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

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**EVIDENCE**

**Wednesday, May 6, 2009**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Larry Miller**

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Wednesday, May 6, 2009

•(1600)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC)):** I call the meeting to order.

I want to thank all of our witnesses. We have a number here today, but rather than our usual two-hour meeting, we have four hours. Anyway, we'll get started.

I understand, Mr. Fuller, that you have to leave around 7 o'clock for a flight.

**Mr. David Fuller (Chairman, Chicken Farmers of Canada):** Yes. My flight is at 8 o'clock, so I'll probably leave a little before 7 p.m.

**The Chair:** Very well. Whenever you have to go, we'll certainly excuse you, and we appreciate you being here.

Mr. Easter, please.

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** The original motion for this subcommittee directed that the hearings be televised, and very few of them have been. This is a subject that Canadians are interested in. I would like an explanation for why they're not being televised.

**The Chair:** I'm going to be honest with you, Mr. Easter. I thought they were being televised.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Well, I don't see any cameras here, Mr. Chair.

I would like the clerk to report to us which ones were and which ones were not.

Secondly, on a different point, I did table this with the clerk, so I've given notice of a motion in which we're looking to schedule in a specific timeframe. The motion reads:

That representatives of the Agriculture Union be invited to meet with the subcommittee on food safety, May 13, 2009 from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. and that no other witnesses be scheduled during that time.

I will submit as well, Mr. Chair, that as soon as they're translated I will have two more. I do that because I think there's a reluctance somewhere, so we can drill down on this issue, to hearing the witnesses who were in the plants where the problem occurred and the people who know the issue on the ground at the plants.

I simply notify the committee that those resolutions have been tabled for debate.

**The Chair:** That's fine, Mr. Easter.

In your reference to witnesses, I can tell you that the clerk has had a very tough time to get some witnesses for some nights, and that has been for a number of reasons. The H1N1 flu that's out there right now has been part of it. I remember one witness is away on maternity leave, and another witness who was asked to come is no longer in the industry and refused to come. There are some other ones, but it is our intention to have every available witness and make every effort to get them here. We will continue to do that.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** My concern is that these critical witnesses who were in the plant and on the ground, basically, on this file of listeriosis at the time, not be diluted with other witnesses present, the key one in terms of getting to the bottom of the issue. I was of the understanding that the Agriculture Union would be here in a two-hour slot today. I thought that was the agreement I had with you the other day, but obviously that's not...

I can tell you, Mr. Chair, that had the clerk called the Agriculture Union, they would have been here in a two-hour slot, if you were willing to give it to them.

I've made my point. The motion will be on the floor and we will debate it, because that's the way we're going to get a move to ensure that the witnesses are here.

•(1605)

**The Chair:** I recall the other day you made it very clear and you never mentioned about having them here today, Mr. Easter.

Mr. Storseth, please.

**Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC):** I have a point of order.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's simply a clarification from the government side. We've agreed any time there's been any request for a televised meeting, but Mr. Easter has been a longstanding member of Parliament and I'm sure he knows that Standing Order 119.1 indicates that it is up to the committee to request each committee meeting to be televised.

Actually, if you look at the blues, the actual motion was for the committee meetings that were televised. That's what the motion is about. If you want more, according to Standing Order 119.1, you have to put another motion forward for each committee meeting.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I don't want to debate it, Mr. Chair, because—

**The Chair:** Mr. Allen, please.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** I appreciate what Mr. Storseth has said, and I don't doubt his veracity when it comes to quoting M and M, but clearly the parliamentary secretary is here, and clearly when we met he'll remember that it was abundantly clear what we had stated—and specifically what I had stated—when we debated how we would set the committee up. It was abundantly clear to me, since I moved the original motion, that indeed all—and I repeat the word “all”—of these committee hearings be televised.

Mr. Lemieux was perfectly clear about saying yes, he understood and would do that. If it's a procedural matter, Mr. Chair, that somehow we needed to do that in every single meeting, then I would have appreciated that understanding so that indeed I could have done that. But I felt we had an understanding. I believed we had understood each other, in the sense that in a spirit of cooperation we were going to do that. We also met with you, Mr. Chair, and my understanding between us was that indeed that's how we would do this.

To find out now that it hasn't happened.... If it's simply a technical issue from the perspective that someone didn't tell someone they needed to come, because I understand this room doesn't automatically have it, then I understand that. Since we're quite often going to be here, I would hope from now on that information would be sent to the correct department, so they can be televised.

**The Chair:** While you were initially speaking there, I spoke to the clerk about this. There are only three rooms, and unfortunately we got shoved out. So that's the reason.

Mr. Lemieux.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell):** I would like to comment on that.

Certainly, we did have discussions between me, Mr. Allen, Mr. Easter, and Mr. Atamanenko at the time, regarding the subcommittee. There was a discussion about televised meetings, and you're right, I indicated that there was not a problem—and there's not a problem. It is from a procedural point of view where there are two points to consider. The first is how the committee itself.... I am not the committee, and I think we all know that. We all work together on committee and we work with motions. So I can't speak on behalf of the committee, but I can certainly speak on behalf of the government side. We have no problem with televised meetings.

But there are two factors to consider. The first is that the committee itself, as a committee, must make its will known—not just me to you and to Mr. Easter. The second thing is, as the chair is pointing out, the availability of rooms. There are a very limited number of rooms. There are times when a televised room is available; there are times when it's not. It's for the committee to express its will to the chair and for the clerk to work within the facilities and the resources that are available.

Anyway, I just wanted to clarify the discussions we did have, and that from the government side we don't have a problem.

**The Chair:** Okay.

I'm going to take Mr. Bellavance, and then we're going to go on to our witnesses.

Go ahead, Mr. Bellavance.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ):** I'll be brief, because we do indeed have witnesses to hear.

On that very point, on the issue of televised meetings, I cannot accept room availability as an excuse for not televising meetings. Many committees are televised, and ours is almost never televised. We have created this subcommittee, and said specifically that we wanted the meetings to be televised. In fact, they were all televised towards the beginning, except for last meeting and today's meeting.

What we are asking the clerk—I believe Mr. Lemieux understands that we are not accusing the government of anything, or at least I am not—is to make every effort required to ensure that meetings are indeed televised.

I believe we even had one meeting that was televised using mobile cameras. We were not in a committee room already equipped for television, unless I am mistaken. So I think it can indeed be done, and it is what we have asked for.

If we are required to move a motion at each meeting requesting that the next meeting be televised, then we will do so. However, that is a real waste of time. I thought we had agreed from the very start that all meetings would be televised.

• (1610)

[*English*]

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

We're going to move to our witnesses now.

We would ask each organization to please keep your comments to ten minutes or less. I'm going to give you a two-minute warning, just to give you an idea. And I won't cut you off right at the ten minutes, as long as I know you're close to being done. You can add anything in questions.

First of all, we're going to move to Ms. Brenda Watson and Mr. Robert de Valk from the Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education.

Ms. Watson.

**Ms. Brenda Watson (Executive Director, Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education):** Thank you.

We're here to talk about the Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education. We're known as a partnership, and we're a national association of public and private organizations with an interest in educating Canadians about safe food-handling practices. We're committed to educating Canadians about the ease and importance of safe food-handling and preparation activities in order to reduce the risk of microbial food-borne illness. Our message helps build confidence in our food system. In the brief I provided your clerk there is a list of our members at the end.

Our history. We were formed in 1997 with the purpose of developing and implementing a national safe food-handling public awareness program focused on the important role the consumer plays in keeping food safe. This is because both government and industry recognized that consumers have a role to play when it comes to food safety. In a recent campaign we were able to reach over 12 million Canadians with our safe food-handling messages over a one-year period. That was during the 2005-06 fiscal year. Our most recent project has been launched in partnership with our sister organization in the United States called Be Food Safe. This campaign is targeted to the main food preparer in Canadian households and offers a colourful platform of graphical icons and detailed safe food-handling messages.

These materials are tailor-made for all members of the partnership, including government, retail, and health care professionals. The Be Food Safe platform is suitable for information brochures, posters, websites, and food product packaging. The Be Food Safe icons and messages were featured in March of this year on a Government of Canada full-colour insert distributed to 54 newspapers across Canada. Canadian Council of Grocery Distributor members have seasonally supported the partnership by providing FightBAC! and now Be Food Safe messages in their flyers, which go to households all across Canada.

The partnership serves and engages critical consumer education intermediaries in the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors. The partnership provides a forum for all members to share and harmonize their safe food-handling communication strategies and tactics with other members and to receive feedback and expert advice. Where possible, members coordinate the delivery of their individual programs to achieve maximum reach for resources invested.

Canadians are looking for more information on food safety. According to recent Canadian population studies, Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada estimate that 11 million to 13 million cases of food-borne illness occur each year, costing Canadian health services, industry, and society as a whole an estimated \$12 billion to \$15 billion annually.

According to research, consumers think it's very important to follow safe food-handling practices at home. That same research also reveals that despite the fact that the majority of adults feel confident that they understand and follow safe food-handling procedures, a sizeable number do not consistently follow them. For example, only 15% of people consistently use a food thermometer. Using a food thermometer is important. You can't tell if food has been cooked to a safe temperature by how it looks. Over half of people say they defrost meat and poultry at room temperature at least "sometimes". This practice can allow bacteria to grow on food. Only 50% of consumers reported washing their hands for 20 seconds before and after handling food. Clean hands and surfaces often lead to the reduction of the risk of food-borne illness.

Research conducted by the Government of Canada has confirmed that consumers want more information about food safety, including safe food-handling practices. The consumer is an important part of the food supply chain, and the partnership and its members help raise awareness of the four core steps consumers can take to reduce the risk of contracting a microbial food-borne illness. The four core

messages are a proven platform to raise awareness of the important role the consumer plays in Canada's food safety system.

- (1615)

As mentioned above, the partnership's four core messages to the consumer are the following: clean—wash hands and surfaces often; separate—don't cross-contaminate; cook—cook to proper temperatures and use a food thermometer; and chill—refrigerate promptly.

The partnership helps to keep food safety top-of-mind with people when they shop for and prepare food at home. Therefore, it is essential that consumers receive frequent reminders of the importance of safe food handling to reduce the risk of microbial food-borne illness.

We have ongoing public awareness initiatives. The partnership offers consumers access to information on safe food handling at home, in both official languages, through our online website, [www.canfightbac.org](http://www.canfightbac.org), the French site, [www.abaslesbac.org](http://www.abaslesbac.org), and our new websites, [www.befoodsafe.ca](http://www.befoodsafe.ca) and [www.soyezprudentsaveclesaliments.ca](http://www.soyezprudentsaveclesaliments.ca).

Our messages are proactive and ongoing. We're not crisis communicators. Rather, we have a consistent message year-round for consumers; that is, there are four core steps to keeping food safe at home, and if implemented consistently, your risk of contracting a microbial food-borne illness is reduced. These messages empower the consumer and build confidence in the Canadian food system. The message doesn't change with the situation. The messages may be ramped up prior to a seasonal event, such as Christmas, New Year's, Victoria Day, July 1, and Labour Day back-to-school, because long weekends are key periods when consumers may be more likely to be receptive to hearing safe food-handling messaging.

In a crisis situation, the partnership plays a support role, referring media and consumers to the most appropriate organization or association that can provide the scientific and factual information on the issue. On that note, the partnership relies on Health Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada for science-based research.

On our list of improvements are the following:

First, food safety initiatives must include a focus on the consumer.

Second, communication briefings need to include organizations, such as the partnership, to help flow information back to consumers.

Third, communication must be harmonized, integrated, and planned between industry and government.

Fourth, ongoing investment is required to deliver food safety messaging to consumers. Behaviour change campaigns can take 20 to 30 years to gain significant traction in the marketplace, as demonstrated by farm business management initiatives and the anti-smoking campaign, just to give examples.

Fifth, we believe that the partnership model makes effective use of financial resources. Rather than inventing a new model, the Government of Canada should invest in the existing one—the partnership—that has served the Canadian consumer well over the past 12 years.

In 2009, everyone in the Canadian farm-to-fork continuum needs to do his or her part to keep food safe. A great deal has been invested, from farm through to retail. Let's place appropriate investment in the consumer end of the continuum moving forward, because from farm to fork, the consumer is the last, but equally important, link in Canada's food safety system.

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

We now move to the Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors. We have Mr. Nick Jennery and Ms. Jackie Crichton.

**Mr. Nick Jennery (President, Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, members of the committee, for allowing us to be before you tonight. I will be succinct. You won't have to call me on that.

By way of introduction, I'm the CEO of the CCGD, and Jackie Crichton is our vice-president of food safety and labelling and a member of the staff.

The folks we represent are both the large and small grocery distributors, both on the retail side as well as on the food service side. In terms of statistics, we have about half a million direct employees, and we supply about 85% of all grocery products to about 12,000 stores across the country.

To state the obvious, food safety is the highest priority for our sector. Specifically, we think food safety is a supply chain responsibility. We think both industry and government should take a continuous learning approach to this, and that this learning be shared among all so that best practices are part of continuous improvement. We will never be so arrogant as to think we've figured out all the solutions.

In short, we also know as retailers and distributors that we are in the consumer trust business and you ignore that at your peril. Consumers expect us to sell safe food all the time, every day. If a problem occurs in the supply chain, the entire industry wears the impact of that. So we take the subject seriously. We take an open and shared approach in discussing the issues and due diligence within the industry.

Tonight, Mr. Chair, I have some summary comments on our approach and four recommendations that we have provided recently to the government.

In terms of our approach—I mentioned it's a first priority—we don't compete on food safety. We share what we know and what we think through a very active industry committee, which Jackie Crichton chairs. As an association, we also share what the committee produces in terms of manuals, templates, best practices, and training programs with the industry. Our approach is continuous learning and, through that, increased due diligence.

However, despite the Canadian food safety system being recognized as one of the safest in the world, and even having the best inspection in place, with industry implementation of HACCP and HACCP-based programs, there is still the potential for food safety outbreaks, and there's no such thing as zero risk. Therefore, a critical tool for food distribution and retail is having an effective and efficient recall system, one that immediately links the industry to CFIA decisions. If you check with store managers or their department heads across the country, everybody knows when you receive a recall, your sole and immediate focus is to remove that product from sale, no questions asked. That action is triggered by a CFIA recall notice, which is a one-to-many electronic system, with information distributed real time.

What has the industry done since the Maple Leaf recall to support what I said? We've played an active role in the consultation process around CFIA's proposed changes to listeria inspection strategies, recommending a rapid test methodology for the test-and-hold policies being considered, and also to look at high-risk products first.

Second, we support Health Canada's move to permit the use of sodium diacetate and sodium acetate as an option for processors who feel they need preservatives in meat, accepting the scientific evidence that it can provide better control of pathogens.

While grocery is an exceedingly competitive sector, when it comes to food safety, we all work together with one goal: sell safe food. As an example, we worked with the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers operating as one retail sector to develop manuals, and we have provided a copy of our HACCP-based retail food safety program to Health Canada. This program is being implemented across all CCGD retail members. We are also supplementing that with food safety one-pagers, with more reference material on issues such as vacuum packaging at retail and labelling.

● (1620)

In the fall of 2008, CCGD, along with Food & Consumer Products of Canada and CFGI, took the lead in bringing together an industry association working group to review and update the *Supply Chain Food Product Recall Manual*. This is a bible within our industry. The CFIA “Food Emergency Response Manual”, commonly referred to as FERM, is included as a section in this industry document.

A number of suggested enhancements to FERM have been provided to CFIA. These include consistent application of a standardized investigation template for use by both government and industry, and consistent use of recall notice templates that provide retailers and consumers with the required information.

Mr. Chairman, there is nothing that could have been done in distribution or retail to prevent the Maple Leaf listeria situation from happening; however, we have been actively working with the regulators and with the government bodies to share best practices and our lessons learned to help strengthen the Canadian food safety system.

Here are our recommendations, in conclusion. In an effort to draw learnings from last summer's outbreak, CCGD has identified four recommendations, which we believe will help strengthen the food safety framework.

First, government and industry must work from a mutually understood template for gathering information at the time of a recall. This will enhance and speed communication by assisting in gathering consistent, complete, accurate, and timely information, while avoiding differences from region to region, inspector to inspector, and company to company. Such a template should also include a clear list of questions about secondary products that were implied in the recall.

Second, consumers must be provided with complete and accurate information in a timely manner in recall notices and advisories issued by CFIA and in communication to media from government. In a rolling recall, things can get complicated and confusing, and therefore specific information must be provided early on. What I'm really saying is that we need to have consistency, clarity, and accuracy as soon as we can.

Third, to protect consumer confidence, which is paramount for all those in industry, and to protect safety, media must not be provided with information ahead of the industry. To keep consumers safe, retailers need to know as soon as the risk is identified, in order to remove a product from sale. We react from CFIA; we do not react to media. At a minimum, news releases issued by government departments must be accessible to all parties at the same time.

And finally, the fourth point—and we live this every day—there must be a credible third party to provide food-borne illness information to consumers in a contextual and timely manner. Often, consumers are hearing about things they don't understand on which they're given some directives. I think all of us need to work together to help provide context to maintain consumer confidence. In a time of crisis and fear, consumers want to know that there is a single credible voice they can rely on to provide them with accurate, science-based facts. This individual should be responsible for telling Canadians what the pathogen is, where it is found, who is most likely to be impacted, what the symptoms are, and what to do if they are experiencing the symptoms. We recommend that this information be made available in a generic manner, at all times, not just in times of crisis, for each food-borne pathogen.

To conclude, Mr. Chair, thank you again for allowing us to be here. While there is nothing we can see that could have been done at distribution at retail, we appreciate the opportunity to put these thoughts forward in the hope of helping to strengthen the Canadian food safety framework going forward. We are absolutely committed to doing that, day in and day out.

● (1625)

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

I'll now move to Chicken Farmers of Canada, to Mr. David Fuller and Mr. Mike Dungeat.

**Mr. David Fuller:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. You have a copy of our presentation. It is not my intent to go through that entire presentation, but just to hit the highlights, if I could.

Chicken Farmers of Canada is a national organization funded completely through farmer levies. Chicken Farmers of Canada plays a key role in developing, partnering, and managing programs that augment the quality, safety, and competitiveness of Canadian chicken.

Through such on-farm programs as the food safety program “Safe, Safer, Safest!”, the animal care program, and the biosecurity initiatives, CFC works closely with government partners and industry stakeholders to keep the industry innovative and responsive.

Food safety has been and continues to be a critical priority for Chicken Farmers of Canada and the Canadian chicken industry. The foundation of our success story and a successful industry is the consumer confidence we have built and maintained in the safety and quality of Canadian chicken.

By taking a proactive approach to food safety, we contribute to the health of Canadians and reduce health costs associated with negative food safety issues. For this reason, we jealously guard our competitive advantage and actively challenge policies and actions or inactions that jeopardize it.

Without high food safety standards, the credibility of our products in the eyes of the consumers would plummet, and Canada would not have the benefit of a thriving industry that it enjoys today.

Chicken farmers across Canada have taken their responsibility for food safety at the farm level very seriously, by implementing an on-farm food safety program, by funding research directed at food safety, and by being actively involved in industry-government initiatives and committees addressing food safety.

Food safety, however, is not something that can be controlled solely on the farm. It is a joint effort among all parties in the supply chain, from farmers, processors, transporters, retailers, governments to consumers. The government plays a large role in providing confidence to Canadians that their food supply is one of the safest in the world. Government involvement in the process of ensuring consumers an equally safe supply of domestic and imported food cannot be taken for granted and cannot be compromised.

The federal government needs to complete the federal-provincial-territorial on-farm food safety recognition program. It needs to conduct an avian influenza incident post-mortem to address outstanding issues and improve current protocols. It needs to harmonize meat processing codes in Canada into a single federal standard. It needs to ensure that imported product meets the same high standards as Canadian chicken. It needs to maintain CFIA's pre-marketing label registration process. It needs to promote the strength and integrity of Canada's food safety system to the media and to the Canadian public. It needs to maintain the government presence at the federally inspected poultry processing plants. It also needs to increase investment in poultry research that delivers on society's priorities and educates consumers on their roles and responsibilities in food safety.

In 2001, federal, provincial, and territorial ministers agreed to a framework for the recognition of HACCP-based on-farm food safety assurance programs. These programs would be audited and their credibility assured through an FPT recognition process.

Chicken Farmers of Canada was a strong proponent of the FPT recognition process and has led the charge in developing and implementing CFC's on-farm food safety assurance program, "Safe, Safer, Safest!" CFC was the first to receive technical recognition for its producer manual in 2002 and the second to receive technical recognition for its management manual in 2006.

To date, more than 93% of chicken farms in Canada have been audited, and more than 83% are certified.

The third and final step of the recognition process, prior to receiving full recognition from the FPT, is a third-party audit of the chicken food safety system. CFC is preparing for this third step. Our organization is deeply concerned, however, that the government finalization of the criteria for the FPT recognition process has been stalled. Without FPT recognition, a decade of work will be put in jeopardy. This recommendation must become a higher priority for the government so that Chicken Farmers of Canada can achieve full implementation of its leading program.

● (1630)

Under animal health, the benefit of CFC's "Safe, Safer, Safest!" program is not just restricted to food safety. CFC has used its program as a platform to deliver enhanced animal health and animal care on Canadian chicken farms.

Since 2004, CFC has worked in partnership with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to develop protocols where there were none and to enhance those that already existed. This included government and industry disease preparedness, prevention, response, and recovery, such as enhanced biosecurity provisions, a pre-cull program, and an AI low pathogenic surveillance program.

Recent experiences with AI have demonstrated just how far Canada has come. But we can still do better. It is important for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to conduct a post-mortem of the 2009 incident with industry in B.C. We need to assess the effectiveness of our new protocols. We also need to address issues such as fair compensation for farmers that have remained unresolved since 2004.

Under animal care, much like the food safety program, CFC has developed, through consultations with industry stakeholders and experts in the field, an animal care program that has been supported for implementation by both the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association and the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies. This program is being distributed to farmers and will be combined with the food safety audit in the coming year.

Food safety is a partnership. It is not enough for chicken farmers and the Canadian chicken industry to do their part. Food safety is a shared responsibility, provides a shared benefit, and therefore the cost must be shared. A key responsibility of government is to provide a consistent and comprehensive regulatory framework to ensure consumer confidence.

In Canada there are at least eleven different standards for processing chicken: one at the federal level and ten at the provincial level. As there is only one consumer, there is no reason that meat and meat products sitting side by side at the meat counter should meet different standards.



There have to be efforts to harmonize the meat code. In the past there have been efforts to harmonize the meat code with no success. Because past efforts have failed to establish one standard, it is critical that all parties, federally and provincially, commit to a new process of developing a single, acceptable federal meat processing standard in Canada.

One concern with a process that has different standards is that there are products that come into this country from outside of Canada. Those standards need to meet the same Canadian standards the Canadian chicken farmer has to meet, and today that is not happening.

Under labelling requirements, for both domestic and imported product, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has in place a pre-marketing label registration process. However, this valuable program is being terminated in favour of one that would only investigate problems as they arise. This is a move from prevention to reaction, something that goes against the food safety principle of HACCP. Switching to a reactionary mode is not a progressive step. Canadian consumers assume that the Canadian government has done everything possible to ensure products on the shelf are safe.

I'd like to finish off with research. The CFC believes it is important to conduct research on food safety issues so that the chicken industry can pursue science-based programs and policies. In this regard, CFC is a founding member of the Canadian Poultry Research Council. The council is only six years old and it has been able to leverage \$1.2 million from industry into \$5.1 million of research funding.

Currently, research money under the Growing Forward program can only be allocated to projects that fall within the innovation and competitiveness outcome. Funding needs to be made available for such areas as food safety, which fall within the "contributing to society's priorities" outcome. Research funding under the Growing Forward program should not fund innovation to the exclusion of other very worthwhile research projects.

•(1635)

My final comment, Mr. Chairman, is that while CFC spends a significant amount of time and resources on food safety at the farm level, CFC is also involved in consumer education programs. CFC is a founding member of the Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education, a national association committed to educating Canadians about the ease and importance of food safety in the home.

The Canadian government should focus more attention on safe food handling. There are significant side benefits to appropriate food safety measures, and government should consider education programs on an ongoing basis.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

We'll now move to Mr. Lynn Wilcott from the BC Centre for Disease Control. I understand you have a document that was just passed around to everybody.

•(1640)

**The Clerk of the Subcommittee (Mr. Andrew Chaplin):** They were just his speaking notes. We needed them for the translators.

**The Chair:** I see. They were passed to the interpreters. That was my mistake.

Go ahead, Mr. Wilcott. You have 10 minutes.

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott (Acting Program Director, Food Protection Services, BC Centre for Disease Control):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I don't think it would actually do much good to pass around my speaking notes, because they'd probably be just about impossible for anyone to read.

**The Chair:** I misunderstood the clerk.

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott:** And I apologize for not having anything prepared for the group to follow along with. It was just confirmed on Monday that I was coming here today. At the time I was at a conference in Kananaskis, Alberta, so I wasn't at my office.

Anyway, I was asked to come here to provide comments and our views, from a provincial viewpoint, regarding our communication and how we work with the CFIA. Neither I nor our department was directly involved with the listeriosis outbreak or the investigation of the plant. We certainly were involved in the recall and in helping ensure the product was removed from the shelves.

I'm with the BCCDC, the BC Centre for Disease Control. It's an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority. My department specifically is food protection services, and our business is to prevent food-borne illness.

I'll just give a short introduction of what we do, just some of the things we do in our department. We provide inspection services to provincially licensed processing plants, such as dairy, meat, fish, etc. We provide technical support to the regional health authorities, in terms of food safety and policy guideline development for the province. Where we start to work with the CFIA, from an outbreak or a recall viewpoint, is that our department participates in and coordinates outbreak investigations. Often there'll be an outbreak before the food is identified. In fact, that's the more usual route.

The other thing we do is liaise between the CFIA and the regional health authorities, the folks on the ground, the public health inspectors in the field.

So when the province works with the CFIA, there are really two areas we work in. I'll just divide them up into non-recall outbreak-related work and then everything else.

On everything else, operational programs, we actually work really well with the CFIA. This is day-to-day work we do. There's overlap, say, with the dairy program. Plants may be federally registered, but they're also provincially licensed, so there's an overlap there. And we work extremely well with our CFIA colleagues in those operational day-to-day operations. As well, even with the folks in Ottawa, we're involved in federal-provincial-territorial committees. Again, we have a very good working relationship.

Now, turning to food recalls and outbreaks, during routine food recalls—these might be allergens or outbreaks where there are no illnesses involved—again, we have a good working relationship, good communication with our CFIA colleagues. Where things seem to go off the rails is during recalls where there are illnesses involved, or potential for illnesses, or potential adverse publicity, or even prior to a recall, when we as a province are doing an illness or outbreak investigation. This is the point, in those kinds of examples, where the CFIA becomes very reluctant to share information openly and freely.

To illustrate why this is important for us, as a province, doing these investigations, I'll just explain quickly what happens during an illness investigation.

Typically, what happens is that a patient is sick and they go to their doctor or to the emergency; they present themselves. The doctor examines them, diagnoses them, suspects that it might be food-borne illness, and may take a stool or blood sample to confirm the illness.

I want to back up a little bit. Almost all outbreaks are first identified in the field by public health officials; they're not identified by lab tests or results of plant inspections. That's not where they're identified. They're identified in the field by identifying these cases. So the people submit stool samples or blood samples, they're tested, and an organism, species, might be identified. If an organism is found, it'll be genetically fingerprinted.

At the same time, after the organism is confirmed, the patient will be interviewed. We'll do a case history on the patient, get a food history, and find out what they ate, because at this point we have no idea what it might be. It's an investigation that really starts in the dark.

Now that, in itself, is problematic, because you're often interviewing people and you have to find out what they ate two weeks ago, three weeks ago, because there's a time delay in lab tests. In fact, for a lot of organisms—what they ate—the symptoms don't present themselves for several days. With listeria monocytogenes, it can be as long as 70 days between the time the person eats the food and begins to present symptoms.

•(1645)

We do the case history, and then what happens is we start to find clusters. All the results from all of these case histories are gathered provincially and we look at them. We start getting clusters, where maybe you'll see a blip in the number of cases of salmonella and they all have the same genetic fingerprint, so you realize there's potentially a connection.

So you go to their food histories. You look at what commonalities there might be. If you're lucky, you find commonalities. If you don't,

you have to re-interview the people. At some point, hopefully, you get similar foods that were consumed by the different people.

If it's a food that was produced in a processing plant or if it's an imported food, this is the point at which we would contact the CFIA. It's the point at which we need additional information in order to be able to confirm or identify what food made them sick, because sometimes you might get more than one hit, and it might be that more than one food is related between people.

You want to get information like distribution patterns. Was that food distributed where your patients lived? Was it distributed with a certain lot number or code number? Was it distributed at the time when the person would have been buying the food?

Other information that's useful is information about the processing plant that it might have come from. Are there any test results from that processing plant? Or were the results from the inspection quite poor? This is just additional information that we need as a province and as outbreak investigators in order to be able to identify and confirm a food.

This is the information that the CFIA is often reluctant to give and to share with us. Not sharing that information makes it very difficult for the province to confirm or identify the contaminated foods.

I'm almost done, but I will say that an outbreak investigation is a lot like putting together a puzzle. You start out with just a very few pieces. As you're going along, additional pieces to that puzzle keep getting added. If you don't get all the pieces of the puzzle, it's very hard to finish the puzzle. That's part of the problem that we sometimes have with the CFIA. They are sometimes reluctant to freely and openly share that information we need at the beginning of an outbreak investigation.

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

We'll now move to the cattlemen. We have with us Mr. Dan Ferguson from the Ontario Cattlemen's Association and Mr. John Masswohl from the Canadian Cattlemen's Association.

You have 10 minutes, gentlemen.

**Mr. John Masswohl (Director, Governmental and International Relations, Canadian Cattlemen's Association):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to make just a few brief comments and then turn it over to Dan Ferguson.

I would say that the situation among cattle producers is very similar to what Mr. Fuller outlined. Food safety is something that producers take very seriously. We're keenly aware that consumers insist that the food they purchase is safe—and so they should. At the same time, the things that producers can do are fairly limited.

That said, Canadian cattle producers are committed to ensuring that the beef they produce is safe for all consumers. Keep in mind that this includes their own families, so they have a personal interest in making sure that food is safe.

At the same time, beef production in Canada also operates in a competitive environment, so we have to be aware that beef purchasers in both the domestic and the export market will want to choose beef based on a number of factors. We're going to want to make sure not only that they have confidence that what we produce is safe, but that we produce it at a competitive price so they will choose that Canadian product.

We have developed a number of things. In fact, we've developed an extensive on-farm food safety program. We call it "verified beef production". Under that program, we provide training to producers so they have all the latest knowledge to produce wholesome and healthy beef.

Dan delivers that program in Ontario so he is going to outline some of the aspects of that verified beef production program.

• (1650)

**Mr. Dan Ferguson (Coordinator, Verified Beef Production - Quality Starts Here, Ontario Cattlemen's Association):** Thank you for having me here today.

The program I'm involved in is the verified beef program. It's a national HACCP-based program that has received CFIA technical review on a national basis.

I've been delivering the program to farmers in a workshop format for five years. So my level of expertise is from meeting directly with the farmers at the workshop level.

Nationally, we have the same program delivered right across the country. What is delivered in Ontario is also delivered in Alberta. That's very important for this group to know.

Nationally, we have over 12,000 producers who have been through our workshops, with the majority of those in Alberta, of course. There are financial incentives there to encourage producers to go through the program. There are 4,500 producers in our program in Alberta, with 2,500 here in Ontario, followed by Manitoba and Saskatchewan. As I said, certain provinces have extra financial incentives to encourage uptake of the program. Obviously, beef is not a supply-managed commodity, so to get the producers to come to the workshop you sometimes need a little carrot.

The VBP program participates in and shares program developments with other commodities through the Canadian On-Farm Food Safety Working Group, and it looks at solving common challenges with those other commodities. A recent project compared our program with similar ones in the United States and Australia and pointed to some advantages, such as the standardization of our national program in terms of both producer requirements and conformance assessments.

On the farm, producers continue to point to the immediate benefits they see from taking part in the program, such as improved efficiency of animal health product use. Whether they are large or small operations, reviews of their practices seem to yield a small analysis showing them what they can do better on their farms. That's a bit surprising, because most of the early adopters of our program are considered to be the well-run facilities, which are out there trying to be at the front edge of the program.

We go through five different standard operating procedures when we're delivering the program at these workshops. It's a proactive HACCP-based format that we're using, and it's producer-driven. We're trying to identify potential food safety hazards, such as chemical residues from animal health use, and physical hazards from possible broken needle fragments at processing time.

We cover these five operating procedures in that workshop format, and we go through animal health management, feeding and watering, cattle shipping, pesticide control, manure management, training of staff, and communications.

I think most of the group has heard how that works through some of the other commodities, so I won't draw you into each of those SOPs, because they're specific to on-farm programs. But by using these operating procedures and the record templates we set the farmers up with, we have a higher level of assurance that the food safety measures are being met on farm.

I think that's how I'll conclude.

**The Chair:** Thank you for being brief. That was good.

Mr. Robert McLean, from the Keystone Agricultural Procedures of Manitoba.

**Mr. Robert McLean (Vice-President, Keystone Agricultural Producers):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Good evening to you and to members of the committee and speakers and guests. I'm certainly pleased to be in attendance to present to you on the importance of food safety.

I'm the Keystone Agricultural Producers vice-president. As well, I'm an active member on our livestock and traceability committee.

Keystone Agricultural Producers is a general farm policy organization representing the interests of a wide variety of agricultural producers. In relation to food safety, KAP sees its responsibility as aggregating the concerns common to all agricultural producers as well as specifically supporting and promoting the needs of all commodities, including the smaller sectors, in Manitoba.

Food safety remains a top priority for Canadian agricultural producers. We have a responsibility to deliver healthy and safe products to consumers. As well, our livelihoods depend on our ability to guarantee the safety and quality of our product to domestic and international consumers. Proper programs and systems need to be in place to deal with the realities of food-borne illness, animal disease outbreaks, and other food safety problems in order to maintain the confidence of our consumers.

My presentation today will focus on some of the general issues related to agriculture as a whole, what producers are doing to address these issues, and where the industry needs increased government support.

Producers address food safety through three broad and related systems: on-farm food safety programs, biosecurity programs, and tracking and traceability programs.

On-farm food safety programs are typically industry guarantees of product quality. Commodity groups are responsible for developing and administering these programs, and you've certainly had some of the commodity groups bringing that forward.

An example I want to give you is CQA. That's the Canadian quality assurance program throughout Canada. One of the things that happened with CQA was that when we did the CQA on-farm for pork, we had hoped that once we did this food safety program, there would be a premium, plus market access. We've had the market access, but unfortunately the premium has dried up.

Producers are willing to prove that the food they produce is safe through these programs, but government must know there is an economic cost to producers to do so. Safe food is a public good that government bears some responsibility for. While industry is willing to lead the way, there is a need for cost to be offset by government on behalf of society, possibly through tax credits or incentive-based programs.

Certain groups of consumers have shown that they're willing to pay for food that complies with specific certification, be it organic or locally grown. These foods are differentiated from non-certified foods and command a higher market price. Because there is the expectation that all food sold in Canada is safe, there is no price premium paid to Canadian producers who pay the costs associated with providing safe food, yet they compete with international producers who do not always pay the same costs. David did bring up that point.

One of the questions you have to ask is whether the imported food meets the same food safety, environmental, and labour standards as ours. My answer would be that it does not.

Further, smaller sectors such as sheep and goats, which do not have the financial resources of the much larger commodity groups, require additional help to develop on-farm food safety programs. The smaller livestock producers do not have the required human resources to develop the programs on their own, but they are no less important because of their smaller market share.

Biosecurity programs are again commodity group-led initiatives to protect animals and prevent the spread of disease. As has been highlighted through the H1N1 situation, the Canadian pork industry is a leader in biosecurity measures and disease control protocols, but government help is required in developing biosecurity programs for commodities that currently lack programs. These are commodities that do not commonly operate in controlled environments, as the pork and the supply-managed sectors do. Non-confined animals pose a much more difficult situation for biosecurity. Government must work with these commodities and organizations to ensure that proper biosecurity measures are developed.

Further, non-agricultural government organizations and the general public must be properly informed and trained about biosecurity and disease prevention. Some of us have heard of instances where people have entered a farm site without checking to see what biosecurity protocols are in place and without the consent of the farm owner. In Manitoba, Keystone Agricultural Producers acted quickly, working along with the provincial government to put together a workshop to train those government inspectors and others

frequenting farms about the importance of biosecurity and what to expect when they do on-farm inspections.

• (1655)

Finally, tracking and traceability programs are intended to provide government and industry with a responsive capacity to deal with a disease outbreak when it occurs. Product can be traced back to the farm. When the origin is identified through a premise identification system, other products delivered from that source can be followed the other way through the chain and recalled. Further, in the event of a contagious animal disease, the origin can be isolated quickly and the incident dealt with.

The critical work that needs to be done with this system is to develop national standards for all commodities. Programs can be administered in partnership with provincial governments and commodity groups, which will interact with producers at the grassroots level. But national standards are crucial. If provinces have competing programs for market access, it will create a difficult situation for exporters in all provinces. Sellers would be unable to provide clear information about food safety programs to foreign buyers.

The federal government also bears responsibility to ensure there are national guidelines in place. When there is a failure in one province, it is the entire country that suffers from closed borders and lost market opportunities.

In summary, Canadian agricultural producers and government agencies have some of the tools and programs at their disposal to ensure that the food they produce is safe, their animals are healthy, and in the event of a food safety incident, the source can be isolated and dealt with in a timely manner. There are some gaps in these programs that need to be addressed. Some are commodity specific, where one industry lags behind another; some are universal to all commodities.

The federal government has three critical tasks in front of it. One, it has to develop national guidelines for tracking and tracing food safety and biosecurity, with enough flexibility to be adapted to each province without being compromised. Two, it has to ensure there's producer participation in these programs by providing proper incentives for voluntary participation. This will not only encourage active participation in the system, but compared to a regulatory regime, producers will be more likely to comply if their efforts are compensated. And three, a strategy needs to be developed by the federal government on how to move the entire food industry forward on the issue of food safety, with targeted resources to ensure that the Canadian industry remains and grows more competitive internationally.

The provision of safe food is the responsibility of all Canadians—producers, processors, retailers, consumers, and governments alike. We need to work together towards this common goal for the health and safety of Canadians and our foreign consumers, as well as for the economic well-being of our food production system.

Thank you.

• (1700)

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

We'll now move into questioning.

Mr. Easter, for seven minutes.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Thank you, folks, and thank you all for coming and for your presentations.

I'll turn to you first, Mr. Wilcott. You said that CFIA is basically reluctant to share information openly. I guess I'm of the point of view that in terms of this listeriosis issue, we needed a much stronger inquiry than we're currently getting. Some of us wonder whether, with the potential of an election in the wind, there may have been some political pressure not to share information as well.

Your statements are somewhat along the line of those from the Ontario medical officer of health. I'll quote it to you. In their report, they stated that the process followed by CFIA, specifically with respect to the repeated recalls:

created the impression that the response was not well organized, and contributed to the public's sense of unease and confusion. It also made it more difficult for the public health units to plan and organize their efforts.

I'm wondering from you if that's been your experience with CFIA.

Secondly, the other problem.... I will admit, I was shocked at the president of the CFIA's statement here that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is not responsible for food safety in this country. Now, if they're not, who is? Who should be? That's my question to you.

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott:** The listeriosis outbreak last summer was a unique situation, a unique outbreak and recall. Wave after wave of different products were recalled. I can't speak for CFIA in how they were determining what was coming up. As I said before, I wasn't involved in the plant investigation.

From a public health viewpoint, it was confusing, and it was difficult to operate under that system with different products coming out, because in our province we made an agreement with the CFIA that we would be responsible for verifying that the product was removed from certain establishments. Our responsibility was for institutions, hospitals, and long-term care facilities as well as food service restaurants.

The number of facilities involved was in the thousands, and as different products were recalled, our inspectors had to go back to these facilities and verify that. So it was a difficult time. It was a difficult outbreak.

• (1705)

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I raised the question, although we certainly would like to determine responsibility here because that's not the role of Ms. Weatherill. She's not going to determine responsibility; she's going to determine where we go from here. But we too are going to

have to make some recommendations on moving forward, and a number of recommendations were presented here this morning in several of the briefs.

The Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors mentioned that there needs to be a single, credible voice. Can you expand on that? We've had CFIA, we've had the Canadian health authority, and we've had Health Canada here, and at the end of it they admitted it's a shared responsibility. My experience with shared responsibility is that no one is really responsible. The minister is certainly not taking any responsibility. So what's your view?

**Mr. Nick Jennery:** Mr. Chair, I would point to the current H1N1 situation, where Dr. David Butler-Jones is consistently out there with a message. People know who he is. They recognize it, they follow the story. If we look at the BSE crisis, I think CFIA did a good job with Dr. Brian Evans. He was out there early. He was providing the context. There was continuity of message.

I understand these things can be complicated and I understand they can come at you fast and furiously. I see an incremental improvement, and it's something we hear from consumers in our stores.

**An hon. member:** Except with listeriosis.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Yes.

**Mr. Nick Jennery:** As to who that expert is, I leave it to the government as to who the most appropriate—

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** It would even be nice to have a minister who didn't go into hiding.

On the chicken producers, David, your brief says “ensure imported product meets the same high standards as Canadian chicken”, and that's something we're hearing a lot of in all products that end up on grocery store shelves.

Is imported product meeting the same standards as Canadian product, either in terms of its production or the quality control systems environment it's produced under? If not, why not? What has to be done to make it so?

**Mr. David Fuller:** I can use one very simple example that will answer a number of your questions.

A number of antibiotics are not certified to be used in Canada, but a product that comes into Canada has the capacity to be able to use those antibiotics. It puts us at less of a competitive edge, and if antibiotics are not approved for use in Canada, then product that is coming into Canada should not be able to have that same kind of treatment.

That's just a simple example. We need to have a simple standard, where if it is not acceptable in Canada, it cannot be acceptable for product that comes into Canada, that feeds Canadians. That has to have the same standard.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Who should pay for it? I find in this country producers are asked to cover a lot of the cost of food safety while in other countries it's covered by the public sector to a great extent.

**Mr. David Fuller:** It should be a shared responsibility among all of us. You need to look at different aspects. Even in processing it's different, and the pre-market label approval that we talked about—these are key components that we believe must be maintained in the country, that's for sure.

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

Mr. Bellavance, for seven minutes.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Thank you very much.

For those who do not understand French, please take a moment to find the right channel so that you will understand my questions.

Mr. Wilcott, my initial questions are for you. Your agency reports directly to the Ministry of Health of British Columbia, does it not?

• (1710)

[English]

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott:** That's right.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** You were saying that your day-to-day relations with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency were very good. However, you did say that the Agency did sometimes fail to share sufficient information.

I would like to know why you made that comment, and whether you have a specific example of a situation where the Agency did in fact fail to share sufficient information.

[English]

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott:** I can give you several examples. We get the same information the public gets with recalls, so whatever public notice is given, that's the information we receive. We don't receive any other information regarding, say, bacterial species, or any fingerprint information, or on distribution of the product. Whatever the public sees is what we see. If we want additional information that could be useful for outbreak investigations, we have to ask for it. Sometimes we get it, sometimes we don't. If we do get it, it will be delayed. And any delay in an outbreak investigation potentially means that more people will become ill, there will be secondary infections, etc. That's one thing.

Another example is there are certain recalls that are not publicized that we're aware of. These may be recalls that are a result of bacterial test results that a company may have done, or test results that the CFIA may have done. The CFIA—and I'm not sure what the reasoning is—do not publicize these recalls. These could be products that were distributed to institutions only, or only to restaurants. I'm speculating here, but I guess they figure there is no reason to tell the public. If they don't tell the public, we don't find out about it either. That's another example. Again, for potential outbreak investigations, that could be very useful. We could have an outbreak occurring and we wouldn't know the cause of it, but if we had that information we would be able to act.

Those are two specific examples. I can give you other ones that have happened as well.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I imagine you have already notified the CFIA and its management that you failed to receive adequate information, and that you need to have all available information provided in a timely fashion.

What reason were you given for the agency's failure to share all information with you?

[English]

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott:** You would have to ask them.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Did you already put that question to them?

[English]

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott:** We have asked and they said it's not their policy, or there is potential liability. I would say we haven't had a real reason given.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Did you try going up one level, to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, and ask him to rectify the problem? If you did, what answer did you get?

[English]

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott:** To my knowledge, we haven't gone to that level. We have had our provincial health officer, Dr. Perry Kendall, meet and discuss this with—and I can't remember who it was—the regional director or possibly the director of CFIA. I don't know what level that was at, but I know we have asked and we've been told, we'll give it to you sometimes, but other times it's not forwarded.

Again, there are other situations where if we don't know what we don't know, then we don't know what to ask because we're not always given the information.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** When you sit on this subcommittee, you hear all kinds of things that make no sense.

I'm going to tell you about something that occurred and you will tell me if you have ever experienced a similar situation. On April 20, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and the Deputy Minister of Health Canada wrote to Dr. Williams, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health.

I mentioned this to Mr. Butler-Jones, who heads the Public Health Agency of Canada. He did not clearly remember whether he wrote such comments.

The blame was laid squarely on Ontario, not necessarily for what happened, but for the delay in confirming the contamination source. Ontario was being blamed for that, because the Toronto Public Health Office had sent samples to the wrong laboratory for analysis. The samples should have been sent to the Agency's regional laboratory in Scarborough, but instead were sent to the Listeriosis Reference Service at the Health Canada laboratory in Ottawa. Thus when others were asked questions, we were told that the Agency's laboratory in Scarborough was not certified at the time the Listeriosis crisis occurred. So there are contradictions there.

I'm wondering if that isn't the way the Agency goes about things—trying to offload any potential problems onto the provinces.

Have you ever been in a position where you were told that, in fact, it was you who had done the wrong thing? Given what I have just told you, is there a specific procedure that the province is required to follow in the event of a crisis like this, or is the procedure somewhat random?

• (1715)

[English]

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott:** Well, we don't work in a haphazard fashion. Outbreak investigations tend to vary depending on the situation. As I said, when you start an investigation, you are completely in the dark in most cases. When we have enough information that we feel there are foods potentially implicated, that's the point—if it's an imported or processed food—when we contact the CFIA to give them the information we have. We provide all the information we have.

I'm speaking for British Columbia. I can't speak about the example you provided with what happened in Ontario. At that point, as I said before, we often ask for other information. We need more information to be able to confirm whether or not the foods we've implicated—and often there is more than one food.... We want to be able to narrow it down. We ask for information, and, as I said, we don't always get the information we're looking for.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you. Your time has expired, Mr. Bellavance.

Mr. Allen, for seven minutes.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to everyone who has come.

My first statement is actually more of a request of Mr. Fuller, Mr. McLean, and—I'm sorry, I can't see the gentleman's name. Ferguson? Okay. You all referenced the HACCP plans you have in each of your individual industries. What I'm going to ask you to do is send the committee copies of those, if indeed you can. If that's available, I'd greatly appreciate that—and indeed from Mr. Jennery as well, because I believe you mentioned that. Mr. De Valk, if you have one as well and you want to send that in, we'll be glad to take that one too, just to make it easier for me than having to track it down. Sometimes I don't get things in a very quick manner. Perhaps I'll get it quicker this way.

Mr. Jennery, you made an interesting comment, I thought, as part of your response to a question. You said Dr. Evans was the lead spokesperson on BSE, when that tragedy occurred, and Dr. Butler-Jones was indeed the spokesperson...and is at this present time for H1N1, and you said he was doing a terrific job—I'm using your

words, of course. I would tend to agree with you. He tends to be the public face. The question really isn't for you, sir; I'm just simply referencing what you said.

Yet, when it came to listeriosis, the public face was Michael McCain. In two other serious incidents in the past six years, we saw Public Health and CFIA. Now we see the industry. The only thing I see different between the three is that in the first two—at this point in time, at least, under H1N1—we haven't had a serious illness leading to death. But in the case of listeriosis, we saw 22 people die.

**The Chair:** You have a point of order, Mr. Lemieux.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** I just want to identify that the minister was very present during this listeriosis crisis. He did numerous press conferences communicating with the public, and Mr. Allen is simply casting aspersions here.

• (1720)

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Allen.

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

I want to thank my colleague for his non-point of order.

The simple case is that Mr. McCain, in his testimony before us, said that he was the public face of this particular illness. The public, according to the media reports, also said that. Notwithstanding the government side's belief that they did some things, and clearly the minister was out and spoke a few times and CFIA spoke a few times, Ms. Swan said in testimony—and my colleague on this side has already said it—that she believed industry was responsible for food safety. It seems quite obvious, then, that Mr. McCain should be the lead spokesperson.

Mr. Wilcott, sir, there is this whole sense of information sharing, because we're talking about public safety and ultimately public health in the food system. If we're to have real security in the sense of truly believing our food system is as safe as it humanly can be, what do we need to do to open up the channels of communication? What do we need to do to ensure that when you're sending things to the federal agency, we're indeed getting things back to us at the provincial level so that you can actually help the public get to the place that it needs to be, which is either to a physician or to safe practices, or to all of those things you're seeing? I hear what you're saying about how difficult it is. It's a little bit here, a little bit there. How do we put the puzzle together? It's like building a puzzle, it seems to me, without one of the corner pieces, which means you really can't get it done.

How would you want to see the information sharing change?

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott:** From our viewpoint, we would be looking for complete, open, and free information sharing, at not withholding any information. At times, there could be information that one agency may have that they feel maybe isn't relevant and they don't pass it on.

In an outbreak investigation, it could be relevant. That's as simple as I can put it—a very open and free sharing of information. From a provincial viewpoint, at least in British Columbia, we provide everything we have, because we want to identify the food source as quickly as possible. We don't always get that back.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Perhaps the CFIA needs a HACCP plan, so that they can actually identify the critical points and get them back to you.

How can we, in your estimation, sir, ensure that through regulation, through statute, or through mandate, we get that information to the public health authorities across the country? Clearly, it is the public health authorities, whether they be localized or not. I can't speak to every province because I come from Ontario. Clearly, we have public agencies that are regionally based when it comes to public health in Ontario. We have a public health officer for the province that folks are feeding information into. From this perspective, in your sense, what would you like to see us do to ensure that this flow actually happens?

What I'm hearing from two public health officials—one now in Ontario and one now in B.C.—is that it's not happening.

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott:** I'm not a parliamentarian; I don't pass laws.

I simply do my job to try to prevent illnesses. How you have that done by CFIA...I'm not really sure how you can do it. What we would be looking for is simply the outcome, that open flow of information.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** I appreciate that.

**Mr. Nick Jennery:** Mr. Chairman, perhaps I could just answer the question that originally came my way. My point was really around providing consumers with a clear context, as opposed to my understanding of what Mr. McCain was speaking about.

He was explaining about the issue and about what the company was doing. My point was that consumers really want to know. Some of them hadn't even heard of listeriosis before. What are those symptoms? Who are the people at risk? What should you be doing? There is information on some of the Government of Canada websites. I'm just suggesting that there be an enhancement in trying to bring forward that information about who's at risk.

It's that contextual information as opposed to an explanation of what was unfolding at the time. That was my point.

**The Chair:** Mr. de Valk, you had your hand up. Did you want to speak to that as well?

**Mr. Robert de Valk (Director, Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education):** Yes, I think there is a model we can use to help the flow of information between the provinces and federal government agencies like the CFIA. The public health authority has what are called sentinel sites—there's one in Guelph—where Canadians can report their results when they get sick, and they're tracked very closely.

As we found out in this particular case, the field results often identify a crisis first. So there is information sharing at these sentinel sites between the provinces and the federal government. I understand we're in the process of developing 10 sites, but we've only had one now for three years. If we had more sentinel sites and more of that information was shared, we would probably be a lot more comfortable about sharing information back and forth between governments and agencies.

So that may be a helpful tool.

• (1725)

**The Chair:** Mr. Lemieux, you have seven minutes.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I thank our witnesses for being here today.

What I've heard from each of you, either directly or indirectly, is that food safety is indeed a shared responsibility because there are so many different key players involved in the food process. We've heard from producers about systems and processes they implement at the farm gate and right through to processing. We've heard about food preparation and the impact it can have on food safety. Then of course it flows right through to consumers, who end up doing the final food preparation if they happen to be consuming it at home.

Mr. Wilcott certainly described well the challenges that are present when trying to define whether it is an outbreak. I appreciated your point that it's usually first discovered in the field. Then it's a matter of trying to piece the problem together from there by interviewing people: "Is more than one person ill? What did they eat two weeks ago? What is the source of the problem?" It's a complex problem and there are many interfaces.

One of the things that concerns me—from some of the questions my colleagues asked—is that I sometimes think their mission is to lay blame. They want to nail somebody for this. When my colleagues and I voted on establishing this committee, its working hours, and the kinds of witnesses we wanted, the aim was not to lay blame. The aim was to find out what happened, who the different players involved were, and what the interfaces were and how to better manage them. To me that's the key, and we all need to work together to move things forward.

The lessons learned reports will help move things forward. They have been tabled by different organizations, and we certainly need to communicate better. I appreciated Mr. Jennery's comments on communicating key information to industry and the public. Again, interfaces between different governmental organizations need to be improved.



Let me follow up on one of the comments Mr. Jennery made on communication. You said that industry should find out before the media, and I'm wondering what your thoughts are on the practical application of that. Given the society we live in today—especially since we're all interconnected on a high-speed communications network—there's often a lot going on at once, but the media, industry, and the public must be finding out at the same time. Maybe you could elaborate.

I'm concerned that if we start putting a step-by-step process in place to share information, it will become more bureaucratic. Then people will say, "Listen it broke down here, and that's why the public didn't find out. It broke down there, and that's why industry didn't find out." I'm wondering if you can comment on what you mean by this flow of information and who should find out first.

• (1730)

**Mr. Nick Jennery:** Mr. Chairman, my point was really that I think there should be one source of truth and that information is one to many. Over the years Canada has built up an enviable electronic real-time system of one to many. Anybody can sign up to that, so we all get the information at the same time.

When you have the complications of a rolling recall—and, as Mr. Wilcott pointed out, this was a difficult recall—there is a temptation to have some sidebar conversations, and then the media start to speculate and report on things. I think we all play a role in this, but I would encourage support for the CFIA system to be out there. We know it works.

In the bisphenol A situation, the media were speculating on what the standard would be. From our standpoint, we did not react to that. We waited until Health Canada actually made a definitive statement, and I'm glad we did, because the speculation was based on wrong information. I would encourage total and absolute respect for the CFIA system, because that is the only trigger we respond to. When there are discussions with media, etc., it can sometimes complicate things.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** I will also ask a question about recalls.

You made some comments about recalls. How do grocery distributors handle a recall, and do they differentiate between a voluntary recall and a mandatory recall? Is the paperwork different? Is the communication method different?

**Mr. Nick Jennery:** Within the grocery infrastructure, whether you're a department head, a store manager, or a corporate officer, it is recognized that a recall situation—and there's a standard format for that—is not a time to discuss or to ask questions; you pull it off the shelf. You just get it off the shelf.

What do you do with the product afterwards? You'll figure it out. It can depend on the situation. It depends on the manufacturer, the product, and all sorts of things. The point is that you get it away from the point of sale and then figure out what the issue is from there.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Is there only one issuer of recalls? For example, can a company undertake a voluntary recall? Do you get recalls only from the government, or do you get recalls that are not actually on government letterhead, recalls from the manufacturers themselves?

**Ms. Jackie Crichton (Vice-President, Food Safety and Labeling, Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors):** Generally speaking, when it's a recall, it is from CFIA. In terms of voluntary versus mandatory, there really isn't a difference. The mandatory recall occurs only if a firm was determining that it would not do a recall when CFIA thought it should be. All recalls are reacted to in the same fashion, and the information that triggers the recall is the information that comes from CFIA.

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

I don't want anybody to be alarmed. The bells are going off because we have votes.

If I have unanimous consent, I'm going to suggest that we have one five-minute round. Ms. Bennett can have five minutes. I think we have time.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** I think the bells are only ringing for 15 minutes, so I would recommend that we suspend the meeting and come back.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.):** I actually have to have dinner with the Minister of Health at 6 p.m. I'd like to sneak in the five minutes, if that's okay.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** I understand now. You want to start the second round with five minutes but not complete it.

**The Chair:** Certainly not. We'll just be five minutes. I think we'll have enough time.

Go ahead, Ms. Bennett.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Thanks very much.

Dr. Wilcott, how many cases of listeriosis did you have in B.C.?

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott:** I know we had four or five deaths, but I can't recall the total number of cases.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Have you done a look-back study of the kind they did in Ontario? Does BCCDC have a lessons learned exercise?

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott:** We do, and we did go through that exercise.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Would you be able to table it with this committee?

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott:** I would think so, yes.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Have you looked at the Ontario report at all?

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott:** I can't recall if I have; I may have.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** It sounds like Dr. Williams' conclusions are very close to yours in terms of clarifying the roles. They needed to strengthen their laboratory capacity, probably because you don't, and improve communications. As my colleague said, what we learned from SARS was collaboration, cooperation, communication, and clarity of who does what when. That was in Dr. Naylor's report, and somehow it didn't happen this time.

I'm concerned that in the chronology and what you've said is that once it hits the food chain and there is illness or possible illness or the potential of adverse publicity, all of a sudden the communication slows down in some way. I was wondering how you can sort of demonstrate that for us in real time in the real cases. Is there something that would just show us that you would have expected that? Do you use IFIS, and would you not expect things to be posted there as soon as they see anything? Did that not happen this time?

• (1735)

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott:** With the listeriosis outbreak?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Yes.

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott:** I can't recall. I'm not trying to be difficult. I just can't recall.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I think one of our concerns was that once we knew that the plant had national distribution, you would have liked to have known everywhere it had been, in order to be able to do your public health job properly. Is that...?

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott:** At that point, really, the information we're looking for is prior to that knowledge, knowing what product it was and that it was distributed nationally. Often in an investigation you still don't know for sure which product it is, and that's the time when you need as much information as possible regarding an implicated food: how it has been distributed, timelines, etc. That's the time. Once it's all known, that's it, the information is out there. But it's prior to that.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Even before the genes are mapped and they know it's coming from the same source? What kind of information did you need from CFIA that you didn't get?

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott:** Initially it was found in Ontario. I wouldn't say it was ground zero, but that's where it was identified. So it's difficult for me to speak specifically about that investigation because we just weren't that involved with it at that point.

I'm sorry, what was your question?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** On the quality of information you would have liked to have had earlier, can you describe what just didn't happen?

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott:** Again, I can't really speak for what happened in Ontario. We weren't involved at that level.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Since that time, now that you're there, have there been any tabletop exercises or training in tabletop exercises to try to do it better in a virtual way since last summer?

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott:** We have gone through a tabletop exercise with CFIA, and I can say things have improved somewhat. But we still feel there could be a lot more improvement with regard to communication and getting that early information from the CFIA.

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

I apologize to our witnesses, but votes happen around this place and we all have to be there. We're going to suspend the meeting now.

I want to invite our witnesses.... We have some food that was brought in for the committee, but we have you here through the dinner hour, so I'm going to ask you to please help yourselves back there while we're gone. We have five votes, which will take a bit of time, but we will be back here soon.

I would ask the members to please come here immediately after the votes, and we'll get back at it. Thank you.

• (1735)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1840)

**The Chair:** We'll call the meeting back to order. Again, we apologize for having to slip away, but we have to do those things.

We'll move back to questioning. Mr. Shipley, for five minutes.

**Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the witnesses for helping out with our dinner. We appreciate that. The votes do take some time.

Oh, Brenda is not here. I had—

**Mr. Robert de Valk:** I'll try to substitute.

**The Chair:** I should have mentioned that. I understand Mr. Jennery had to leave, and Ms. Watson did indicate to me when we left that she had to go at 6:30, and Mr. Fuller of course. Every group is still represented.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** That's great. When I looked up, I just saw the vacant chair.

Mr. de Valk, it's good to see you again.

In terms of the Canadian partnership, Canadian food safety, your education, what we're talking about here—aside from Mr. Easter, who is trying to find blame—is about actually moving ahead. How are we going to prevent something like this from happening?

When I listened to Mr. Wilcott, I think we got a pretty clear understanding of the complexities and the issues around getting to something like listeria, which you can't actually taste, you can't smell, you can't feel, you can't find, hardly. In fact, had we not done things that Mr. Easter and his government had cancelled, we still might not have the answers for that. We want to keep moving ahead with steps in place to prevent it.

Ms. Watson talked about how in a recent campaign you were able to reach over 12 million Canadians with our food safety handling message over the year. One of the things that's in here is that there is a considerable number of people who actually do just the basics. You and I, likely, at our homes don't do what we should do. And if you're going to change the culture of Canadians.... You used the example of how bad it is in terms of smoking, how bad it is in terms of drunk driving, to get that message actually out.

When you talk about reaching over 12 million Canadians in terms of trying to promote the food safety issue, how do you benchmark that in terms of its success? Do you have any ideas?

•(1845)

**Mr. Robert de Valk:** That's probably the number one question we had at the partnership right from the beginning, how to benchmark, because as you make more people aware of food safety, the incidents relating to food safety also increase because people become more aware and they therefore report.

It's a double-edged sword. Even though you might be reaching consumers and getting them to change their behaviour, they're also becoming more conscious and reporting to their doctors that they have had something that might be traced back to food safety. You have both things going on at the same time.

The message we're getting, though, is that we have to work with the idea that the consumer has to be reminded of a message about seven times, if not more, before it really sinks in. We get that from our advertising folks. As a result, we work closely with all our partnership members, especially the retailers, where consumers often find themselves at least once a week. If we can get them to put the message out on a regular basis during the summer, for example, then we know we're reaching consumers maybe seven times over a period of a month.

That's the way we think we can influence behaviour, especially right now. Just washing hands, for instance, would be very helpful.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** I think you'll see that in this building, and in all of our government buildings, the portable handwashing things.

Mr. McCain actually accepted full responsibility for it because it was in his plant, but it raises the issue that we have 11 million to 13 million cases per year of food-borne illness—this comes from Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada.

So we have a situation now with listeria, which is one that would fall under this 11 million to 13 million cases of food-borne illness. Can somebody help me with that? Is that true?

**Mr. Robert de Valk:** Yes. I think any outbreak is included in those statistics.

That statistic is much like an iceberg. It's built up from the type of data that Mr. Wilcott collects in his province and that every other health agency collects. They feel this is a glimpse of what might be the reportable possibilities and what consumers are experiencing. We never have that 11 million or 12 million cases reported, but we do have the tip of the iceberg. We extrapolate from there that it's probably what's happening out in the population.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Okay.

Mr. Wilcott—

**The Chair:** Your time has expired. We'll come back to you.

Mr. Easter, for five minutes.

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

The program that Mr. Shipley talks about being cancelled is I think environmental testing. Mr. Evans said in response to questions that there really never were mandatory requirements for environmental testing, but I wonder about this going forward.

Some of the people I've talked to are really the auditors of the auditors in these plants, and hopefully they'll be before the

committee at some point in time. In these plants, if there should be environmental testing.... As I understand it, for the slicing machine that was involved here, the manufacturer's specifications were followed. Do we need more stringent requirements around that by government inspectors as well? Does anybody have any ideas?

Mr. de Valk.

**Mr. Robert de Valk:** I think the message you're getting from the industry is that where there might have been something amiss is that the pattern the particular environmental testing was revealing in its test results wasn't being looked at closely enough.

I mean, you can certainly mandate that all equipment be cleaned properly, and that's already on the books. It's not until you go through that cleaning procedure and do your environmental testing and your food contact surface testing that you can start to get a picture of how good you are. If you get a picture that suggests there is an area of concern, then you take further action.

We now have a policy in place whereby additional environmental testing is being done and additional food contact surface testing is being done. As we collect that data, we're going to have a much better opportunity to answer your question on whether we need further regulations.

One of the things that's happening right now is that the CFIA and the industry have agreed that we need better data on how this whole thing works in a plant. Then we can probably make some better judgments on what policies are needed.

•(1850)

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** There is an area that I would ask the farm groups about, whether it's the beef or chicken groups or KAP. HACCP is a much misunderstood system. In my experience, it has worked well.

The reason I ask this question is that in the report we have to do at the end of the day, these areas have to be explained, so that the report itself develops some better understanding, both for those who may read the report and, in going forward, on how the system as a whole operates. I would like someone to explain the system fairly briefly if they can. We never got a chance to ask this question of CFIA.

There's one other point that I don't want to lose here.

In the Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors presentation you said that "media must not be provided with the information ahead of industry". I wrote "media". Has that happened? The scare factor in these kinds of situations is awful. We're seeing that right now with the H1N1 virus. A scare factor can destroy an industry for all the wrong reasons.

Can you comment on that? What has to be done to prevent that from happening? Again, I would come back to the point that somebody has to be in charge and be responsible. This shared responsibility, in my view, is part of the problem.

**Ms. Jackie Crichton:** From the standpoint of media communication, what we're saying is that the communication to media and industry should be at the same time and not one ahead of the other. It should be one to many, which is the current system through the CFIA webmaster, whereby it goes out electronically to anyone who chooses to subscribe to the webmaster, including any consumer who wishes to do so. We just feel that it needs to be ensured that this is the way communication does happen, that it is the one to many, and that it is occurring at the same time, as opposed to perhaps one group hearing it ahead of the other.

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

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Could Mike give an answer on that, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** Yes, Mike, if you can briefly.

**Mr. Mike Dungate (General Manager, Chicken Farmers of Canada):** It's a slightly different perspective and it depends on what is going on. I'll go back to not a listeriosis outbreak but an avian influenza outbreak.

I think what was beneficial in 2004—and we came out of there and we did a post-mortem and a lessons learned—was the fact that there was a briefing by CFIA with industry before it went public, and we were collaborating on how to contain the disease.

We also knew that we had to share media lines, in a certain sense, because as soon as the media got a press release from CFIA they were going to start making every contact possible to try to get a different angle on a story. Then the one to many becomes a one to many and a different message out there, and we're trying to support each other in the messaging. I think there's a team and a collaborative relationship that needs to be established there. I think it's very important if we're to manage and know what we have to do.

**The Chair:** Thanks, Mr. Dungate.

Mr. Bellavance, five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Mr. Wilcott, my question is to you again. Earlier, I didn't have time in my seven minutes to put all the questions I had for you.

Mr. Dungate was just speaking about the events in 2004, in British Columbia, to which you referred also. Because of avian flu, a great many birds—poultry—had to be destroyed.

I imagine that the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control was directly involved in those events. You were certainly on the front line then. Is that not so?

• (1855)

[*English*]

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott:** We were involved from a human health viewpoint. That is our primary concern, and it was our primary concern at the time. The people who were dealing with the disposal of the poultry...we gave them information in terms of how to prevent them from being infected as well because there were cases of conjunctivitis. I think that was the main illness. Some of the workers became ill with that. But that was our primary concern at the time.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** At the time, during a post-mortem—the study that's always carried out after an event of that kind—did the Agency recognize that it was itself likely contributing to the propagation of avian flu, when its employees visited farms and then went to other farms with the same boots they had been wearing on contaminated ground?

Do you think there has been any improvement there? In April—very recently—British Columbia had to deal with a case of avian flu again. In your opinion, has there been any improvement between 2004 and now?

[*English*]

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott:** I can't really answer that. I'm not really involved in the biosecurity from an animal disease viewpoint on the farms. It's my understanding that there have been improvements, but that's very second-hand. I don't have any direct knowledge of that.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Mr. Dungate, can you give me an opinion on that?

**Mr. Mike Dungate:** Yes, I can. In my view, the situation has improved between 2004 and 2009. That's a fact. However, things are always difficult when there are staff changes. There is a lot of excellent training being done. There is the biosecurity equipment used by CFIA. But even today, in 2009, there have been some minor problems, minor in comparison with those encountered in 2004. Problems always arise in relation to the distribution of quarantine notices and the people who take them to the farms. Even if the farms in question are not part of the problem, there is still a risk if they are located within a three-kilometre radius.

But these are really minor problems in comparison with the ones we saw in 2004. Nonetheless, with the post-mortem, we had an opportunity to learn some lessons again.

**Mr. André Bellavance:** You mentioned a problem relating to quarantine notices. Were quarantine notices issued to farms that should not have received them? Or was the problem different?

**Mr. Mike Dungate:** Inspectors visited farms one by one, issuing the notices. If a strain of the virus is detected on one of those farms, the inspector could transmit it from one farm to another. That's not the case here; there was no transfer. We inspected both farms in question and everything was fine, but there is still a risk.

**Mr. André Bellavance:** But that was one of the problems with the process in 2004. However, the virus wasn't transferred as a result of inspectors visiting farms to issue quarantine notices. The virus transfer occurred during the animal slaughtering process, through vehicles, through employees. Yet there is still no clear understanding that the process needs to change.

**Mr. Mike Dungate:** Yes, but we learned a great deal in 2004, there is no doubt of that. Absolutely. There is a group at CFIA that handles poultry and the incidents of avian flu, so these people are familiar with all the protocols, but perhaps they are not the same people who provided the advice at the beginning. I'm not sure. That's why we want to do a post-mortem with CFIA.

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Often people deplore the lack of inspectors. Perhaps the problem is not the number of inspectors. Perhaps the problem lies with the locations they are working in, and what they do. I really don't know, but the minister always tells us that there are so many inspectors, an incredible number of inspectors. There are so many employees at the agency that I wonder if the organization has become so large that the left hand no longer knows what the right hand is doing. I ask myself this question, but I'm not asking you to comment, because I do not want to put you in an awkward situation.

Is my time already up?

• (1900)

[English]

**The Chair:** Yes, you are out of time. I'm just letting you finish your statement, Mr. Bellavance.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I wonder about this, because the Auditor General's Office has been noting the same shortcomings at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency regularly, ever since the 1990s. It seems to me that the problems have not been corrected. After hearing what I've just heard about a topic as serious as such an epidemic, it seems to me that people haven't learned all the lessons. I understand what you're saying, that improvement has been made, but unfortunately I see that some bad behaviours still go on. I just can't believe it.

[English]

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

Just before I go on to Mr. Allen, indulge me, if you would. I want to follow up a little on HACCP. I think most of you have had a chance.

I wonder whether the cattlemen and Mr. McLean from Keystone could comment on HACCP and its benefits and that kind of thing.

Mr. McLean.

**Mr. Robert McLean:** I'll tell you what went on in our firm with hogs. I referred to the Canadian quality assurance program.

What happened was the provincial association went throughout Manitoba to the towns of Manitoba. The producers went to meetings and were provided with the manuals. It was a day-long meeting on how the certification process would take place. This is an annual certification, in which the vet comes at the cost of the farm unit. We have to do daily logs of the feed and of any medications, and it all has to be recorded and verified annually.

That's what happens on the farm on a day-to-day basis.

**Mr. Dan Ferguson:** Just to be clear, HACCP is a seven-step program. First you identify the food safety hazard. Then you develop a standard operating procedure that can control the hazard in that operation, whatever the commodity may be. You define your target levels or the critical limits you can live with. The monitoring process is the next step. The fifth step is corrective actions to bring the operation around to the way it should be. You develop methods to verify that you've done it properly. The final step is the record-

keeping document. Those are basically the seven steps of HACCP for any group.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Allen.

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

We certainly did not want you to feel that we left you out.

I really want to talk more to Ms. Crichton about the sense of the supply chain. It can be a rather extensive one, from a geographical perspective, as well as very intricate, from all perspectives, because of the different places, the different hands, and the different systems that actually move it from place to place, whether it comes, indeed, from a farmer or a farm somewhere through the processing chain to, eventually, the fork.

To paraphrase Napoleon, he once said that the army marches on its stomach. He ultimately lost the Franco-Prussian War because he basically starved his army to death.

Not to be misunderstood, my sense is that there isn't anyone in the chain, from the farmer to the fork, who is trying to do anything other than provide the best quality food and the safest quality food we possibly can. I want to ensure that folks don't understand from the metaphor that somehow we're trying to do something to folks around the issue of food.

Could you sort of walk us through some intricacies here, in the sense of the food supply chain we now have? It is much different than it was, I would suggest, 30 years ago, and is changing, it seems to me, on an annual basis in terms of how intricate it truly gets when it comes to the things we consume. They literally travel thousands upon thousands of kilometres.

We don't grow papaya in this country, yet you can find it. We don't grow oranges in this country, but you can buy them. There are numerous other products we find on our store shelves that we don't necessarily produce, nor do we grow them here. But things we used to grow here are now disappearing, like canned peaches, for instance. In my neck of the woods, in the Niagara Peninsula, when the last canning factory, CanGro, left, it meant that there were no canneries east of the Rocky Mountains for fresh peaches, or fresh fruit for that matter. That means that the local source of canned fruit for Canadians is now gone. In fact, flip the label, and you'll find that it is probably a product of China. Flip the product of frozen fish over and you may find that it's a product of China. It might be caught in the Grand Banks, mind you, but it might be a product of China.

If you could, and I know you don't have a lot of time, could you try to give us a sense of where you think the system isn't up to snuff? And where you don't have controls that you might want, because clearly you can't be in all places at all times when you're sourcing product far away, how sure are you and how comfortable are you that those regulations we see here for our farmers and our processors are actually being followed there? What is your sense on that?

Ultimately, the subsequent question would be why, if you're not sure they are as good as what we have here, we are selling them. I'll finish with that and let you take the rest of the time.

• (1905)

**Ms. Jackie Crichton:** Certainly one of the things we have seen is an increase in products from around the world. Part of that is due to consumer demand. Consumers travel. Consumers buy products. They come home, and they'd like to see those products on our shelves.

Certainly from the CCDG members' standpoint and the industry standpoint, food safety is a top concern in all realms, regardless of where the product is sourced. We work closely with CFIA and their findings. We work closely with vendors. We work at the international level with common best practices and we work with groups such as the Global Food Safety Initiative and programs they have in place and consider to be equivalent.

It depends on the nature of the product and sometimes on the risk associated with that given product. But it is always top of mind. When we are making a purchasing decision, it is that food safety aspect. There are, of course, other things that come into play as well, but food safety is always top of mind.

**The Chair:** You have a few seconds.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** It begs the obvious question, then. What are those other considerations besides food safety?

**Ms. Jackie Crichton:** Food safety, certainly, is first and foremost. Sometimes it is the quantity that can actually be supplied to you. That can be a situation. The quality of the product comes into play, depending on product specifications. Is the company able to meet the quantity of product you need to supply your outlets?

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll move to Mr. Shipley, or is it Mr. Storseth?

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Thank you, Chair. I know you prefer not to notice me at committee, but....

I'd like to thank all of the witnesses for coming and enduring the time here today. I know the break we had to take for votes disrupted our committee flow a little bit, but we very much appreciate your patience and your time on this. This is a very important issue that we have in moving forward on food safety.

I would like to talk a little bit about food safety and maybe relate some of the things we have going on today to some of the things that have happened in the past in our agricultural sector, and indeed to some of the concerns we have when it comes to food safety in Canada, and also talk a little bit about our record and how strong it actually is.

First of all, I'd like to talk to Mr. Masswohl from the Canadian Cattlemen's Association. Could you give us a little bit of background on the science of BSE and some of what happened there? Could you relate how that affected us and, moving forward, how we could have been better prepared for that?

**Mr. John Masswohl:** Yes, that's certainly the one that's biggest in our minds as being a disease that perhaps has a reputation it doesn't deserve, and how countries and trade and emotions react to it. That's perhaps instructive for what the pork industry might be going through right now with the H1N1 virus.

With BSE you had a new disease that started appearing in Europe and the U.K. in the late seventies and early eighties, and people didn't know what it was. Animals were just getting sick, and people didn't know why. They started to do some research to learn more about it and found out that people were also getting sick. As the years went by and the research was going on, trade barriers went up and people stopped trading with the U.K., which became the way people and countries dealt with it.

Science moved on, and they learned what it was and how it was spreading and how to control it. But countries—including Canada—still put up trade barriers. Perhaps we were somewhat guilty, too, and had to taste our own medicine, because when we discovered it here, that's also what happened to us. We immediately lost all of our markets in other countries, losing to the tune of \$11 million per day, because we do export about 60% of our production.

With that happening, and with the U.S. then getting in the same boat as us, we did manage to address it from the point of view of knowing what to do. We changed regulations in Canada. We made sure that our feed ban was stopping the spread of the disease from animal to animal; it was not contagious, but it was through feed. We adopted some changes in how beef was processed to make sure that the risky parts of the animal containing the agent were not going into the food supply.

So we've done everything to assure the safety of the beef, and we've done other things to ensure the health of the animals. But we still continue to suffer from the economic impact. I think that's the real message here, which is to identify what are the things.... Some of the things we've talked about are real food safety concerns, and you have to make sure you're preventing those and controlling them.

Some of the other things we've talked about are extremely important issues—animal health issues, biosecurity, and disease prevention, and perhaps country-of-origin labelling in terms of marketing—but a lot of these things aren't food safety issues. So we want to make sure that when we're talking about how we respond to these things and what lessons we learned, we're really getting at what the objectives are. If there's a food safety objective, we need to ensure we're addressing it from that perspective.

• (1910)

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Exactly, and I think it's important to recognize the difference between trade and science. All too often it's used as an excuse.

I know that the SRM removals are something the Canadian Cattlemen's Association brought forward, though not exactly in the vein it came forward. And I know that you and I have had discussions about the regulatory burden placed on farmers and where that should be looked after. But it is important I think to recognize that our beef is not only top quality beef to consume but also some of the safest beef in the world.

When we start looking at traceability and age verification and some of these other tools we've heard about at the standing committee, and from your organization before, would you agree these are additive tools that not only help us with marketing, but with traceability and the safety and soundness of our system as well? Would you agree with that?

**Mr. John Masswohl:** Absolutely. You want to make sure you're doing all the things necessary to ensure that it's safe, without going as far as doing things that are purely cosmetic, that add costs and affect your competitiveness.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Absolutely.

**The Chair:** Mr. Storseth, your time has expired.

Mr. Masswohl, you did mention something there—

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Do I have more time, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** No, you don't.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** I'm starting to agree with Mr. Easter when it comes to some of this.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** Everybody gets treated the same.

You referred, Mr. Masswohl, to what happened in the BSE crisis. I actually made a statement in the House today in which I mentioned that very same thing. The last thing we need right now is fear-mongering or misinformation out there about the safety of the pork industry. You're right, I think they're probably on pins and needles hoping they don't go through the same thing that those of us involved in the beef industry did. So I thought that was a very good point.

But to Mr. McLean, as kind of an offshoot of that, I was wondering what's happening right now with H1N1. Do you feel there's any food safety issue at all with people eating Canadian pork, or pork in general?

**Mr. Robert McLean:** None whatsoever. But, you know, sitting through this hearing here shows us we're doing more testing, we're doing more surveillance, so there are going to be more cases that consumers will hear about. That's simply because the system is working.

Is it a food safety issue? No, not necessarily. To countries that say they don't have any problems, I question that they have the surveillance system we have. We have to keep this in perspective.

•(1915)

**The Chair:** Sure. I hope the same thing happens to our pork industry as happened with the BSE, where we actually increased our consumption per capita here in Canada of Canadian beef. Only time will tell.

Mr. Easter, five minutes.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I have a couple of questions, Mr. Chair.

I note, Mike, that in your presentation you say you're not in favour of the poultry rejection project, but you don't see it as a food safety issue. Can you explain both sides of that equation? I ask that because if there is another benefit of the food poultry rejection system that we need to be considering, other than food safety, I think we need to think about it. And I think you're talking about independent third-party options there.

I have a second question for you as well. You mention in your recommendations that harmonized meat processing codes in Canada should come under a single federal standard. I think a number of us are worried about that approach, in that it would have a massive impact on some of the smaller slaughter plants. I refer especially to beef and pork and ones that produce sausages, ones that provide a safe product under federal standards, and more localized product, purchasing local beef and pork and supplying it to local residents within a fairly tight area.

Could you comment on those two points?

**Mr. Mike Dungate:** Thank you.

In terms of the poultry rejection project, what you've got is CFIA inspectors off the line, and these are birds that are identified to be pulled off the line, and you're determining what can go back on and what's salvageable in that.

In fact, the CFIA inspector will watch the line. These people are taking the product off. The inspector could let them all go, but they're looking to say "Does it meet our quality? Does it meet that?" As it comes in, if it's got a broken wing or something, that gets taken off, and the farmer doesn't get paid for it. He doesn't get paid for because CFIA regulations state that's not a sellable product. If it comes in broken, it can't go on.

We've always had CFIA inspectors who have said, "Okay, these are CFIA regulations. We're employing them; we're saying that comes off the line." That means the farmer doesn't get paid for the weight of that or the whole bird. We now have CFIA inspectors off the line, in terms of doing that, which is not a food safety issue because you're just taking the stuff off. You're not saying what can go on the line; you're saying what's coming off.

Now you have a plant employee who is going to determine whether it is something that happened as a result of being in the plant or something that is the result of the farmer doing something wrong in the transport there.

Now you have the person who's buying the product using federal legislation to determine whether they're paying for it or the farmer is paying for it. Instead of having that third party there who was essentially adjudicating using federal legislation, the buyer is determining who's paying for this—the farmer or the processing plant.

That's why we say it's not a food safety issue, but it does become an issue in terms of a transactional nature between farmers and the processing plant and who pays. CFIA had that third-party role before when they were doing it, and now we've put it in the hands....

We agreed, partly, to do this because then the CFIA vet would come back and sign off an attestation. They would review the work done. We've since learned that now the vets do not want to sign that attestation because they didn't inspect that product, even though they're supposed to go down and look at it. So now we're worried we have no control whatsoever in this process.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Small plants, big plants, provincial, federal?

• (1920)

**Mr. Mike Dungate:** Quickly on that one, in terms of us...product moves everywhere across the country. More and more—and we've heard it—you've got to get enough volume to meet a buyer of this size—product. You can't do it all at once. So the product does move a lot.

It causes issues in terms of competitiveness. If the federal level is not what we need and it's supercharged, as it were, then let's find that common level that works, understanding that's what any product that would come into the country has to meet.

We're not in favour of dumbing them down below a food safety level, but we're not interested in a regulatory burden either. We would like a consistent application across the country.

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

Mr. Shipley, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** I'll continue with that, just for a minute. There's been a lot of discussion around it. In fact, one of our individual witnesses was saying that if you're going to start to take away... It's becoming easier to get a hospital built than it is to get a slaughterhouse built, if that is in fact a reliable comment—and I think coming from that individual it was a fair assessment. We've heard the stories about why we don't have some of the processors staying in business, and it's that the restrictions are just so high.

We always hear about how we don't have much issue. Most of us around the table here likely buy product that comes from provincial slaughterhouses. So it becomes this issue about feeding the large companies as opposed to shutting down our small community slaughterhouses, which are actually doing a great job and seem to not be caught up in many of these recalls.

Help us understand how we can politically.... As soon as we talk about changing or harmonizing or bringing together a standard that is actually a reliable standard, then the political field starts to go wild about it, saying we're losing our standards and we're not going to protect our farmers, our people.

We have the same trouble when we try to harmonize and talk about imports coming in and having to meet Canadian standards. Those that don't meet it, we've got the issue.... I'll raise that question maybe later.

Can you deal with that other one? How can you help us get through that? It's a big issue.

**Mr. Mike Dungate:** It is a big issue, and I think we're seeing it from this side as well, Mr. Shipley, in terms of some smaller provincial processors who, because they're provincially inspected, are not allowed to ship and sell their product outside the province. They may be located in a place where their natural market goes across a couple of provinces and they want that ability. They're seeing that the standard at CFIA, that investment cost, is prohibiting them from doing that.

I've heard—I can't verify it—that a lot of times what's going on with our CFIA national standards is each time a country we're interested in exporting to says there's a higher standard we have to meet here, we add it across the board in Canada. So we up it and up it, and maybe, instead of being very good negotiators with countries in terms of what we have to do to get into those markets, we meet what they say, but we're raising the bar all the time for ourselves.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** I guess, though, that could be if we had a list of 15 standards and a country says they want this one, then they may not require the other 14, but they require that one, and now we have 16.

**Mr. Mike Dungate:** Right.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** I think that's always an issue. I'm trying to work through how we can become more competitive and yet keep our small plants and our community businesses in place, which provide great service to our communities.

Mr. Wilcott, I'm wondering how it's working in terms of moving forward, steps learned, lessons learned. I think, at least I suspect, that after this event, everyone has done lessons learned. You've done it in B.C. I'm sure they've done it in Ontario and Alberta. Nationally, CFIA has done it—in fact, gone beyond that. Health Canada has looked at what's been learned, what we can do better.

How is that being coordinated from your perspective? How are the communications? How can that come together? What format would you suggest we could move to? This is all about communications, and communications, whether it's here or sometimes in our family, wherever it is, is one of the largest struggles we have.

• (1925)

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott:** We started a process, I think it was two years ago. An outbreak of E. coli in Alberta was connected to donairs, and we wanted distribution information of that product in British Columbia. We didn't get it and we were quite frustrated by it. Our provincial health officer was involved with the CFIA to get this information.



Out of that came a realization by us and the local CFIA folks that we had to do something to try to improve communication, so we have been working on a food-borne illness outbreak response protocol to share information. It's not finalized yet. When it is finalized, I'm hoping we will start to have more open and free communication. That's been the process we have used within British Columbia.

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

Mr. Dungate, you mentioned a minute ago about how other countries, when we're trying to open markets, whatever, ask for a little more. Just to be clear, are you suggesting that maybe in the whole realm of food safety it isn't really necessary, or are you saying that maybe those countries are putting extra requests in there simply to impede the amount of exports coming into their country? They would be imports from their side. Can you clarify that?

**Mr. Mike Dungate:** I'm not sure exactly why they are doing it. I know that in a lot of cases, other countries, certainly.... If we're negotiating a veterinary agreement, we've always said we should be doing an equivalency in terms of inspections, CFIA-level inspection versus the level of inspection in that country. We end up generally, however, in these bilateral veterinary agreements getting these approvals of plant-by-plant inspections. So they come over, look at our plant and say if that plant wants to ship, they're going to have to do this differently, do that differently. It may be that they're adding something unique to that plant because of how it's set up, and now that gets written into our federal standard because we only have a federal standard; we don't have it on a plant-by-plant basis. They look at it plant by plant.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Bellavance, do you have any questions?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Yes.

Mr. Dungate, Mr. Fuller was the one who made the opening statement, but I would image that you agree with what he said. Could you provide clarification or a comment about his remarks concerning the federal government? According to him, the federal government could act with greater conviction to protect the industry's credibility and the national inspection process by emphasizing effective communication with consumers. This is pretty much what other witnesses have told us, both this evening and ever since the subcommittee began its study on food safety and the Listeriosis crisis.

In your opinion, what should be done? The recommendation is to ensure more effective communication with consumers, but shouldn't we also be talking about more effective communications with the provinces concerned and the other agencies? Everyone must have the same information, everyone must know what direction we are going in and everyone must understand what we are doing. I've already used this expression at other committee meetings, but all the same, I have the impression that some people are on the side roads. As Mr. Wilcott said, and he put it very well, the result is that we are not as effective as we should be.

This is the year 2009, and we have already dealt with other problems. We are reviewing all these difficulties, and we think that

these things must be understood. Unlike Mr. Shipley, I don't have the impression that most people have learned from their mistakes, be it the agencies, the departments or other institutions. Mr. Fuller tells us that communications must be improved, but how could that be done?

• (1930)

**Mr. Mike Dungate:** In a way, it's a matter of educating people. We mentioned that in the current system, there is a gap between the moment the consumer buys the product and the moment he eats it, and that this gap has to be covered. That is why we are contributing to an education partnership. The government must play a very important role as part of this exercise.

As for the poultry rejection project, a number of issues were raised in the media. We believe that this is not about a food safety problem and we wanted CFIA to demonstrate this so as to convince people that the problem was due to something else. Frankly, I think that this issue is primarily between CFIA and the workers. All the same, the media and our consumers were wondering if there was a problem with the slaughtering of poultry. But that was not the case. The perception of consumers and the media just need to be corrected.

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Thank you. In the final analysis, that is your criticism of the agency. Mr. Fuller also mentioned the media coverage of these problems. He said that the agency had not taken the necessary measures to downplay the concerns, on the contrary, and that the problem had taken on greater dimensions. The farmers did not want this, of course, and no doubt the other stakeholders in the food chain did not want this either.

**Mr. Mike Dungate:** That's right.

[*English*]

**Mr. Lynn Wilcott:** I want to make a few comments on what you're talking about.

Fears are generated by the public when they either don't have all the information or think they don't have all the information. That's when the public gets most concerned, in my experience.

On regulatory agencies releasing information to the public, we've seen a trend in B.C. with restaurant inspections, and I think it's similar across the country. They're now posted on the health authority's website. So people can go to the website and see what the inspection service was for the restaurant. They can choose to go to that restaurant or not.

At the time, the restaurant industry basically said the world was going to end if this happened—and it never did. What happened was the poor restaurants had to improve, and the public felt better about going to restaurants.

I don't think it's that different with processing plants. We underestimate the intelligence of the average consumer. The more information they have, the better decisions they're going to make, and the better they'll feel about them. They'll feel confident about buying products.

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

Mr. Allen, do you have any questions? Five minutes.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. My friend Mr. Shipley raised the issue about a witness who was here earlier this week, Mr. Charlebois, who used the analogy of the hospital and an abattoir—I think erroneously so, to be honest. I think he does a disservice by doing that, because the assumption is that somehow food safety should be considered less than a hospital stay.

I don't agree with that, because ultimately a hospital is about sanitation and looking after those who are chronically ill. They're unfortunate to be in that situation, but it's still about sanitation. Why should we suggest that somehow the food system should be less sanitized than the hospital situation? More folks died last year than died in the average hospital, when you think about it. Ultimately when we're thinking of sanitation, I think to use the analogy sets up, as Mr. Wilcott said, this sense in people's minds that you are inferring that it's harder to run an abattoir than it is to run a hospital. Well, first of all, an abattoir doesn't have surgeries. We don't confine the hogs or cows to a ward. It's a *processing plant*. So I think that analogy was flawed from the get-go.

Nonetheless it raises an interesting point when people repeat it, because it assumes we should think about food safety differently than we do about the health care system, and somehow that's here and this is here. I don't think that's true when it comes to sanitation. It should be on par. One of the things we did learn and that I'm hearing from all of the witnesses is that the system needs to be, from producer to fork, safe. One of the things that does happen all the way through the system is handling. Everyone's handling the product all the way along.

Whether it be the farmer, who is doing an excellent job, whether it's the trucker or the stocker of the shelves, whether it's in the abattoir or in the poultry processing plant, everything's being handled. So why aren't we saying that their sanitation standards should be equal to the standards for those who are handling patients? They're simply transmitting different types of pathogens one way or the other. I think we do a disservice when we do that. I'm not suggesting, Mr. Dungate, that you did that. You didn't, just to make that clear.

You talked about the regulations and the burden. I would suggest to you that there are producers in this world who are looking at us and saying that we raised the bar and kept them out. We're saying to them, "You raised the bar some other place and kept us out." But here's what the industry has said to us so far during this committee. Whether it was Michael McCain or some of the other bigger producers, they are saying in testimony that the voluntary standards in their plant are higher than what the CFIA requires.

I may be wrong. Maybe I'm hearing it wrong, Mr. Dungate, that somehow the CFIA's standards are higher than what the plants feel they should be doing. Was I being misled when I heard that? Was it spin or is it factual?

•(1935)

**Mr. Mike Dungate:** I would put our system and what we do in our industry up against anyone—absolutely anyone in terms of what we do. I work at a farm. I know what the regulations are, and I would say that certainly what we do on farm... We've gone through...and as you heard from Mr. Fuller, 83% of our farms are already certified on

a HACCP program. Frankly, we're waiting for the next step from CFIA so that we can approve this overall system. We're concerned about the stall on that basis, because we want to be there.

I will say this. No matter what the standards are—and it may be a standard that has to go into another country or a standard that has to be for the purchasers of our product, particularly the consumers of our product—it doesn't matter if it's science or not. If they won't buy it because we don't have an animal care program, because we don't have a food safety program, or because we're not doing exactly what we said we were going to do, we won't sell product.

So at a certain point, there is a regulatory bar, but there's a marketing bar as well. Believe me—and I think that's where you're getting Michael McCain—we meet a marketing bar. In most cases, it will be above, and it has to be above, the regulatory bar, because the regulatory bar should be the minimum.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Allen. I did cut you off about six seconds, but it was very close.

Mr. Storseth, five minutes.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** He certainly is very generous.

I do want to note for the record, thank goodness we don't have television cameras here as Mr. Easter wanted, or they'd note that there are no Liberals here today.

I would like to talk to Mr. Masswohl about something. We're here today talking about a very serious issue on food safety. South of the border there's something going on that I think is being veiled in the cover of food safety but has very little to do with food safety. You know very well what I'm talking about, the COOL legislation.

As a chance to put the Canadian Cattlemen's Association's position on the record on the COOL legislation in the U.S., can you give me your position on this? Do you believe it has anything to do with food safety standards in the United States?

•(1940)

**Mr. John Masswohl:** It has nothing to do with food safety. It's a marketing initiative. It has been described by the administration that was in place when the law was passed as basically a marketing initiative and having nothing to do with food safety. Since the new administration has come in they've started to waiver, and they don't seem sure whether it's marketing or food safety. We're not getting a lot of sense that the issue is moving in the right direction.

The problem is that they've passed a law that requires meat, whether it's beef, pork, lamb, or other products, to be labelled with the origin of the country where the animal was born. That is a violation of the NAFTA. It is a violation of the WTO. There's a principle of substantial transformation in both those agreements that says that meat has the origin of the country where the animal was transferred into meat. That law violates that principle, and we think the case needs to be pursued at the WTO. Minister Day said as much last week while he was in Washington. We appreciate that. I guess we're waiting for the legal steps to be taken.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** I agree with you.

One of the things that I hear sometimes from people around the Standing Committee on Agriculture table when we bring witnesses forward is that they're advocating for COOL legislation from the Canadian perspective. I think this would not only have nothing to do with food safety, as is the case in the U.S., but I think it could be potentially very harmful to our industry.

Would you agree with that?

**Mr. John Masswohl:** I think people have to be careful what they ask for. There's nothing wrong with the concept of country of origin labelling per se, but our problem with the U.S. law is how they did it, labelling the meat with where the animal was born. With the Canadian approach, which is a product of Canada standard, a voluntary standard, maybe there's still some work to be done on how that's defined, but I think what we're doing here in Canada is a much more appropriate approach, on a voluntary basis.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** I couldn't agree with you more there.

If the chair will permit, we talked a little bit earlier, Mr. Masswohl, about regulatory burden and the burden that some of the additional steps we've had to take, as a government and as a country, have put on the producers in our country.

I would like you to put on the record some of the regulatory burden and how you would like to see it addressed in Canada, the differences between the U.S. and Canada. How would your organization like to see us go about addressing some of the differential in the regulatory burden that we're seeing?

**Mr. John Masswohl:** There's a number of things. I heard the debate about hospitals versus slaughter facilities. I don't know anything about hospitals, but the point on slaughter facilities might be moot, because nobody wants to build a slaughter facility in Canada.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Exactly.

**Mr. John Masswohl:** In fact, it's the opposite. We're worried about the ones that we have built over the last few years and that are closing down because they're not competitive.

For a long time, we have been an advocate of regulatory harmonization. Regulatory harmonization is not all about food safety. A lot of it is about competitiveness. What would top my list would be the enhanced feed ban, the SRM removals. Canada needed to enhance our feed ban and we did it. I think we went a little far on it, in that we've basically oversold it.

The Americans are starting to catch up. They're implementing their enhanced feed ban. In fact, they have technically implemented it. It is in force, but they're not enforcing it for another six months, I believe, and even when it is fully enforced, they don't have to remove all the materials that we do, and they can still use them in fertilizer.

One of the requests that we have made is for the minister to work towards harmonizing with the U.S. and to give us the ability for fertilizer to come back. We're not convinced that there's going to be a lot of transmission from people who are spreading the fertilizer they buy at Home Depot on their backyards in Toronto. It would be very valuable to have that back.

There are issues related to veterinary drug approvals. I think one of the witnesses talked about veterinary drugs that can be used in other countries, but not necessarily here. There are a lot of veterinary drug companies that don't bother to apply for approvals in Canada because of the length of time and the cost to get them approved in Canada. For the size of the market that Canada is, it's sometimes not even worth the bother of applying.

It doesn't mean that those products aren't safe. Our competitors are using them. If we had a regulatory system that could facilitate or streamline that approval process without sacrificing... I'm not talking about making any concessions or doing anything to jeopardize safety. But if other countries have approved certain products, maybe we don't have to start at square one all the time.

Another issue is user fees, for example, to have food safety officials in Canadian slaughter facilities. They're providing a public service to do that food safety inspection, and those slaughter facilities in Canada pay the cost of those food safety inspectors back to the government, whereas in the U.S. that is deemed as a public service and the U.S. government provides that service. So again we have a cost imbalance.

●(1945)

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** How much in user fees are you looking at there?

**Mr. John Masswohl:** It's been hard to break it down in total. We understand that the total user fees paid for all meat inspection in Canada—so that's all meats—is approximately \$20 million per year. We're a subset of that.

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

We'll go to the official opposition. I don't believe they have any questions.

Mr. Shipley? No?

Well, seeing as we've had four full rounds and there isn't enough time to complete another one, I think we've had a pretty good meeting with a lot of questions answered.

I'd like to thank all of you very much, lady and gentlemen, for coming here today. It was very informative.

The meeting is adjourned.









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