy provincially inspected lamb.

I think there has to be some flexibility and continued discussion with, as I said, the federal-provincial-territorial committee on how we can come up with a meat safety system that will protect all the consumers in Canada.

**The Chair:** Your time has expired.

Perhaps you can answer very briefly and directly, Mr. Holley.

**Mr. Richard (Rick) Holley:** There were two issues I wanted to speak to. The first has to do with the double standard.

I would reiterate what Dr. Osborne has said, but until we resolve this issue, I think there should be a single standard. We are going to always face problems in terms of imported products coming into Canada that meet the provincial but not the federal standard. If they're manufactured in Ontario, they can't be sold in Manitoba, but they could come from China and be sold from one end of this country to the other. That has to be straightened out, because we are signatories to the WHO agreements on sanitary and phytosanitary standards.

The second thing was that about 45% of the food in Canada is inspected by the federal government. Sorry, that number is reversed: it's 55% of the food is inspected by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Things like cereals, cooking oils and spices, are not inspected by anybody. If you guys think that inspection is going to be the be-all and end-all of food safety in this country, think again.

The third thing was to provide information with respect to food-borne illness surveillance programs that are currently in place. FoodNet is a program in the United States. It has ten sentinel sites and monitors the health of 45 million people, like Todd used to do in Canada. We have a fledgling system in Canada, operated by the Public Health Agency of Canada. It's monitoring the health of one million people in the Kitchener-Waterloo area, and they're moving forward to set up another sentinel site, which may come about this year in Alberta and/or British Columbia.

• (1905)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Duncan, five minutes.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen.

I'm sorry I missed the beginning of your remarks, but I want to pick up on something you said, Dr. Holley. Can you provide a list of what's not inspected in Canada, please?

**Mr. Richard (Rick) Holley:** Yes. In a broad sense, things like bakery products, cereal products, biscuits, cookies, pasta, peanut butter, infant formula, unpasteurized juice—I can go on—spices. Anything that is not covered by the Fish Inspection Act, the Meat Inspection Act, or the Canada Agricultural Products Act is not inspected by the federal government, the CFIA. They don't have time to do it. It is their responsibility, but they don't do it; they can't, and they have my sympathy.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Thank you.

What are the ideal growing conditions for listeria, in terms of temperature, humidity? What is ideal? Is it a large range, is it a small range, so if we altered, we could change it?

**Mr. Richard (Rick) Holley:** The organism is what we call a psychrotroph. It will grow very, very slowly at refrigerator temperatures, so four degrees is not a problem, and it will get to very, very high numbers over a period of 59 days, which is the shelf life of a cooked, cured meat product in a vacuum package. It does not need oxygen. It will grow without oxygen.

It's relatively pH insensitive. It will grow at very high pHs—pH 9, pH 4.5. That's not a problem for it. And it will also grow at body temperature, and we know that, because it kills people.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** If we changed the parameters, is there any way to alter the environment that would reduce the chances of developing it?

**Mr. Richard (Rick) Holley:** Absolutely. Keep it clean. It's a no-brainer, and I don't mean to make fun.

The more we know about the limits associated with the ability of this organism to grow, the more we'll be able to control it. Health Canada brought out, September 8, permission, which they had been sitting on, to allow the use of sodium diacetate in these kinds of products that cause people, mostly in Ontario, to die from listeriosis.

That was something approved a long time ago in the United States. In the United States, they brought it in three years ago, because at that time they had the biggest recall—about 26 million pounds of cooked, cured turkey roll contaminated with listeria—so they allowed it then. It was an uneven playing field. Health Canada was reluctant to do it, but during the course of the outbreak, they passed an IMA allowing its use.

Now we know how to stop the organism from growing, and we can take 100 similar kinds of products that have the antimicrobial.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** That was my next point. You're saying that this product will stop the growth. I was going to say that there has to be some sort of early warning sign. What would be early warning signs?

• (1910)

**Mr. Richard (Rick) Holley:** That's a good question. The early warning sign is the safety system.

The new attempt by the CFIA to get early warning of impending problems—that is, buildup of these organisms on the equipment and growing in the crud that occurs in the bearing traces and in the joints inside the machine—by swabbing the food contact surfaces on a regular basis will provide a history. Over a course of months—and correct me if I'm wrong, Ron—you'll see in a food plant....

You have maybe ten machines working in a row. If you're monitoring all ten of those machines that make hot dogs, and you see a problem developing in one of them, which shows listeria, then you know that it's time to take that machine out of the line. At the same time you identify a problem you start testing the end products. Don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying don't test the end products, but don't test the end products in a random fashion.

It's the food-contact-surface swabbing program that is the early warning.

**Mr. Ron Osborne:** If you collect records, why would you not use them? This was where one of the deficiencies was in the Maple Leaf program. That's what I heard. They collected records, but they didn't study them.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** There was no analysis.

**The Chair:** Your time has expired. Thank you.

Mr. Shipley, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Keep it clean. That was your statement. Sanitizing is important. Cleaning is important—making sure that workers are clean, that they wash their hands. Are we breeding resistant bugs?

I'm listening to you. We're creating a superbug.

The last time I was in a hospital—which was a while ago, thank you, and I very much appreciated it—they didn't have all these little hand sanitizer things in the hospital. But we didn't come out with super-infections. They're all over in here. We have them in our hospitals. We have them in every workplace. When somebody sneezes, we go and wash our hands. Are we creating some sort of superbug? You say to keep it clean. How do we keep it clean when it would appear to me, as a layman, that they keep getting more resistant?

**Mr. Richard (Rick) Holley:** I think that the potential for what you're intimating has been realized certainly in the hospital nosocomial environment, where we're using lots of anti-microbials on a constant basis, and those anti-microbials are used in patients who are immuno-compromised, in general. So that provides an opportunity for natural selection to occur. Whenever you put pressure on a microbial population—and microbial populations are a good example because they are large, there are millions and millions and millions—in any life system, any biological system, you're going to find, in large populations, an individual who is able to withstand whatever pressure is being placed on that population. So if it's an antibiotic, you're going to see antibiotic resistances develop. If it's pH resistance, you're going to see some organisms that are able to grow at pH 9, etc.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Could I just ask, though, how do we reverse this trend? You're the PhDs, the doctors. I'm not talking about what we can continue to do to make these bugs stronger. I'm asking about how we make them weaker without having to use stronger antibiotics, stronger sanitizers, stronger whatever, and then once they pass through that, we have a larger problem to deal with. I'm interested in the solution.

**Mr. Ron Osborne:** We're looking here at a system approach, and it's not that we want to have stronger sanitizers, but through the whole system we want to keep the growth of micro-organisms down. By allowing them to build up in the different pieces of equipment, they grow in large numbers. We're saying keep the numbers low, and that was our philosophy at Caravelle. We figured if we kept the numbers low, from the beginning to the end, there'd be less risk when the burgers got to the restaurant.

I think that we're not necessarily looking for stronger sanitizers, although sometimes we may have to use them, but we're looking, through the system, to keep the numbers down so that they don't build up and consequently contaminate the product.

•(1915)

**Mr. Richard (Rick) Holley:** In the food environment our experience is that we're not selecting for superbugs. In a nosocomial environment, yes. So the wise application of a variety of different

hurdles has worked for us, and the listeria, as associated with the outbreak in question, in my understanding, was not a superbug.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Thank you.

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

I really appreciate your taking the time to come to the committee. There's no doubt about it that both of you have a lot more knowledge about the scientific part of this than most of us do.

We have some committee business we have to attend to. Thanks again for coming.

**Mr. Richard (Rick) Holley:** Thank you.

If we can be of further help, we would be more than happy to try....

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I have a notice of motion and then we have some budgetary items.

Mr. Allen.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Let me say thank you to our guests.

I'll read the motion into the record:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1) and the order of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food of February 12, 2009, the Subcommittee on Food Safety send for copies, to be delivered by May 27, 2009, of any notes taken and of any briefing or communications materials provided by lobbyists for Maple Leaf Foods Incorporated to the following list of Designated Public Office Holders on the dates retrieved from the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada: on December 4, 2008, to the Hon. Vic Toews; on August 29, 2008, to the Hon. Jim Prentice; on September 4, 2008, to the Hon. Gerry Ritz; on July 24, September 4, and November 5, 2008, to Brian Evans; on October 17, 2008, to Kevin Lynch; on August 25, 28, and 29, September 12 and 17, October 10 and 14, and November 7, 2008, to Carole Swan; on September 12, 2008, to Paul Benoit; on September 4, 2008, to Cameron Prince; on August 29, 2008, to Laurie Throness; on August 23 and 26, 2008, to Stephany Crowley; on July 25, 2008, to Meena Ballantyne; and on July 25, 2008, to Aaron Gairdner.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Is there discussion on the motion?

Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** I have a short comment. It seems that the opposition is going fishing once again. They don't have anything. We've seen a number of things that have happened where they've tried to create rabbit trails, if that's what we want to call them, that have gone nowhere.

In testimony here, we've heard about the independent investigator. Early on, the opposition tried to create doubt as to whether she was going to be able to do her job. We've clearly heard testimony that she is going to be capable of doing that, that she's independent, and that everyone's cooperating with her. Even as late as this afternoon, Mr. Easter was still trying to say she couldn't do her job. Clearly she can.

Documents that were requested have been provided in the past. As the committee has asked for them, they've been provided. On other documents, such as the ones that were asked for through ATIP, and that the opposition tried to say were changed, it was good to get them, because, as we've seen, it proves they were not altered in any way, shape, or form and that they in fact clarified the situation rather than amending or changing it in any way.

As well, the opposition has gone after the minister on this issue, as we've heard both here and in the House. Clearly today we've heard his testimony, which was open and forthright, and consistently the testimony from the witnesses has shown that this is an open and transparent process. The minister himself has been open and transparent.

At one point, we heard that there were problems with the recall of the products. We've since heard that the process worked as it should have in the whole mix of events that took place.

Certainly on communication, there were attacks on that as well. We've heard that the minister has been on the job, that he's done a good job, and that communication has been clear.

The other thing that bothers me is that there have been attempts to pollute the independent investigator's report, I think, before it's even presented.

Mr. Allen has come up with a number of motions. Clearly, he's trying to go fishing, and that's okay if he wants to do that. We actually would like to see him come up with some content so we could support a motion, but here, obviously, he has a list of the designated public office holders that listed their contacts with Maple Leaf and is trying to see what he can discover.

From my understanding, I don't think there's anything there, but again, if the opposition comes here with content, we'll certainly be supporting it. If they're just going fishing and looking all over desperately trying to find something where there isn't anything, I think at some point we'll tire of supporting that.

As well, there probably should be a request for copies, rather than a demand from anyone that we send to for copies, because it would take quite a while to get them if people decided they didn't want to send them.

Those are a few comments that I have about this motion.

● (1920)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Easter.

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

I guess you'll allow me the same liberty, because the parliamentary secretary's comments were certainly not on the motion. I do feel obligated to deal with the political spin that the parliamentary secretary tried to put on the table when he was dealing with this motion of Mr. Allen's. He first accused Mr. Allen of going fishing. Mr. Chair, I submit to you that it's what public inquiries do. They look for trails, they look for documents. It's from those documents and those trails that you find discrepancies in terms of the evidence that has been provided.

He made some comments on the so-called independent investigator. I can tell you that from my perspective on her performance before this committee, she's a wonderful woman. However, the terms of references that she has been given clearly indicate that she doesn't have the authority to investigate one of the most important aspects of this whole listeriosis crisis. That was the political control at the time the crisis occurred. She hasn't investigated the minister as yet. That really concerns me. He should have been the first person investigated. We know that there was an election just about to be called at the time, and we know from comments made by his own communications director that the minister was more concerned about the political fallout than he was about the food safety of Canadians.

I am concerned, certainly, that the independent investigator—yes, she may have a report in terms of how to fix some of the things in the system—will not get to the political involvement or lack thereof, in terms of her investigation.

On the verification reports and the spin the parliamentary secretary tried to put on that, Mr. Chair, I would ask him to read them. There is clearly a question here when you look at the verification report starting on February 11 right through to August 6. All of them, Mr. Chair, were changed, amended on August 26, 2008, after it had been confirmed there were 12 deaths in this country due to listeriosis. That seems to me rather strange. These are not simple amendments, Mr. Chair. I would question whether or not this is actual tampering of the evidence.

So I differ from the parliamentary secretary on that point. The minister has been, if anything, not open or transparent. Giving a parliamentary committee an hour to question him today, coming here without having a written submission translated when he has the full resources of the department, not having provided this committee with all the documentation that we asked for previously so that we get it half an hour into the hearing is not open and transparent, Mr. Chair. In my view, that's kind of covering up. I just outline those points, Mr. Chair, to deal with the parliamentary secretary's spin. And that's one of the difficulties that we have with the parliamentary committee versus a public inquiry—which I am more and more learning towards—because the government, for whatever reason, rather than trying to get to the facts of the matter, is trying to provide cover to the minister. That does indeed concern me, so I will certainly be supporting this motion.

It's not about going fishing. It's about finding—and I certainly thank Mr. Allen for doing the investigative work—so we know these documents are out there. They should be brought forward. We need to see them so that we can get to the bottom of this issue in a comprehensive way.

● (1925)

**The Chair:** To clarify your point about the documents that were asked for, they were in the hands of the clerk almost two weeks ago. They went for translation. If you want to blame the clerk, which I guess is what you're doing, I don't think that's fair either. The translation came today. We did have the documents two weeks ago.

Mr. Allen, please.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank my honourable colleague, the parliamentary secretary, for his earlier comments, but I would state quite unequivocally that I don't fish. If I did, I'd actually hook the right bait on and go catch it. This is about trying to glean information the best way we know how.

As you know, Mr. Chair, I've made a couple of attempts, and I think I've been cooperative, through you, Mr. Chair. Earlier on there was maybe a wider net. I listened to some comments and advice and tailored it more so that it became more reasonable and indeed was more specific so that it would give the opportunity for the government side to actually go and get those documents, versus having to go through a perhaps really onerous task of trying to find things, which may indeed have been very difficult for them to do. I have come forward with this in a spirit of cooperating, because that's what it seems to me we intended to do when we started out this process, through you, Mr. Chair. And I know you were part of that intent to make it a cooperative endeavour.

If indeed there's nothing in the documents, I guess I'll simply be up late at night reading them and then, when I'm finished with them, we'll shred them. All I'll have done is to actually find out a lot of things that are of no value to this committee, but may have been of value in some other form, in my understanding, about how the whole system works. That, unto itself, is of value.

It isn't so much, from my perspective as the mover of the motion, about trying to cast a net or go fishing. It really is about gleaning information that can be helpful to me, as a member, and that's why I brought it forward, ultimately for my understanding, to help me work through this entire process. As I've said here in committee and as I've said publicly, my goal at the end of this is to indeed work on public food safety, full stop. That's my intent.

I think, Mr. Chair, some will probably see that for what it is, and I hope they do. So I would hope that all honourable members would support the motion, although they may see it as perhaps a fishing expedition. But for those who truly know how to fish, perhaps you could help me with that, since I don't know how to fish, and you could bait the hook for me. Maybe I'll be able to catch the big one, one day.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Bellavance.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I just want to add that the people will be the ones to judge the remarks by Mr. Anderson, the minister's parliamentary secretary. Because he said that as far as he was

concerned, our attempts to get transparency, to get information about this issue and the fact that we want to use this information to inform the people properly are nothing more than lowly partisan delay tactics and filibustering on the part of the opposition.

As we have said right from the very beginning, this subcommittee was struck in order to make up for the lack of transparency that the government deliberately and decisively demonstrated throughout this entire crisis. Again today, the minister told the committee that he is very pleased with the way he has been running things. He is always telling us that the opposition is challenging the competency of Ms. Weatherill, which has never been the case. Everyone knows—the media has mentioned this—that it's impossible to find out what's going on during this investigation, which is being done in secret, on the sly.

The minister will receive his report and will do what he pleases with it. That's clear in everyone's mind. The Conservatives are the only ones who are still saying that it was the right thing to do. This is not how SARS and the tainted blood scandal were dealt with. Unfortunately, there were other crises in the past. But investigations were not done on the sly back then. An independent judge was appointed to oversee the inquiry. This is how we should proceed. This is the reason for having this subcommittee. We are not here for the fun of it. Rather, we are here because the people have asked for the truth and they want us to identify possible solutions so that these kinds of incidents do not happen again.

We are not naive; we know that this could happen again, but as lawmakers, we must do all we can to avoid a recurrence of these types of crises. I think that's our job. We are just doing our job. The sole purpose of Mr. Allen's motion is to get to the truth. In no way do I see it as a form of filibustering or as a delaying tactic.

We will be voting in favour of this motion.

• (1930)

[*English*]

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

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** We have some budget business to do, so I need a motion to go in camera.

It is moved by Mr. Anderson.

(Motion agreed to)

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]







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