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Chair

Mr. Larry Miller

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• (1605)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ)): I would like to welcome you to today's meeting.

Usually, Mr. Miller chairs the meeting. He will be with us in a few moments. He asked me to replace him so that we can start this meeting on food safety.

The second witness has not yet arrived, but since the meeting is supposed to begin at 4:00 p.m., we will begin.

Welcome, Mr. Chambers. Mr. Albert Chambers is the Executive Director of the Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition. You have 10 minutes for your opening remarks, and after that, the committee members will have an opportunity to ask you some questions. I'll just also mention that you do have access to interpretation.

[English]

Mr. Albert Chambers (Executive Director, Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members.

Thank you for inviting the Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition to appear during your hearings on this important subject.

The coalition was formed in December 2000 and incorporated in 2007 to act as a single, strong voice for industry along the food chain, together with the public and government, on industry-wide food safety issues. Our membership is composed of the national, provincial, and regional associations involved in the agrifood industry and the individual companies that provide services to that industry.

As you can see from the membership list attached to our submission, we represent organizations whose members encompass every link in the supply chain, from input suppliers through to primary producers, transporters, processors, manufacturers, importers, and final marketers at the export, retail, and food service stages.

Our mission is to facilitate, through dialogue within the food industry and with all levels of government, the development and implementation of a national coordinated approach to food safety to ensure credibility in the domestic and international marketplaces.

Over the past eight years we have been actively involved in consultations with ministers and officials at all levels, and in intra-industry discussions, about the future shape of Canada's food safety

system. We see the work of your subcommittee as a valuable opportunity to continue this work and to realize our vision: that Canada's agriculture, aquatic, and food industry will have a world-class reputation for producing and selling safe food.

In March of this year the coalition completed a year-long project to develop a national strategy for industry-led food safety programs. Copies in French and English have been circulated to you prior to this meeting.

The participating organizations, members, and non-members of the coalition who worked on this strategy determined that it should be grounded in a set of four guiding principles.

The first principle is that food safety is a shared responsibility of all participants in the supply chain, all levels of government, and consumers.

Our second principle is that governments at all levels, the agrifood industry, and other stakeholders should foster and facilitate the development of an integrated and coordinated and national approach to food safety policy and regulation, based on sound scientific risk assessment and risk management principles and international standards.

Our third principle is that industry and government food safety initiatives should encourage the implementation of HACCP and/or HACCP-based food safety systems by businesses all along the supply chain.

Finally, our fourth principle is that food businesses, governments, and other stakeholders have a responsibility to adequately resource and proactively manage, update, maintain, and continually improve their individual and collaborative food safety systems and food safety initiatives.

I'll touch on each of these principles in brief.

Businesses involved along the agrifood supply chain clearly recognize that they have a responsibility for food safety, which they share with governments and consumers. This is not a recent recognition or awareness; Canadian agrifood businesses and their associations have consistently and continually advocated this approach, especially over the past two decades of rapid change in the Canadian and global approaches to food safety. We ask you to endorse this principle of shared responsibility in your final recommendations.

We fully recognize that under our constitution, the jurisdiction for food safety is divided amongst the senior levels of government, and in some cases is delegated to the municipalities or other agencies within provinces and territories. However, our members and the agrifood businesses they represent firmly believe that Canada should have one national approach to food safety. Canadians, no matter where they reside or purchase their food, are entitled to the same level of assurances about its safety—assurances that should be based on common standards and expectations.

A corollary of this statement is that agrifood businesses within each link of the supply chain should be asked to operate according to common standards and expectations within and amongst the responsible jurisdictions. Our expectation of imported food products should, as a matter of course, be the same as our expectation of our national system.

• (1610)

Our national strategy sets out some very clear goals with respect to this principle. They include the need to revise the federal-provincial-territorial vision of a national approach to food safety, last looked at in 1994, based on an agreed set of principles. There is a need to establish a national decision-making mechanism for food safety policy and regulation in Canada. We need to clarify the role and the scope of national codes, industry-led food safety programs, food safety objectives, and other food safety requirements, and integrate food-safety-related discussions across departments within each government. We also need to open the lines of communication between government and industry groups in order to encourage collaboration on the future evolution of food safety policy, objectives, systems, etc.

We are aware that the federal, provincial, and territorial officials have been discussing the development of a national food safety strategy since at least 2003. In February of this year the agriculture ministers requested a food safety action plan. We are also aware that this national approach has been taken in Australia and within the European Union, and it is now under very active discussion in the United States. Models and best practices exist within federal systems with joint jurisdiction. These can be studied and perhaps adapted to our needs.

Therefore, we ask the subcommittee to strongly endorse this principle, the establishment of a national coordinated approach to food safety, in your report and make clear recommendations about the process by which it could be achieved.

Starting in the early 1990s, Canadian agrifood businesses and their national associations have cooperated with governments to develop and implement HACCP and HACCP-based food safety systems. You are aware that Canada was a pioneer in the field of

HACCP and a major contributor to the development of the international approach through the Codex Alimentarius Commission. HACCP food safety systems have been implemented in federally registered establishments, in some provincial registered establishments, and in larger, more complex non-registered establishments. Canada has also been a pioneer in the development of HACCP-based food safety systems for micro, small, and medium-sized businesses that do not have the resources to develop and implement a site-specific HACCP food system.

Over the past 15 or so years we have seen the members of the coalition and other industry associations work closely with the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to develop and implement national HACCP-based food safety programs for almost every segment of the supply chain. For example, we now have 22 national HACCP-based, commodity-specific, on-farm food safety programs covering approximately 99% of primary production. For other segments of the supply chain, industry associations have developed or are in the process of developing and implementing at least 14 national programs.

The development of these initiatives has involved significant investments by individual agrifood businesses, by their industry associations, and by the federal government. So successful has this collaboration been that governments have renewed their funding initiatives under Growing Forward and the recently announced Canadian integrated food safety initiative for some of the key components of that collaboration.

Industry-led HACCP and HACCP-based food safety systems are now an integral part of Canada's food safety approach. They are a necessary complement to the capacity of governments at all levels to engage in direct inspection and audit activities.

Our strategic document strongly endorses continued investment by agrifood businesses, their associations, and governments in both the implementation of these systems and in their continuous improvement. We ask you to endorse this concept—the implementation of HACCP and HACCP-based programs by businesses all along the supply chain—in your report.

Establishing principles is a first step. Developing the tools that are needed for a coordinated national approach is clearly a challenge, but a manageable one. But ensuring that these systems are adequately resourced, proactively managed, updated, maintained, and improved will be the real test of the Canadian approach to food safety.

Our national strategy sets out a number of goals and actions for industry, for other stakeholders, and for governments in this area. They include promoting awareness of the Canadian food safety programs; strengthening Canada's food safety training and auditing infrastructure; increasing the pool of qualified food safety personnel; establishing quality consistency across food safety specialists, including consultants, trainers, etc.; and strengthening federal, provincial, and territorial support for industry-led food safety initiatives. We ask the subcommittee to endorse this principle as well and include recommendations concerning the resourcing of government food safety initiatives and concerning the development of the infrastructure needed to ensure that industry's activities can be updated, maintained, and improved.

•(1615)

In conclusion, the Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition would like to thank the subcommittee for asking it to make this submission. Your inquiry into food safety comes at an important time in the evolution of the Canadian system. As we have discussed, governments—federal, provincial, and territorial—are actively considering new food safety initiatives. As parliamentarians you are expecting amendments to the Food and Drugs Act to be introduced, I assume, in this session. Your recommendations will have a major impact.

We ask that you carefully consider our recommendations and the detailed contents of the national strategy for industry-led food safety programs, which we have tabled with you. They represent a strong consensus on the part of the agrifood supply chain and of our members about the future direction of Canada's food safety system.

As a final point, we would like to say on behalf of our members that the coalition is ready to engage further with this subcommittee or with other committees of the House as changes are made to the Canadian food safety system.

Thank you very much.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. André Bellavance): Thank you, Mr. Chambers.

I'd like to mention that in the French version of your speaking notes, you say that appendix A includes the list of your organization's members. I believe that we have that list only in English; the French version does not appear. If you could provide that to the clerk, please, we could include it with your document. It's not a serious matter, but—

[English]

Mr. Albert Chambers: My apologies, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. André Bellavance): No problem. I just want to make sure that we receive it.

Mr. Anderson.

[English]

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): We don't have that list in our paperwork, or I don't have it in mine, so I would appreciate it if we could get it in English as well.

It may be just a problem with distribution.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. André Bellavance): Our research analyst has a copy of that, but if you could forward the list of your members, it could then be distributed to the committee members.

Thank you very much.

Our next witness is Mr. Brewster Kneen from the Canadian Health Coalition. Welcome to our committee. You have 10 minutes to give us your comments, and then we will move on to questions.

[English]

Mr. Brewster Kneen (Representative, Canadian Health Coalition): Thank you very much for the opportunity to be here and to address you on behalf of the Canadian Health Coalition.

I won't say very much about the coalition. It's national, largely voluntary, has a small staff, and is very active in several provinces, particularly Ontario and British Columbia, in addressing issues of public health in the broadest sense.

I've just been asked to fill in for Michael McBane, who is elsewhere today. I am an independent writer, author of half a dozen books on food, agriculture, genetic engineering, and corporate control. My wife and I have published for 30 years now *The Ram's Horn*, a monthly newsletter of food systems analysis.

Many issues concerning food safety have been in the news, of course, in recent years. I am sure you have considered and heard about many of them, from bovine spongiform encephalopathy—a still-unsettled controversy, I should say—to listeria, salmonella, bird flu, and the current so-called H1N1 swine flu pandemic.

It's very tempting to get drawn into a discussion of particular diseases and how they have been dealt with or not dealt with. I don't intend to do that, because I think they are all manifestations and consequences of the way we have allowed our food system to be organized and constructed. To look at particular diseases and public health issues one by one strikes me as kind of like that story about picking babies out of the water, out of the river, without ever asking who's throwing them in.

Public Safety Minister Peter Van Loan summed up very simply the issue that I wish to focus on when he tried to explain why the government decided to shut down six prison farms: "...it's simply a fact that the type of agriculture practised on the prison farms is totally unrelated to modern, high-technology, capital intensive agriculture."

While Mr. Van Loan's statement may be true, it is not modern, high-technology, capital-intensive agriculture that actually feeds most of the global population, either today or at any time. In fact, it is a growing diversity of foods for the local population that is actually how people feed themselves. The prison farm style of agriculture, which supplied the prison population and the community, is closer to this global practice than it is to the high-tech industrial agricultural system that Mr. Van Loan pointed out.

The CFIA was created in 1997. I remember the discussions about its creation and all the issues therein. I would say that it has remained true to its not explicitly stated mandate to serve modern, high-technology, capital-intensive agriculture. Therein lies the source of the problems of food safety and public health that are being investigated by this committee. It is the structures and practices of industrial agriculture and food processing and distribution that are the source and multipliers of the public health problems the CFIA attempts to address but is handicapped from doing because of its mandate, which is to promote and protect this industrial food system. Instead, it has sought to polish its public image by trying to clean up, through HACCP and other means, and more and less regulate out of existence, small-scale, local, and regional food production, processing, and distribution in favour of large-scale, centralized, export-oriented corporate agribusiness.

This is unequivocally illustrated by the CFIA's treatment of small-scale local abattoirs, or its outlawing of the sale of fresh eggs at farmers markets unless they have been through the grading process, which has been mandated for eggs produced in 60,000-bird layer factories. The same thing could be said of pork, beef, and everything else.

The fact is that diseases like avian influenza are the products of intensive, large-scale, industrial poultry production, whether in Malaysia or in Canada, and not backyard flocks anywhere in the world. Just ask the farmers of the Fraser Valley of British Columbia.

● (1620)

Bacteria and viruses, such as listeria, salmonella, BSE, avian flu, and swine flu, are all virtually inevitable products of large-scale factory production of meat, eggs, and even vegetables. Monocultures of any sort invite attack by opportunistic bugs. In addition to monocultures are the conditions of intensive production, as in poultry, swine, and feedlot beef, and the conditions are ripe for the spread of all kinds of unwelcome guests.

No amount of downstream sanitation and regulation is going to alter this condition. If public health, efficiency, and sound ecology were to be the mandate of an agency charged with protecting and enhancing the health of Canadian people and the food we eat, this agency would have to call for a radical deconstruction of our current industrial production system and its control by a handful of giant corporations.

In each and every sector of the food system, from seeds to supermarkets, there are essentially three corporations that rule the roost, and these corporations are required to serve the interests of their shareholders, not the public. That's their legal, fiduciary responsibility, after all. It is the interests of these giant corporations that are served and protected by Agriculture and Agri-food Canada and the CFIA. This is what modernization of the seed regulations,

streamlining of the regulatory process, removing the obstacles to innovation, and self-regulation are all about: corporate wealth, not public health.

Farmers and gardeners growing food for themselves, their neighbours, and their local markets are not going to poison themselves and their customers. They are highly unlikely to be breeding diseases. They would quickly be identified and soon be out of business if they were. Trust, after all, is the foundation of any functioning economy.

Factory farms and giant meat factories can write off the millions of dollars lost as a result of a disease outbreak caused by its products and carry on as before, with only some modifications to its operations as requested by the CFIA—another inspection process or two—and the CFIA no longer has the capacity to ensure that its rules are being followed. The only question is, when and where will the next disease outbreak occur?

I suggest very strongly that it's time—well past time, in fact—for a radical deconstruction of the global industrial food system for the sake of public health and the environment around the world. It is time to create a public agency dedicated to ecological farming, including animal and plant biodiversity, healthy food, food production for local and regional markets—not export—and the assurance of adequate nutrition for all. A genuine food system, in other words, dedicated to public health.

I realize this is a big challenge, but it is time for Agriculture Canada and the CFIA to get out of the corporate bed. It is time to make healthy soils, clean water, and ecological farming the basis of our food and agricultural policies. The problems currently identified as issues of food safety would largely disappear, and rural communities and local economies would thrive as they provide healthy food for all of us. It's a big but essential challenge that I am presenting, I realize, but I think the times call for it.

I would be pleased to discuss this further with anyone, and I thank you for the opportunity to present this to you.

● (1625)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. André Bellavance): Thank you very much, Mr. Kneen, for those remarks.

Now we will begin the first round of questions and answers.

Ms. Folco, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to congratulate the two witnesses, Mr. Chambers and Mr. Kneen, for their very succinct presentations. My remarks are particularly intended for Mr. Chambers, because he touched upon a number of topics that I was already intending to ask questions about.

Mr. Chambers, in your presentation you did not talk about the federal government, but it's clear that you see very clearly that the federal government has a responsibility toward the people of Canada. Within the framework of this responsibility, you mentioned a national inspection system with various protocols. Well actually, you did not mention protocols; I'm the one who is talking about protocols. I would like to hear your opinion on the issue of standardized protocols that would have to be complied with throughout Canada. I think that's somewhat related to what you said in your presentation.

In addition, there is the possibility of having a more diversified system within this area of federal responsibility, perhaps an alternative that would take the form of a diversified system that would be more specifically in keeping with the needs of each region. Such a system would be more reflective of the local processes of food production. I'm not asking you to recommend either one option or another, but rather, I'd like to know if you see a completely standardized system, or more of a standardized system that does have some regional variations?

[English]

Mr. Albert Chambers: Thank you, Mr. Chair and honourable members.

I would think that the best starting point for our answer, from the coalition's perspective, is that we are realists, even though we have put some very challenging suggestions before the committee and before governments about having a national coordinated approach. I don't expect to have any hair left, perhaps, when we can get all the governments in Canada to agree on a single approach to food safety.

• (1630)

Ms. Raymonde Folco: It depends on which side of your head, I think, Mr. Chambers.

Mr. Albert Chambers: Well, I've been growing this one for a very long time and losing this one for almost as long.

What we're looking for is a commitment on the part of governments to move towards that kind of an approach. There have been various initiatives in the past where governments have assigned officials to develop national codes, whether they were for horticulture, for dairy, or for retail and food service. What we saw happening then was provinces falling out of step with that objective, for various reasons. Some of them have to do with getting time on the agendas in provincial legislatures; some of them have to do with other things. But we don't see much progress down that road.

Starting with ministers of agriculture or agrifood and ministers of health, we would like to see them make that very strong comment to the principle of a coordinated approach, and secondly, then, launch a process that would involve themselves and their governments, and industry stakeholders and other stakeholders, consumers and others, in the discussion as to how to get there.

We see, as the brief pointed out, some very interesting examples as to how that could be done. Whether they would fit in the Canadian context, with all of our challenges and our history, that's another question, but I think great progress could be made down that road. In the end it probably would see some differences still remain, and whether those would be regional, that's possible, but it more

likely would be provincial in that sense. What we'd like to see, though—I really don't like to use the phrase “minimum standards”—is a good, strong set of basic national food safety standards and approaches. That way, industry all across the country, whether farmers, input suppliers, manufacturers, or retailers and food service, would be able to say, “Okay, this is what we're trying to get to”, and everybody is trying to get there.

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Kneen, if I've understood your answer, what you are presenting us with is a complete overhaul of the ??agri-food?agrifood?? and food safety system throughout Canada. Unless I'm mistaken, you are showing us a completely different philosophy toward the entire food safety system.

How do you see that federal government's role in relation to the recommendation that you have just made?

[English]

Mr. Brewster Kneen: Thank you for your question. It's very much to the point.

I should say that my wife and I have farmed for 15 years. We raised our children on the farm. We raised sheep and lambs for the market. Very early on—we started with no experience—I got the local agriculture representative to come out and I asked him what we should do. He said we should grow corn. Well, we happened to be farming on glacial till of Nova Scotia, and the last thing you want to do is stir up those rocks. But that was a uniform program for the province. Corn was what was on the menu that year. So it really didn't matter where you were.

That was a pretty good lesson for us, a good introduction.

But we've seen, over the years, the movement back from agriculture of the federal government. Now if I were to ask an agriculture rep for some advice, I would get some consultant who might work for Cargill or one of the other agribusiness industries, who, obviously, would have a product to sell. I think that sums up where we've gone in 30 years.

So the government, in a sense, has privatized any public responsibility it had for agriculture. It's now engaged in plant breeding, or across the board trying to.... If you want to do research, you have to have a corporate partner. This means that it's the corporate agenda that is followed in every instance.

What we're calling for is actually a federal agricultural policy, an agriculture and food policy that has as its basis the health and welfare of the Canadian people and the economy, based on local production for local consumption, and reducing....

My first book, actually, talks about the characteristic of our industrial system as maximizing the distance between where your food came from and your mouth. And what we're seeing now is a move across the country with local food to reduce that distance, to shrink it back.

The federal government has a tremendous responsibility that it needs to take up on behalf of the Canadian people to redesign.... I shouldn't say redesign, because I think we do have to start all over again and rethink what agriculture is all about. Their current policy is about export and balance of trade, not public health. I think that's fundamental. That basic mandate needs to be reorganized.

It would mean shifting, for example, in plant breeding and animal science, and so on, to much stronger public support for public programs and public science, for the benefit of everybody. It would mean a different kind of education—and again, this should be directed in concert with the provinces right across the country—not to have a uniform program, rather to have programs that would meet certain criteria, standards in a sense, but that would have to be tuned, as with any farm, to the local ecology. What do you actually do on the prairies? What do you do in the Maritimes, or in the coastal fisheries in B.C., or the inland fisheries in Manitoba?

I would suggest that this would need to be done in conjunction with Health Canada. Our understanding of health has to begin with healthy food. It's interesting. Almost invariably, the people we talked to who have been through cancer treatments have switched to organic diets.

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. André Bellavance): Could you please finish, Mr. Kneen.

[*English*]

Mr. Brewster Kneen: It's amazing. They've discovered, as we all know, that cancer is an environmental disease. And what better place to start than with healthy food. But you can't have healthy food if you contaminate it all with agro-toxins and genetic engineering.

It's right across the board. I'm sorry, it's not a simple answer. But I want to indicate what I mean by that.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. André Bellavance): Your time is up. Thank you.

Mr. Chambers, I am going to continue along the same lines as Ms. Folco's questioning about national policy.

We have noticed that during and after crises such as listeriosis or bird flu, which unfortunately happened here, government authorities blame each other. The federal side says that the provincial government should have done something or other, and did not. Conversely, the provincial side may put the blame on the federal government. I think I follow your idea about coordination, but as regards national policy generally, we always have to be very careful about respecting areas of provincial jurisdiction—here I am expressing my own view, which perhaps you share. It is wrong to think that the federal government always has the one and only right solution. I will give you an example of what I mean, and ask for your comments.

Because of its agri-traceability system, Quebec has been ahead of other jurisdictions for a number of years. I do not mean by that that we are better at everything. Other provincial governments may also be ahead in other areas. When we talk about national policy, I always

hear, and this is shared by quite a few people in Quebec, that at some point, there may be a tendency to set standards based on the lowest common denominator. A province, in this case Quebec, that has developed a much more demanding approach, will not want to move backwards.

• (1640)

[*English*]

Mr. Albert Chambers: Mr. Bellavance, I think you're quite right, that we have a very uneven system in terms of food safety across the country and in terms of traceability at this point as well.

What the coalition is seeking is opportunities for governments and industry and other stakeholders to come to a consensus about where we should be trying to get to in the future. It may be that the best practices are currently enshrined in a provincial program in a particular province, or they may be best practices at the federal level already, or they may be best practices in what industry is already doing, which is ahead of federal, provincial, or territorial governments.

So we'd like to see that consensus-building, decision-making process, but you also have to understand that many food businesses function across provincial boundaries, and what they find themselves faced with is different sets of requirements in different provinces. Some may be industry-leading, some may be lagging behind, and others may be quite different. They may achieve the same objective, but they may require the company to do quite different things in order to get there, which means that those companies have to retool and redesign their food safety management practices in order to meet these different jurisdictions.

And it's not just an issue between provinces and the federal system. It can also be a matter of concern within provinces, where at some levels, in some provinces, jurisdiction has been devolved down to local regional authorities and you can, so I'm told by some of my members, without actually leaving greater Toronto, cross between food safety requirements on one side of a street that are different from those on the next side of the street.

So our desire, from an industry perspective—and this goes from the farm level all the way through to the final marketers—is to have as close to a consensus as we can on what those standards should be and the opportunity to meet them on an equal playing field across the country.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. André Bellavance): But you are not saying that when it comes to managing a crisis, it is important that all the players be involved, that no standard be imposed on one jurisdiction by another. In fact, my impression from your opening remarks was that you wanted all stakeholders to have a say and to assume certain responsibilities.

[English]

Mr. Albert Chambers: We certainly want that, and we certainly want a high degree of coordination and communication in times of crisis. Industry has seen some very good practices on the part of government in certain crisis situations in which there has been very good communication, but in other situations, as the case studies of these kinds of things will no doubt show, there has been less than optimal communication between governments and with the industry players. There are challenges there.

From our perspective, I believe the members would say that we see an opportunity to create best practices for all levels of government—and for industry and consumer input—that would allow us to get through those crises in a much better fashion. Let's be clear that when we talk about national, we're not talking about an imposition by, say, the federal government on the provinces. We're talking about creating a new mechanism. We're not prescribing what that might be. The Australians, who have a similar jurisdictional structure for divided jurisdiction, went out and created a whole new set of decision-making mechanisms into which they all have input, and they all participate, and the standard is arrived at. Industry and others have a formal role in that process as well. We're not saying we could move that directly here, but we're saying we should at least have a look at those kinds of mechanisms so that we can have national approaches in a federal system.

• (1645)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. André Bellavance): Thank you very much.

Mr. Allen, for seven minutes.

[English]

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

Mr. Chambers, following your line of thought around some sort of a national standard that's cooperatively achieved—I think that's what you are saying—through some sort of consensus-building, bringing together all of these players from different jurisdictions in a political context, there may indeed be divergent viewpoints on what the standard should be when it comes to the industry, because you represent an industry that's quite divergent. There are those who might be at the processing end and those who might be in the retail end. It would seem to me they would have divergent views when it comes to finding a consensus, although that is a lofty goal.

It leads me to my first question. Discounting the fact that we have that many players, if we simply break it into two jurisdictional components, one being the industry and the other being the regulator, which we can call either level, or levels, of government, when a dispute comes about in your consensus model, who gets the final say?

Mr. Albert Chambers: First of all, I'll deal with the issue of the consensus model.

I've been working in food safety with various associations and governments for almost 20 years now. I have seen remarkable consensus achieved within industry and within groups that represent large and small players. Occasionally, when government officials are allowed out with enough leash to actually come to a consensus with

industry, there has been remarkable consensus on what needs to be achieved.

It's not only consensus, but it's based on the science that's there and on internationally accepted tools, in terms of risk assessment and risk management, and the use of standards. I think we can come to those. Then each jurisdiction has the responsibility, if we have that kind of a standard, to make sure that it's enforced within its jurisdiction. The final decision then in terms of enforcement rests with the government that's responsible. It also rests, obviously, in terms of compliance, with the individual food businesses.

We're looking for an opportunity to have consistent standards across the country that can be reached by small, medium, and large-sized businesses that are using the most modern tools, but not to have different rules in different provinces that have no scientific basis.

Mr. Malcolm Allen: It always intrigues me when folks come before us. Everyone talks about a science-based food safety system and everyone leans on HACCP in a lot of ways, in the sense of that being...I don't want to call it the crutch, but it seems to be the support mechanism by which they say this is a science-based system.

We had a witness here last week who talked about systems and systems analysis. In fact, that's what he did for a living for a long time. He was probably hired by many of your members over the years to actually come in to look at their systems. He talked about how systems fail.

This overreliance, in my words, on this science-based system gives one, in my estimation, a false promise in a lot of ways, in the sense that simply because it's science-based, that makes it work. Let me just point to this HACCP system, which has what they call a CVS piece to it, a compliance verification system, which was run out as a piece of the model that all accepted. In fact, I would suggest that members of your coalition were probably quite keen to do so, and yet they ran it out as a pilot and no one ever verified if it worked.

Now, I took science in university, but I'm not a scientist by any stretch of the imagination. It seems to me that if you're going to have a system that you try and it is supposed to give you a certain result, it's like the hypothesis you used to get when you started out to do an experiment. You started out with a hypothesis, you had a methodology, you did the experiment, and then you verified it and came to a conclusion. But if you leave out the verification, how do you know it worked?

If you're talking about science, and if part of your science-based program is to verify, but you don't ever find out whether the system that talks about verifying actually indeed works, do you really have science? Do you have a science-based system or do you have a system that really has the name "science-based"? So everyone out there who hears the terminology goes, "Oh, it must be safe because it's about science." In reality, what you have as a system is a shell with nothing inside it.

How do we get to the point where we actually build the system, where everyone says this is how we do it, and then we verify it and we all agree upon the verification of it, so that we indeed have a science-based system that truly is based on science, not on someone's wishes?

•(1650)

Mr. Albert Chambers: You've asked a number of questions there.

I'll try briefly to deal with them, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I'd encourage the committee to think about HACCP or HACCP-based programs as having been constructed using a very powerful tool of analysis. HACCP is a toolkit that you use to apply the best knowledge available to the organization that's developing the program about what the hazards are and the measures that can be taken to control those.

HACCP is a component of a good food safety management system. There are other components to a food safety management system, and I think the witness last week was talking about some of those components. Unfortunately, I didn't stay past the ringing of the bells and the vote in order to hear all of his comments.

If you look at a standard, and let's say ISO 22000 is an example of a food safety management system standard, there are some definite best practices built into that standard that would require the validation that a system is actually delivering the results it was intended to produce. Those principles need to be applied, whether they are government mechanisms or industry mechanisms, in order to provide greater assurance.

HACCP is not a silver bullet. HACCP or HACCP-based systems are not perfect, but they are the best practice we have now as to how to develop a food safety management system, and the associations that are part of the coalition have definitely endorsed that approach. It is consistent with the international approach endorsed by the Codex Alimentarius Commission. All of our largest trading partners have gone, and are still going, down that route, and there are new advances that will add to it, which we should be looking at as to how we move forward. You'll see some of that in the government's safe food strategy, the FPT safe food strategy, when it comes out.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. André Bellavance): Thank you.

You have seven minutes, Mr. Shipley.

[English]

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, witnesses, for being here today.

Mr. Chambers, I take a lot of what you're saying to be very good information, and I appreciate your comments and your presentation to us today.

As you know, along with what we're doing as a subcommittee, Sheila Weatherill is doing an investigation that will be completed in July. One of the things the subcommittee actually agreed to and wanted was to look not only at listeria but at food safety in a general context. I think we see the value of that, given the amount of discussion witnesses have had and have talked to us about. It has not only been in terms of listeria, which was one issue we dealt with—unfortunately had to deal with—last summer, with the loss of life. I think what we're seeing right now and what we're hearing, and all my colleagues, I think, agree, is that this is a bigger, broader issue. We want to make sure that the food system and the integrated line of

food is protected and safe, basically from the farm to the fork, I guess, which is one of the analogies we use.

I think during this I've continually heard also that in terms of food safety, whether it's listeria or general food safety, we share that responsibility, and not only as a government. It is shared by everyone from the farm to the fork, basically. Do you share that concept that it is actually a shared responsibility?

I think what we also heard is that there may be some glitches, under lessons learned, that we need to improve upon. I'm wondering if you could just help me. What are your thoughts on shared responsibilities but also on where we have gone since that incident last summer in terms of food safety?

•(1655)

Mr. Albert Chambers: Mr. Chair, the founding rationale of the Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition is a firm belief among members of the supply chain that it is a supply chain responsibility, from input suppliers, whether they're producing agrifood chemicals or other chemicals used in food processing, to primary production processors, all the way down the road to the final marketers, including importers. The Canadian Association of Importers and Exporters is a member of ours. Each segment of the chain has a large degree of responsibility for making sure that it does the best it can to produce safe food.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Do you have a further comment on that? One of the things we talk about a lot here, particularly people who come in from industry—not just industry in terms of the production of food, but industry in terms of the processing of it—are the regulations we have in Canada and some sort of harmonization with those countries we trade with, the closest being the United States. I don't think we can always focus on just the United States, because we import and we export back and forth in trade with many countries. One of the things we have a concern about is when we hear that there's been an incident with China or there's been an incident with some other country with food coming in.

Can you help us in terms of whether it is important that we try to standardize and regulate or harmonize some of those standards with other countries? That doesn't necessarily mean that we lower our standards. It actually means that we bring standards together and harmonize them. I wonder if you have some comment on that.

Mr. Albert Chambers: Mr. Shipley, I think we do. One of the premises of trade policy in the 21st century, I believe, is that before you can impose requirements on the products coming into your country, you have to have the same requirements at home. Certainly that has driven federal interest in areas such as meat and poultry processing, dairy, etc.

What industry has been doing over the past 15 years, say, is developing national programs that are accessible and can be implemented by small, medium, and large-sized enterprises, whether they are on-farm food safety programs.... You've heard from the Canadian Pork Council about the CQA program, and about the chicken program, and the egg program, etc. We also have programs like that for trucking, for packaging, for grain elevators. Practically the whole continuum now has programs available to it. What we don't have is full implementation of those programs across all of our supply chain. That's certainly something we need to do.

Then we need to look at the countries that are exporting to us and determine whether or not they have programs that are equivalent to those. Many of them have programs that are as good as or in some cases better than what we have. We need to look at that situation.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Kneen, I have a question I want to get to you. I was surprised a little by your comments about when you were farming a number of years ago—I guess 15 years ago. I'm wondering what you consider to be a family farm. Is it one that has 15 acres, or 100 acres, or can a family farm be one that has 5,000 acres or that milks 800 or 1,000 cows?

It took me by surprise that actually you discredited the farmers of this generation. You discredited their concern for the environment, their concern for the husbandry of animals, their concern for the production methods that are used, or in fact that they don't understand the land, the soil, the fertility, don't understand the livestock and their healthy diets. In fact, if we all lived on a diet the same as livestock have, we'd likely be a lot healthier than we are.

I'm just wondering what you consider to be a farm.

● (1700)

Mr. Brewster Kneen: Well, I would say there are many varieties of farmers. There certainly isn't "a farmer" or a single type of farmer.

I think you're implying that there is a class of farmers who have the big, highly capitalized, large-scale farms that have to employ labour on a significant scale, who usually carry a substantial debt—and may forever—and are very tightly integrated into the kind of system Mr. Chambers has been describing. They are very dependent on purchased inputs and on sales on a large scale, which means to major corporations or to an export market. That's one type of farmer—though the Federation of Agriculture and others don't talk about farmers but about "producers", which is maybe a more accurate term than farmers.

On the other hand, there are a range of... I would not want for a minute to discredit someone who is growing food for the local farmers' market as just a gardener. There has been far too much dismissal of people who actually grow food for their families and their communities as irrelevant. That's what I meant by the statement of Mr. Van Loan, who would dismiss anybody who wasn't a large-scale, industrial, commercial farmer as being irrelevant. I think that is a...well, the term "put-down" is what comes to mind.

I would say that among "farmers" we should include people who supply their families, first of all; who supply their neighbours and probably their farmers' markets; and who will sell to regional suppliers and distributors primarily. I would like to see a whole lot

more farmers to balance out the preponderance of large-scale, commercial, industrial farms.

I don't know whether that answers your question, but I think there is a whole range of farmers and not just one type.

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

We now move to Ms. Bennett for five minutes.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Thank you both very much.

As we are coming to the end of the hearing part of this, we're very interested in what specifically you think should be done. Obviously, some of the issues around traceability and the idea that you would end up being able to better respond are going to be essential. But I was quite concerned, in reading the report for the Public Health Agency of Canada, that FIORP—the way the government has organized to respond to an outbreak—it seems hasn't been updated since 1999. Most people didn't even know about the agreements or how different departments and jurisdictions have dealt with one. But in looking at FIORP, Mr. Chambers, I don't see the industry even there, in terms of being part of the communication plan, or of how you would do this.

We thought we had learned the lessons from SARS about what cooperation, collaboration, and communication were, and had gained a clarity concerning who does what, when, as David Naylor's report told us. It seems to have worked pretty well in H1N1, given the fact that for pandemic preparedness there have actually been meetings and an approach to communication across departments, across jurisdictions, and with the private sector.

I would like to know what your recommendations would be as to how industry would fit in to some sort of planning for the future, particularly given that the confidence of Canadians relies heavily on the communication plan and everybody being on the same page. As we saw in the outbreak last summer, it seemed that Maple Leaf Foods' Mr. McCain was the communication person and everybody else just fell in behind.

I would love to have your recommendation, as the Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition, and I want to know why your coalition didn't tell these guys to get this plan fixed over the last ten years.

● (1705)

Mr. Albert Chambers: If we went back over time, you'd discover that the coalition has been making a number of suggestions since its formation as to the need to improve certain parts of the infrastructure. And it's not just hard capital infrastructure, but the other parts of infrastructure that are part of the food safety system.

It's also important to realize that until quite recently, food safety has not always been the priority that some of us who are engaged in working on the issue think it should be. It has become a priority in some provinces, and there have been revisions to legislation. It has become a priority with the federal government over the past several years, and we have seen some initiatives come forward in the action plan, in the amendments that were introduced in the last Parliament to the Food and Drugs Act, etc.

The coalition has, for the past four years, I believe it is, been the co-chair with the federal government of what was first the agrifood industry's pandemic preparedness committee, and now most recently of the network from the agrifood industry that is to deal with critical infrastructure issues, in terms of preparedness for crises.

We've certainly seen some progress in terms of government and industry learning from various crises, whether it was BSE, whether it was the avian flu problem and animal health issue in British Columbia, or whether it's the current issues. We've sponsored a number of workshops with government on this issue and we look to see further progress, but what we see is that this engagement has been with the federal government. It has been very difficult to get it to being a national engagement. We have to be prepared to respond, whether to a food safety crisis or a pandemic or some other challenge to the infrastructure of the industry or to public health, on a national basis, not just a federal or provincial or territorial basis.

So we would like to see more progress in that area, definitely.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Are there tabletop—

The Chair: Your time has expired actually, Ms. Bennett.

I'm moving to Mr. Hoback for five minutes.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): I might share my time with Mr. Shipley here also, Chair, just so you know.

Mr. Kneen, I'm a little concerned with some of the answers you gave to my colleague on the size of farms, that somehow the size of farms would have an impact on the quality of food.

I guess the first question I have for you is, who is the Canadian Health Coalition. What are you made of? What other groups make up the Canadian Health Coalition?

Mr. Brewster Kneen: I'm afraid I don't have that before me. I was asked to fill in, and I'm not a staff person. I don't work—

Mr. Randy Hoback: You don't know how many members you have, then?

Mr. Brewster Kneen: No, I don't. I will get that information supplied to you.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Okay.

Mr. Brewster Kneen: I realize that when we started I had neglected to bring an introduction, and my apologies for that.

Mr. Randy Hoback: You know one thing that I get very concerned about is these comments and suggestions that are made to committees that aren't based on fact. They're not based on peer review. I can assure everybody around the committee floor that our big farmers are safe, secure farmers. They provide some of the best food in the world, and we have science to back it up.

We use that science when we go and open up markets around the world with this product. I get a little concerned when people are saying that just because you are an operator that farms maybe 1,000 acres or has 500 cows or an 800-dairy herd, you're not safe. This is absolutely wrong. I'm sure you would agree with me on that comment, would you not?

• (1710)

Mr. Brewster Kneen: I think there's a world of difference between a poultry barn with 60,000 birds in it, in terms of the health of the whole operation and what it requires to maintain that health in terms of sanitation and the quality of the product, and whether that applies to pork, for example, and poultry as well.... I know of a great many people who do not buy pork or poultry at the supermarket anymore because they want something with flavour.

Now what they're getting from those factories may be safe, but whether it's a good food and whether it's tasty is another question.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Again, I'd argue that point. The reason I'd argue with that is whether you feed them corn or barley or oats will definitely have an impact on the flavour of the cut. Whether you're feeding one or 600 has no difference. Again, I look back to the safety. That's what this committee is here to talk about, the safety of Canadian food.

There is no issue with safety now. If you want to talk about taste, there are all sorts of different preferences in taste that people want. Taste is not a safety issue.

Mr. Brewster Kneen: The question of where these diseases originate and how they are spread is very closely related to the size of the operation. Look at any of the situations around the world—

Mr. Randy Hoback: Do you have something with peer review that would suggest that?

Mr. Brewster Kneen: I will send it to you.

Mr. Randy Hoback: You'll provide the committee with studies that show that, which have been peer reviewed.

Mr. Brewster Kneen: I would want to caution, because it's coming out now—and I think you referred to that just now—that to attach something as scientific or peer reviewed may not really give it too much standing, depending on who the reviewers were and who their employers were and whose contracts they were working on.

This is, as you know, a major issue in the question of the drug industry now. It's the credibility of much of what has been...in reports and safety issues. I think the same thing applies to food. I'm sorry, but I hate to say it.

Mr. Randy Hoback: That can go two ways, based on the peer review you provide also, can it not?

Mr. Brewster Kneen: Of course.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Again, like I said, I rely on these farmers to provide safe food. And I know them. They do provide safe food. They have different ways of ensuring that they provide safe food. If you talk about pork barns or chicken barns, I know the protocol they follow in those bigger operations versus smaller operations. In some cases, but not all cases, in these bigger operations, because of the protocol and the processes they have set in place, I would think it's safer.

To basically generalize that because it comes from a big operation it's no longer good or safe is a big mistake on behalf of your organization.

Mr. Brewster Kneen: I wasn't quite saying that. I was saying, where do these diseases arise?

They arise in the large operations, in confinement, where there is a hothouse environment to nurture all kinds of pathogens. They may be safe, but what is required to make those buildings and those operations safe? That's something that one ought to look into in terms of what happens to the food quality in that process and the conditions in the building, the sanitation and the sterilization that is required.

From a health standpoint, as an individual, I want a healthy immune system. I don't want a sterile environment. That's one of the things that happens in those situations. The animals' immune systems are destroyed in the same way that ours would be destroyed under those circumstances. We would be sitting ducks for whatever pathogens happen to wander in. I don't think it makes very much sense. It's a very expensive system, and it doesn't feed the majority of the world's people. When we talk about exports, that is not what feeds the majority of the world's people.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Yes, it is.

The Chair: Thank you. Your time has expired.

Ms. Bennett for five minutes.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I just want to go back to Mr. Chambers for a moment. When or if there are tabletop exercises that deal with a local outbreak, a national outbreak, is your organization or is industry involved in a tabletop exercise in terms of practise, practise, practise, and if so, how many have happened over the last year since the outbreak, and how many usually happen?

•(1715)

Mr. Albert Chambers: When you refer to the outbreak, do you mean last year's listeriosis outbreak?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I mean the practice, the fire drills.

Mr. Albert Chambers: Yes, I'm just trying to clarify, is that what you meant?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes.

Mr. Albert Chambers: I don't know of any exercises yet that have come out of the incident last summer, but the lessons learned documents, as you know, have just been tabled very recently. As an example, a workshop is coming up near the end of this month that is very much going to involve industry and both levels of government on intentional contamination, which of course is one of the other kinds of problems that can be there from a food safety perspective, and that's going to come up. I can't give you the number, but I know following the problem with the avian influenza in the flocks in British Columbia, a number of exercises focused on the animal health lessons learned, what needs to happen. The coalition wasn't involved in those, but many of our members were because it was an animal health, poultry, livestock kind of discussion. It wasn't a food safety discussion.

The coalition itself has had two national workshops: one focused on an intentional contamination example and the other dealt with

pandemic preparedness. Those are expensive and difficult things to launch on a national basis, but we have certainly held those in cooperation with governments over the past several years. The work goes on. Whether it's enough, frequent enough, that's part of what can perhaps be recommended.

Within an organization, obviously, best management practice with respect to a food safety management system is to run test recalls, to make certain you can get your product back when you do have a problem with it, and that's part of best practice. I would expect...I have no way of calculating how many food businesses go through that process, except it would be fair to say that if they don't have a good food safety management system in place, they're less likely to have been doing so. It's our belief that there are real opportunities to put those systems in place.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Have you been asked to participate in one of...? The Public Health Agency report came out quite a while ago, December 2008. In it, it says, "Revisit the FIORP", which is the food-borne illness outbreak response protocol. Is industry involved in revisiting FIORP?

Mr. Albert Chambers: To my knowledge, we have not received an invitation to do so. Other individual food businesses or associations might have been involved in some of those discussions.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Would you say that would be a recommendation, particularly around the communication plan of—

Mr. Albert Chambers: The coalition would be very interested in participating in any elaboration of best practice for communication, whether it's a food safety incident or another one such as a pandemic, etc.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: In the practice sessions around...would they be twice a year? How often should there be practice?

Mr. Albert Chambers: I think we have to understand that the agrifood industry is very large and very complex. Having a national session that would be a practice session brings only certain players to the table at any one time. I think it certainly has to go that way. You need to get the people who are directly involved in an incident or potentially in an incident to go through those kinds of experiences, and then we have to do a lot of education. As we've seen from those reports, there were officials who were not up to date as to what they should be doing. Many in industry would not even have been aware of what would happen in that kind of situation.

The Chair: You have about half a minute.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Are you surprised there were three separate reports: CFIA, Public Health Agency, Health Canada? There doesn't seem to be one report. There's one report from Ontario. How on earth is a citizen supposed to figure out from those three reports when they all fight with one another? Are you feeling you're being—

Mr. Albert Chambers: That's not a question I am competent to answer, I'm afraid.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Would the industry, maybe, like one report?

The Chair: Your time has expired.

Mr. Albert Chambers: I think industry would like all the voices reported. Whether it came in one document or in several is immaterial in that sense. There was clearly discussion and consultation back and forth before those reports were finally issued.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bellavance or Mr. Allen, do you have any more questions?

You have one? Okay, go ahead, André.

• (1720)

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Thank you, I always have another question.

I would like to come back to you, Mr. Chambers. Your members come from the agri-food sector. I imagine they followed last summer's listeriosis crisis very carefully.

Earlier, we were talking about responsibility. Both the government and the industry agree that responsibility for food safety lies with all the stakeholders, even consumers. One of the factors that must be considered is the way in which people prepare their food. That is a comment this committee has heard quite often.

As an observer, you are well aware of this issue, because you represent people from the agri-food industry. I would like to hear your comments on the way in which the crisis was managed, as well as your advice, not as to how what happened could have been avoided, but rather with a view to improving the way in which the crisis was handled.

[English]

Mr. Albert Chambers: Mr. Bellavance, as you correctly pointed out, the coalition represents a large number of organizations—30—representing every segment of the supply chain. We have not, ourselves, as the coalition, done a post-mortem on the listeria situation of last year. I think, though, you would find some important signals in our brief, particularly with respect to the sixth recommendation, which deals with food businesses, governments, and other stakeholders having a responsibility to adequately resource, proactively manage, update, maintain, and continually improve their food safety systems or initiatives.

We have identified in our longer strategy paper where industry needs to move in that direction, and we have given some indications as to where government needs to move in that direction. It has a lot to do with training. It has a lot to do with adequate resources. It has a lot to do with, as Mr. Allen indicated, validating your systems and completing what you set out to do. Governments needs the resources to be able to undertake those actions, and industry needs to make sure it puts forward the resources for its systems. So I think one of the key messages we would like to take out of the 2008 experience was that there would appear to be some improvements needed in resourcing, in training, etc.

The Chair: Mr. Allen, you have a little time left.

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

Actually, Mr. Chambers, you sort of just scored the run before we threw the pitch when it comes to resources, because it was point six that I was going to look at. You quite clearly highlighted in your

bullets about promoting awareness, strengthening Canada's food safety, training, and auditing.

One of the things we heard—and this came from the government side as well—from CFIA, when they instituted a new protocol for testing at the beginning of this year, was that they hadn't trained folks to do the testing. And they actually haven't re-instituted it yet because, my understanding is, that training hasn't been completed yet.

As a subsequent question to that, who decides on your consensus model who isn't putting in the resources, and how does a group say to them, you need to pony up a couple of extra bucks because you're not actually pulling your weight?

Mr. Albert Chambers: I guess I would answer that question in a couple of ways. We haven't gone down to that level of detail because we've suggested very strongly that we need to have a very good discussion as to what that model would look like and what the commitments would be. We're trying to get governments to agree that there needs to be that discussion in the first instance, and then to elaborate that.

Clearly, jurisdictions have responsibilities and budgets, and all these things, which they have to sort through, but if they put food safety as the priority we believe they would if we did have a national strategy and we did have national decision-making mechanisms, then I would hope they would put the resources into it as well.

I'll answer another part of your question by pointing out that during a forum the coalition held with federal, provincial, and territorial officials and industry representatives in 2003, it identified that we needed to have, in a national agreement or consensus, or whatever it's called, a common standard for the qualifications and competencies of food safety auditors, whether they are working in companies in audit and certification programs by third parties, or for governments—federal, provincial, territorial, or municipal.

You'll note that in our national strategy, completed at the end of March, we are still promoting that idea, because six years later we have yet to convince a government—federal, provincial, or territorial—this is something that needs to be done.

So there are infrastructure issues like that on which we need to move ahead before we can have the comfort we should have in the quality and competence of the persons working in the industry and government with the responsibility for verification, etc., in these things. I'm not saying these people are incompetent; what I'm saying is that we need to have an agreed upon standard by which that competence can be judged. That in itself will bring greater confidence to our system, from the perspective of Canadians, food businesses, governments, and from our customers outside of Canada.

And that's just one example of the long list of things we have in our national strategy document. Going back to Ms. Bennett's question on what suggestions we have, we have a long list of suggestions in the basic document.

• (1725)

The Chair: Is there anything else, Mr. Allen? You have about a minute.

Okay. We'll move to Mr. Shipley.

Mr. Bev Shipley: I just have a quick one. We've talked about national standards, and one of the issues that also gets talked about a lot is the fact that we have federally licensed and provincially licensed facilities.

The outbreak of listeria happened in a federally licensed facility. It actually seems that most of the concerns and the recalls do come from the large and federally inspected facilities. I don't ever want to leave the impression that food safety, either provincially or federally, is insignificant. It is. What we are trying to understand is that each province has its own level of what a provincially licensed facility has to meet. One of the concerns is that if we were to go right across the board and make every plant a federally inspected one, it would require a significant influx of dollars, a significant investment, which smaller plants just can't afford.

The other part of it, though—and this is not about food safety—is that some of those things are aesthetic, albeit that may be the wrong word. For example, the laneway has to be asphalted instead of having some other type of covering. The walls have to be a certain distance from other walls or entranceways, which actually has nothing to do with food safety. But if some plants were to adhere to these now and to come into compliance, they would basically have to abandon their facilities and start over and build new ones.

I guess my concern is whether there is a place, from your perspective, where we could actually work on the food safety issues and have a national standard. But on some of these other issues that actually aren't impacted by this, we want to keep...because of the concern we're going to lose some of these provincially licensed facilities otherwise.

Mr. Albert Chambers: The answer from the coalition's perspective is, yes, those results can be achieved. There are tools available to us, tools that industry has created. I've made mention of them in my comments—the presentation talks about them—and you've had other witnesses before you who have mentioned them too. You'll have another witness this afternoon from the truckers, who have designed national HACCP-based food safety programs that can be implemented by the largest of trucking firms or the smallest of trucking firms.

We have yet to achieve federal-provincial agreement that those programs will be formally recognized by governments. Even though industry and governments have made significant investments—tens of millions of dollars of investments—over the past decade and a half into their creation, we do not yet have fully agreed recognition mechanisms to bring those within our food safety system. We need to do that.

So there are tools available that we have invested in cooperatively with government that can achieve the kinds of results you're talking about. Simpler, less complex businesses require simpler and less complex food safety management systems. Things can be achieved, but we have to have that broader realization and awakening to that approach and recognition of it, and we need to be able to set clear food safety objectives different from prescriptive practices in order to be able to make that a reality.

• (1730)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chambers.

We are now out of time, but we'd very much like to thank both of you gentlemen for coming today to testify before our committee.

We'll adjourn for five minutes or so to bring our next witnesses in.

Thanks again, gentlemen.

• _____ (Pause) _____

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The Chair: We'll resume the meeting.

I'd just like to get into our next round of witnesses.

Welcome, Ms. Bette Jean Crews, the newly elected president of the OFA. It's good to see you here.

We also have Mr. Ron Lennox and Mr. John Gyroky.

We have 10 minutes or less, and we'll start with you, Ms. Crews.

• (1735)

Ms. Bette Jean Crews (President, Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Canadian Federation of Agriculture): Thank you very much.

I'm here today representing the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. I sit as co-chair of their Food Safety Committee.

Let me start out by saying that the Canadian agriculture and agrifood industry does produce safe, high-quality food to sustainable environmental standards. Since the early 1990s, Canadian farmers, in partnership with governments, have taken leadership in developing national systems to strengthen our food safety commitment and in working in partnership with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to develop the Canadian approach to on-farm food safety.

The Canadian approach entails the development of auditable, national commodity-specific programs and the creation of strategies and the necessary tools to educate producers and to implement national on-farm food safety initiatives consistent with the Codex Alimentarius' hazard analysis and critical control point—HACCP—definitions and with CFIA's on-farm food safety recognition program.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada has co-funded and assisted in the development and implementation of the national on-farm food safety programs since 1997. While no food safety system can assure zero risk, it's a primary goal of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture to ensure the continued development of strong, sustainable, industry-led food safety, traceability, and animal health systems for the greater public benefit of Canadians. We thank you for the opportunity to address the members on some of the key requirements that we feel are needed to ensure this continues.

Canadian farmers have taken leadership in developing national systems for food safety, but the implementation and ongoing management is costly. These initiatives contribute to the public good and greater welfare of Canadians, but have returned little or no value from the marketplace. There are no premiums for safe food. With already low incomes, the sustainability of these food safety systems is strained. In order to support the continuation and strengthening of these systems, ongoing financial commitment and partnership from the public and from governments is required. The Canadian Federation of Agriculture also advocates for government support for enhancing Canada's reputation as a provider of high-quality, safe food through a government-funded communications plan that raises awareness at domestic and international levels on the strong food safety and quality systems that Canadian production has implemented. This plan would help in achieving marketplace value for the initiatives the industry is putting in place, and it would support the competitiveness of Canadian agriculture.

On industry leadership and industry-government partnerships, first, through a program called the Canadian on-farm food safety program, which ran between 1997 and 2004, and later through the Canadian food safety and quality program, Canadian producers, in partnership with AAFC and CFIA, have proactively led and designed the science-based Canadian approach to on-farm food safety. It's through this industry leadership that 19 commodity groups, with 22 commodity-specific programs covering 99% of all Canadian production, have now completed or are completing the development phases of their HACCP-based on-farm food safety systems.

Producers are wary of increased costs in a very competitive marketplace. They are also extremely concerned about government downloading of costs, administration, and regulation. Producers, however, are also keenly aware of the need to ensure the safety of their products. It's for these reasons that industry must continue its leadership in on-farm food safety and that its development be a strong industry-led partnership with governments.

Through CFA, the national commodity organizations, and the Canadian On Farm Food Safety Working Group, development of on-farm food safety systems has been a success, efficiently allocating funds, conducting industry research, building buy-in from producers through their own organizations, and maintaining accountability to Canadians through yearly third-party financial and compliance audits.

● (1740)

Without that partnership, the CFA believes the strong progress, producer buy-in, and ultimately success in developing strong on-farm food safety systems would not have occurred. To date, this has been an excellent example of how industry-government partnerships can be a very effective tool in delivering services while saving costs to taxpayers.

On-farm food safety programs are only effective if they are implemented. CFA believes it is imperative to have a well-funded, strong on-farm implementation program available to national producer organizations and their provincial counterparts to use, to implement the national food safety systems. CFA welcomes the establishment of incentive-based programs for food safety initiatives

and strongly believes flexibility and incentive-based programs are much more effective at achieving progress compared with inflexible regulatory approaches. However, the recent shift to provincial delivery versus federal under Growing Forward has raised concerns that access to funding may vary across provinces, creating a patchwork approach to the food safety program.

As we move from the APF to the Growing Forward program, CFA recommends the following: significantly streamlining the approval, processing or agreements to improve the ability to obtain contracts or extensions in a timely fashion; and much greater flexibility for use of funding in the areas of training, human resources, purchase of equipment, and full audit cost recovery. CFA also recommends that Canada pursue clearer language on equivalency that will make it more incumbent on countries to allow imports where the food safety protection afforded by exporting countries' inspection programs is at least equivalent to that of the importers, even if the *modus operandi* is different in certain aspects.

Traceability is the ability to track movements of animals and goods through the supply chain. It is an important tool for agriculture. There is a significant public good in the development and implementation of traceability systems in the areas of the protection of plant and animal health and in the area of food safety. Many initiatives are currently under way to implement traceability systems at the farm level and throughout the chain. However, traceability standards alone do not make food any safer; they simply make it easier to track.

CFA welcomed the decision of federal, provincial, and territorial ministers of agriculture to develop and implement a national agriculture and food traceability system in Canada and has called for a system comprising all food production, including primary producers and along the value chain, and building on national standards.

In addition to the obvious benefit to government in protecting the public, a national identification and traceability system would constitute a risk management tool that can greatly improve the competitiveness of the industry as it would allow for identification of contamination sources, reduction of response time in the event of a crisis, and minimizing the economic impacts of a foreign animal/plant disease outbreak or a food safety crisis disease outbreak in Canada. Reduced economic impact results in less industry reliance on government risk management programs. A successful agricultural industry reflects on the economy of the country.

A national traceability system would allow the industry to seize opportunities for reinforcing our domestic and export market access while responding to the growing need of consumers across the globe to know the origin of their food. It would also support Canada's on-farm food safety systems and aid efforts in eradicating domestic animal/plant diseases and elimination of foreign animal disease incursions.

It is therefore important that governments provide leadership and support to ensure that the various traceability initiatives work and are able to communicate with each other. Governments must also assist industry in the event of an incident with trade loss or when receiving compensation. With respect to implementation, CFA again encourages the use of incentive-based systems as opposed to an inflexible regulatory system.

• (1745)

CFA supports a national traceability system that is compatible across the country, across commodities, along the value chain, and technologically compatible with international standards. In conclusion, we'd like to thank the committee for the opportunity to present to you on this very important issue.

The recommendations you make in June will have a significant impact on the food industry, and it's our hope that you'll bear our comments in mind and build on the strong, science-based Canadian on-farm food safety programs. The CFA and its members remain committed to working with government and all stakeholders to further strengthen the food safety system in Canada.

Thank you.

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

I'll now turn to Mr. Lennox.

Mr. Ron Lennox (Vice-President, Trade and Security, Canadian Trucking Alliance): Good evening, Mr. Chairman and subcommittee members.

My name is Ron Lennox. I'm a vice-president with the Canadian Trucking Alliance, a federation of Canada's provincial trucking associations representing some 4,500 carriers and trucking industry suppliers nationwide. CTA is a member of the Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition, who appeared before you earlier this evening. With me is John Gyroky, corporate dock manager and HACCP coordinator with Erb Transport. Erb is a family owned carrier based in New Hamburg, Ontario, specializing in refrigerated transportation, operating a fleet of 1,000 refrigerated trailers, 500 tractors, 150 straight trucks, and employing some 1,200 people and 140 owner-operators.

Erb was the 2008 recipient of *Canadian Transportation & Logistics* magazine's Shippers Choice Award, as well as the Premier Carrier Award from food giant Sysco Corporation. Erb Transport was also one of the first carriers in Canada to implement CTA's HACCP-based trucking food safety program, which I will speak to in a moment.

I had the pleasure last week of speaking before the full agriculture committee as part of its study on the competitiveness of the Canadian agrifood industry. During my remarks, I made the point that you can't have a competitive agrifood industry unless you have a

competitive transportation industry as well. The same holds true here. Virtually every food product we consume is moved on a truck at some point, probably several times for that matter. If you want a full picture of the state of food safety, you have to look at every link in the supply chain, and trucking is a key component.

I'll keep my remarks fairly general. I want to give the subcommittee a sense of the regulatory landscape that the trucking industry operates in, as well as some background on CTA's HACCP-based program.

Most of you here this evening heard my description last week of the highly competitive nature of the trucking industry in Canada: 10,000 carriers employing a quarter of a million drivers, 375,000 people overall, and generating about \$30 billion in annual revenue from the for-hire sector. The industry provides service to virtually every town and city in Canada and the U.S. and is responsible for about two-thirds by value of Canada's trade with the United States.

Erb Transport alone provides temperature-controlled service for 1,800 shippers delivering their food products to 24,000 consignees throughout Canada and the lower 48 U.S. states. It is often said that trucking is the most regulated deregulated industry in Canada. The days of economic regulation of trucking rates and routes are long behind us. The carriers nevertheless face the daunting task of compliance with federal, provincial, and state regulation in areas such as road safety, environment, and labour. While most of Canada's trucking industry falls under federal jurisdiction, we are nevertheless impacted by provincial and state regulation in areas such as vehicle weights and dimensions, where no fewer than 63 sets of requirements exist in Canada and the U.S.

Food is no different, where both provinces and the federal government set standards and regulate. The challenge for a trucking company is to ensure that they are familiar with and comply with the standards in all of the jurisdictions in which they operate. Government regulation is of course just one fact that will influence carrier practices in the safe transportation of food products. The second important consideration is the market. Carriers sell their services to food shippers, and if they want to win new freight contracts and retain existing business, they must meet the service standards they negotiate with their clients.

When it comes to the food business, there is probably nothing more important than meeting shipper requirements dealing with food safety. We have seen the irreparable damage that can be done to a food manufacturer or retailer, and the health risk to the public, if a food product is subject to chemical, biological, or physical contamination.

Food shippers have a very clear interest in ensuring that the carriers they use have standards and procedures in place to ensure vehicles are adequately cleaned and sanitized, that there is no cross-contamination of food products with other commodities, and that the cold chain is maintained throughout the transportation process, from the loading dock to the receiving dock. On the receiving end, consignees also need to satisfy themselves that food that arrives on their dock has not been contaminated during transport, and that they have procedures in place to monitor, for example, the temperature of loads during transport.

• (1750)

I'm certainly not here to suggest that the market is somehow a substitute for food safety regulation. But going back to what I said to the full committee last week, there is probably not a more competitive industry in Canada than trucking. A carrier is not going to last very long in this business if they fail to live up to their obligations to shippers in vitally important areas like safe food handling practices. It's not just about price.

In a similar vein, there are various things carriers can do to go beyond regulatory and shipper requirements for food safety, the most notable one being HACCP. I'd like to take a few minutes to describe CTA's involvement in this area.

Back in 2001, CTA was approached by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency regarding the Canadian food safety adaptation program. It provided funding for HACCP-based programs to national associations representing the off-farm sector all along the supply chain. Our first question, naturally, was what HACCP stood for, because nobody on staff at CTA had heard of it. We were also reeling at the time from a spate of new security programs being introduced in the wake of 9/11, and the last thing we really needed was another project.

However, the more we talked to CFIA, the more we realized two important things. First, if CTA didn't get engaged in the development of a HACCP-based program for trucking, somebody else would do it for us, so better to steer the ship than just be along for the ride. Second, HACCP programs were beginning to spread among the customers we served, so we felt it important to give carriers a program they could adopt that would dovetail with shipper programs. We wanted to create a situation where a carrier would not have to comply with multiple shipper programs, but instead would have one that was uniquely tailored to our industry.

I won't go into all of the details, but CTA applied for and received funding from CFIA, and later from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada under its food safety and quality program, to develop a HACCP-based food safety program geared specifically to trucking operations. We assembled an advisory team consisting of carriers, CFIA technical experts, and national food associations such as the Canadian Meat Council, the Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors, the Canadian Produce Marketing Association, and the Canada Grains Council. While CTA had overall responsibility for the project, the actual work of developing the program was contracted to Kasar Canada, a Nova Scotia-based company with significant expertise and experience in the development and implementation of FSEP and HACCP.

Work began in 2001 on the development of a strategic plan. A draft food safety program was put together with the input of the advisory committee. It was piloted by 10 carriers from across the country operating in different parts of the food industry such as meat, dairy, grain, and dry goods. It was revised according to the lessons learned during the pilot phase, and ultimately submitted to CFIA for technical review.

I'm pleased to note that in February 2005, CFIA advised CTA that our trucking food safety program, consisting of a set of core elements and supported by 10 product-specific modules, met the agency's technical requirements. CTA subsequently contracted with Kasar to deliver the program on its behalf and assist carriers on a consulting basis to integrate the trucking food safety program into carrier operations and to oversee implementation through annual audits.

I'll be perfectly blunt with you in saying that we've fallen short of expectations in moving our HACCP program into the marketplace. As of today, we have 14 certified carrier participants. Some, like Erb Transport, and Midland of Moncton, New Brunswick, are major players in the food trucking business. Other, smaller carriers in different parts of the country have also come on board. What accounts for this? There are several reasons I can suggest.

We believed from the outset that the major push for HACCP would come from the food shipping community, but it seems this took longer than expected to materialize. A lot of carriers got in touch with Kasar to learn about the trucking food safety program when it came out, but many backed off, saying, "We already comply with regulations. We're already meeting any additional requirements that our clients place on us, so we'll do HACCP if and when shippers demand it."

One other thing carriers noticed when exploring HACCP was that they already did most of what was required, but they didn't have the detailed record-keeping systems in place to demonstrate compliance with HACCP principles.

Though my information is only anecdotal, I would say that the tide seems to be turning in this regard. As Mr. Gyoroky will attest, food clients are increasingly demanding signed food safety agreements from their carriers, including HACCP programs, perhaps in reaction to high-profile food safety incidents, perhaps in response to the huge attention given to food and product safety generally in the United States, and perhaps in response to inquiries such as these. Whatever the reason, we're beginning to see positive signs.

• (1755)

We had also thought that if the federal government were to confer official recognition on off-farm HACCP programs such as CTA's, they would have more cachet with shippers. While there has been a number of discussions between industry—under the auspices of the food safety coalition—and government representatives from CFIA, the discussions have not yielded anything concrete thus far.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and subcommittee members, for allowing us to appear today. Both Mr. Gyoroky and I would be pleased to respond to any questions you may have.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lennox.

We'll now move to questioning.

Mr. Easter, seven minutes.

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

Thank you, folks, for coming and giving your presentations.

Two questions, I guess, to both the trucking association and the Federation of Agriculture.

How does our regulatory environment on food and food products compare in Canada versus the United States? As a trucking association, you're operating in both countries.

Bette Jean, you're well aware, I think, of the cost structure in the United States. How do we compare as a country?

Certainly I'm of the view that food safety should be a public responsibility, to a great extent. There's no question that what you have to do in the trucking industry adds costs. Who do they get passed on to? I suspect they get passed down to the primary producer at the end of the day. The same with the CFA in terms of costs at that level.

How do you think we compare with the regulatory environment in the United States? What is the impact of these costs on the primary producer, from where all food has to start?

Mr. Ron Lennox: Mr. Easter, John and I were having a chat at lunchtime about regulation. The fact of the matter is that there really isn't that much direct regulation of trucking specifically on food safety. Most of the regulation applies to the producers, to the distributors, and at the retail level.

There are certain regulations in terms of segregating products, for example, under the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act, but there really isn't a lot of direct regulation on the trucking industry. We take our direction from the shippers we carry for, who are, in fact, regulated in most cases.

As to how they compare with the United States, I'm not familiar enough to say that I know that ours are more stringent or less stringent than in the United States, but I think their system is relatively similar to ours in that the regulation isn't directly on us.

I'm sorry; you had a second part to your question.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Well, that basically covers it on U.S. and Canada on the trucking side. The second part of the question was on who really pays for the cost of any of these changes. It never seems to go up to the consumer. It always comes down to the producer.

• (1800)

Mr. Ron Lennox: As I said to the committee last week, and you were there, Mr. Easter, programs aren't free. We were talking about security programs last week. To put in place a HACCP program is not free either.

I'm not sure what Erb Transport paid to do their program and what they pay on an ongoing basis to be audited, but, yes, carriers are in a very competitive business. When they put in place programs like this, it's sometimes difficult just to absorb those costs. So they do get passed down to their shipping clients.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Bette Jean...or John, sorry.

Mr. John Gyoroky (Corporate Dock Manager and HACCP Coordinator, Erb Transport, Canadian Trucking Alliance): We run the same HACCP program across all of our divisions. On our limited side, it services Canada, and on our international, it goes down to the U.S.

I'm not well versed as to what's required in the U.S., but what I do know is that we apply the same program to our conveyances, to our freight and how we handle it. It's handled in the same facilities, in the same warehouses, subject to the same cleaning for the trailers.

We did our best, and I think the senior management of Erb Transport felt that it was a necessity of business, being in the handling of food, to maintain a standard and protect the integrity of our customers when shipping their freight. We tried to absorb that cost within our operations and how we do business day to day. It is an extra cost there, but we're trying to work it in as best we can with our operations.

Thank you.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Thank you, John.

Bette Jean.

Ms. Bette Jean Crews: I don't know what regulations are commodity by commodity in the States, but I do know, on a traceability basis, when BSE hit in Canada, we were ahead of the States in being able to trace our animals. We've improved phenomenally since then, but as far as actual regulatory requirements went, we were ahead of the States at that point. Having said that, I'm given to understand there is significant assistance to farmers in the States by their government to implement what is being mandated to them now.

I do, though, want to speak to the cost coming back to the producer, because there are small profits. We hear that all the time, but there are also very small margins. We are competing on a global market. One of the things I mentioned in the presentation was a government-led communications protocol or program to the consumer to tell them what we do now, why it is good to buy Canadian, the fact that our food is safe and of high quality, but also tell them about environmental standards and labour standards that we meet in this country. If we can get that promotion through the industry but also through government, then we will get more loyalty from the consumer.

Right now, if we are regulated and mandated for very costly food safety protocols that are not market-driven, that are simply perception-driven, the industry cannot absorb that. There is no way to pass it on because of the cheap food policy and the competition from the global marketplace of foods that come in at different standards from those we produce.

Hon. Wayne Easter: You're basically saying, then, that the public should be responsible for more of the costs of food safety than is currently the case, I suppose.

The other point you mentioned, Bette Jean, in your presentation was the whole issue around products—some of which are food—imported into Canada, which CFIA is responsible for inspecting as well, but which compete against Canadian products. Everything I think we've heard to date at this committee is that they don't face the same strict inspection rules that Canadian producers have, or the same production standards, for that matter.

What are your thoughts there?

Ms. Bette Jean Crews: I believe that food is allowed to come into this country if it meets the production standards in that country. Let's use the States as a very easy example. There are crop protection products that are licensed in the States and that are not licensed in Canada, and yet that product can come into Canada. What we really need is more inspection at the border as well. And I don't mean moving inspectors from one place to another. I mean hiring more inspectors so we have that ongoing monitoring all through the chain, and at the border as well.

• (1805)

Hon. Wayne Easter: The other point that I think you mentioned, Bette Jean—and I'm not as familiar with this—was that the current funding for the Growing Forward program could move us towards a patchwork quilt of programs across the country. Can you give us any specific examples of that?

That's one thing I've been talking about for a while, though not specifically on funding. We have provincial governments coming up with various programs—Alberta, for instance, has the most—and yet somebody else and some producer in another province has to compete against that money that's been dumped into that industry. We agree there has to be flexibility across the country, but what you're really getting is a divergence, in terms of farm support, across the country now.

Ms. Bette Jean Crews: We're concerned about the Growing Forward.... We welcome the flexibility to address provincial issues, because every province is different. In Ontario, where we are right now, we have so many sizes of farms and varied commodities that

our food safety needs are quite different from those of other provinces.

The concern is that there won't be any overview of the national system, that provinces will be able to work together, that there will be fairness. What we're proposing is an industry-government process by which we will know what the other provinces are doing—and so does government—and that the funding simply doesn't go out on an.... And it is. It's on a first-come, first-served basis. Growers from provinces that don't have a lot of money to put toward this are going to be penalized by this whole thing.

The other thing I would like to mention too, Mr. Easter, is the traceability issue. We need provincial traceability systems that work within the national system. In the earlier presentation by the Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition, there were questions about what we require as far as minimum standards and about other provinces having better standards.

We have to be very aware that for traceability in particular, some of it is for emergency management purposes and another level is for market access purposes, and the national and provincial systems need to be strictly for emergency management purposes. Whether you call it basic standards, minimum standards, or science-based standards, it only needs to be this good to be traceable. If I want to market my product and sell more, then I can do the Cadillac version.

But in Canada we need to meet global standards. We need to meet national and provincial standards. I've been to a global conference, and the recommendation was that the global standard needs to be the lowest it can possibly be and ensure traceability and food safety for emergency management and animal health issues. I don't want us to lose track of that thought.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bellavance, seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Ms. Crews, I share your concerns about the costs producers will have to pay to ensure food safety. Your organization represents several thousand farm producers who want to provide consumers with safe food. Ultimately, even if they are not the cause of the problem, their reputation will suffer.

Producers want to ensure that their products meet safety standards, and this costs money. Sometimes there is doubt as to whether or not governments realize how hard producers are trying in their work methods and financially to ensure that food is as safe as possible. In recent years, we have taken some steps to ensure that farm products are very safe.

The government does not seem too sensitive to this, and it is actually imposing measures that will be very expensive for producers. I am thinking particularly of specified risk materials, the SRMs. Our beef producers are now required to eliminate SRMs, even though our American trading partners are not required to do so. This results in unfair competition for our producers.

I am not saying they are opposed to the introduction of these measures. However, I am wondering why the government put them in place. Does it not realize that they are creating unfair competition? The government must help our producers pay these extra costs.

I have other examples of food safety crises. When I was first elected, the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agrifood visited Manitoba producers whose cattle had had bovine tuberculosis. We saw one producer in tears when he thought about what happened years before, when he had lost everything. The compensation payments arrived late and were inadequate. The same was true of producers in British Columbia, who had had to cull millions of chickens because of avian flu.

In response, the government recently published in the *Canada Gazette* some changes in the compensation payments—they were decreased from \$33 per chicken to \$8, or something like that. I share this concern. There is an imbalance here.

I would like to hear your comments on this. You may have some other examples to give us as well.

• (1810)

[English]

Ms. Bette Jean Crews: So there was a question in there?

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Yes, but you are entitled to—

[English]

Ms. Bette Jean Crews: On producer compensation, this is exactly why government needs to be involved and working with industry to set up these programs to help industry design and implement these food safety programs. Regardless of what kind of disaster program you can come up with in this country, until we have the traceability in place to mitigate that damage in a recall situation, and the food safety protocols in place by commodity, then the damage is going to be phenomenal. And you're right, we are still recovering from BSE. We need government involvement in those programs.

There's another thing I wanted to mention, but I forget where I was going with that one now. Would you like to ask me another specific question? I think you were just making a statement that government needs to be involved, and I totally agree with you.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: I was expecting you to comment on this situation. Producers have to make an effort to cover the costs related to food safety. However, the government does not seem concerned about the assistance it should be providing to producers. You said yourself that the efforts made by producers does not result in any extra-value added for them. Nevertheless, they have to ensure that people have safe food to eat.

I mentioned the example of specified risk materials. Does the government ensure that producers do not have to pay this cost on their own?

[English]

Ms. Bette Jean Crews: Yes, I did mention in the presentation that there is no premium for food safety. That's why we're here today: to make sure we continue some of the good work we've done. The Canadian On-Farm Food Safety Working Group worked with commodity organizations to establish food safety protocols, auditable protocols, for some commodities that were able to do it. Not all commodities have finished that work. We would like to see

some process in place that enables that to continue, so more commodities can be brought into that work.

The other thing you mentioned was on the specified risk materials. That is something in modern-day agriculture that we do have to remove. We have to do it for the market as much as for the emergency management of it. And yet there is science there that will enable those specified risk materials to be used to produce energy. That's being done in western Ontario. We're a couple of months, weeks maybe, away from finalizing that.

Government support for those kinds of programs will subsidize the cost to the farmer of getting rid of those animals because now there's a benefit to the dead-stock collector to actually pick up that animal. We don't have any leather industry in this country anymore. We can't use dead stock to make animal food because of the specified risk materials in it. There is no market. Here's where government can help with getting the new science in place and enable farmers to ship their dead animals without it costing them more sometimes than it would to ship a live animal. It's government support in the interim until we get that science in place.

• (1815)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bellavance.

I'll go to Mr. Allen for seven minutes.

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Thank you, Chair, and I thank all of you for coming.

Ms. Crews, I was interested that you used the term “this level” for traceability. I think you're the first person who has spoken to us about traceability being an issue, not so much in food safety but about managing something that may have occurred and finding a way to track—because really that is what it is all about: tracking where that particular product has gone, or to whom we sent it, or who may be consuming it. It's interesting to note your comment around what level that should be at. Your suggestion that the market may want to see something else, which would allow them to have a Cadillac model—using your words—I found interesting.

Based on that and on the whole sense of food safety—because I don't think you'd get too many arguments from most of us who sit on the agriculture committee that the producer seems to bear the brunt of the cost for a lot of the programming—it's difficult to get consumers to be aware of trying to get the primary producer a decent return on the investment. I don't think they're opposed to it, but if you went to most farmers' markets or supermarkets, you'd find most consumers aren't aware of the plight farmers find themselves in from a financial perspective. They would probably be shocked by that.

I was interested in how you see the dynamic of how we engage consumers to make them understand that somehow we need to make sure primary producers are compensated in a fair way. I'm not sure how you see that linkage. You talked about some education—and that's important unto itself—but clearly for the producers you represent, and for the producer you are, you need to find a way to get those dollars back into your purse. I'm not sure I see the linkage between the two simply with education. For the consumer, if the price of milk or bread goes up at the store, they just believe the store takes it. They don't necessarily see it going back to the producer.

Ms. Bette Jean Crews: There is no one consumer.

The position I'm at in my life right now, with the children finally gone—and I think they've quit coming back—

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Now that's not true.

Ms. Bette Jean Crews: —I can afford the luxury of paying extra for food, because I know the value of it. But I have to tell you honestly, when we were paying off the mortgage and raising four kids, if we were going to have tomatoes in the winter, they couldn't be Ontario tomatoes. So let's just be realistic here. You will never have all consumers able to buy what they would like to buy.

By the same token, there are consumers out there who value the environment, the labour standards, and the whole standard of living we have in this country, to say nothing of our food safety standards. They value that enough to pay for it. I'm lucky enough on our farm that we have a small farm market. I've always said that I can educate about 1,000 people a summer, and that's about it. So over the last 30 years, I've hit quite a few.

If the government would come into that and spin this whole thing out to the consumer, or else work with us in a program we can actually market.... We used to have the Agricultural Adaptation Council in Ontario—we still have it—and that program used to let us market our local food. That's now become a provincial responsibility, and I must say that in Ontario, the province has come out fairly strongly on that and is doing well. But if there were some federal dollars, even through that program, that could go to food safety communication initiatives so that the consumer was aware of the differences....

Consumers assume that the government is looking after them. They assume that everything coming across the border is as good as what we produce here. That's where the communication is needed. It is to get that through to them.

• (1820)

Mr. Malcolm Allen: I would concur, from the perspective of consumers, and I think all the witnesses have concurred, that they actually believe there is no one in the business of producing food who is out to poison anyone. That's what the consumer believes also. There are actually all those things behind them in that chain you've talked about, including the chain Mr. Lennox is involved in that is trucking things and moving things from place to place. Indeed, everyone in that chain is doing the utmost to ensure that when it finally gets to the shelf or gets to the plate, the food is actually safe. They truly don't understand what happens behind the scenes in the chain in the sense of where things come from.

We don't grow papaya, so people know when they buy papaya that it's not Canadian. But they may not necessarily know about tomatoes or leaf lettuce, depending on the season, especially at this time of year, when we get into May. Asparagus is probably a prime example. They may not know whether it's a product of Chile or a product of Canada, unless they're checking really closely, and it's not every place that actually points that out to us.

There is a sort of taken-for-granted attitude, if you will, on the part of consumers, and it's a fair one to take, which is that no one is out to poison anyone.

The cost has to be borne somewhere. If the cost ultimately is going to be borne at the primary producer level, it seems incumbent

upon us, because we cherish the safe food supply as a society.... In fact, it's the only thing that will sustain us. If we poison ourselves, we just won't be here. We ultimately need to bear the cost as a society, which means that all of us contribute.

I agree with you, by the way. When my kids were younger and I was paying a mortgage—because I'm kind of like you, and they're kind of gone, almost—it was a tough go for a while to try to make ends meet.

It seems to me that we need a policy that says this is how we pay for safe foods and how we intend to make sure that the processes we're asking for are put in place. We're asking that as a Canadian government. Here is what we need to see happen. The industry is saying that this is what it wants to do. Ultimately, someone actually has to pony up the dollars to pay for that. It seems to me that it's never going to be consumers.

Mr. Lennox, you said earlier that your industry was trying to absorb the cost through efficiencies in your HACCP-based systems. You said that you have been successful or that you've been fairly successful. Do you see that success continuing, or is there a point at which your efficiency gains will simply be tapped out and you'll have to pass costs along?

Mr. Ron Lennox: When I say that costs have to be passed along, in the scheme of things, those are pretty minor. If you take a look at a trucking company and its operations, the big expenses are fuel and labour and equipment. So to put in place a HACCP program would just be a fraction of the overall cost of operating a trucking company.

In terms of our ability to pass those costs on, again, because the industry is so competitive, no company can get out of line in terms of the rates they charge their clients, whether it be because of HACCP or something else, because price is important, and so is service.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Allen. Your time has expired.

Just before I move on to Mr. Anderson, Ms. Crews, I thought you had an interesting comment there about being able to afford food and what have you. I'm the same—I think my boys have all left home for the last time.

I've sometimes said there are three groups of people when it comes time to purchase food. There are those who want to buy Canadian or local and can afford to. There are those who want to buy Canadian or local and can't afford to. And then there is the other group of those to whom it doesn't matter—it's only about price, and that's usually because of financial circumstances or whatever, and that's a reality.

I think I hear you kind of agreeing with that.

•(1825)

Ms. Bette Jean Crews: Well, I am, but I'll tell you, it is also rewarding to go to the grocery store—and I'll use the example of tomatoes because sometimes it's hard to find Ontario or Canadian tomatoes in the store—and I always ask the produce fellow who's working there where the Ontario ones are. I've done this a number of times, and there's been someone standing right beside me reaching for that one from another country. He's listened and wondered why I was asking for tomatoes from Ontario. It has just taken a little sentence about what we do here, and he has gone right over and paid another 20¢ a pound for Ontario tomatoes.

So, as I say, I can reach maybe a thousand people a year. The government can reach a lot more.

The Chair: That was a good comment.

Mr. Anderson, you have seven minutes.

Mr. David Anderson: Well, actually, I did want to follow up on what Mr. Lennox was just talking about: the cost of HACCP. I was going to ask actually whether you knew what the costs of conforming to HACCP were, whether any of your companies or your association had done that work, but you really don't see that as a major cost at all. I'm a producer, a farmer, as well, and on an individual farm it is a significant investment, but you're able to spread that across your firms widely enough that it's not a big cost?

Mr. Ron Lennox: It's not insignificant. I've spoken to our service deliverer, Kasar Canada, and they've indicated that costs can run to easily \$50,000 for a trucking company to put a program in place. And then there are ongoing costs as well for audits, for example, and the cost of those audits would depend on the number of facilities you have that have to come under scrutiny.

But, again, in the scheme of things, compared to the other costs of running a trucking company, it tends to be small.

I'm not sure if John wants to comment on that.

Mr. John Gyoroky: I would tend to agree with that. I think Erb Transport looked at it as a cost necessary to continue doing business, but I would agree with Mr. Lennox that compared to the costs of labour, fuel, and equipment, it is minimal.

Mr. David Anderson: Do you haul live cattle?

Mr. John Gyoroky: No, sir.

Mr. David Anderson: Maybe I could ask the association then.

Do you have any comment on the impact of COOL on the trucking association, and, actually, in terms of maybe the number of animals being moved and the situation you find yourselves in?

Mr. Ron Lennox: I'm just not familiar enough with animal transportation to be giving you an answer on that. I'm sorry.

Mr. David Anderson: Okay, that's fine.

Let's go to the border, then. We've had a couple of witnesses who've come in and said we need to really do a whole lot more inspections right at the border, and we've had presentations that explain that there's a certain number of vehicles that are picked out that can also.... Most vehicles are inspected away from the ports themselves.

I'm just wondering if you find the border to be a reasonable place to be able to transit now. Or do you think it's too onerous? Is it too easy? Does it need to be tightened up?

Mr. John Gyoroky: I think for us, our drivers who drive down to the United States in our international division are carrying FAST cards for quick access. We have pre-border clearance prior to the departure of the unit. In talking with the vice-president of our international division, they really don't have a problem with that. We are compliant with C-TPAT also. With the FAST card, we don't really see a problem with that in crossing the border.

Mr. David Anderson: Is it fairly similar going both directions?

Mr. John Gyoroky: I would say so. I'm not too familiar with the inbound to Canada. I'm mainly concerned with going inbound to the United States. I would hear of any problems with that, and we don't seem to have that. But we have taken the necessary precautions or measures to expedite that process through, again, the FAST program and the C-TPAT compliance.

Mr. Ron Lennox: One of the things that I talked about in the competitiveness study last week was the importance of electronic manifests for moving trucks across the border. The U.S. already has them in place, and Canada should be rolling its out this year. That will be of big benefit, in terms of expediting traffic across the border.

There's just one other thing in terms of whether the border is a good place to actually inspect vehicles. It tends to be a very busy, congested place with limited space. Certainly goods can move in bond, and, to the extent possible, of course, we would prefer that goods be inspected away from the border, provided you can maintain the integrity through seals, and there isn't an issue surrounding a perishable product or something like that.

•(1830)

Mr. David Anderson: Ms. Crews talked about the importance of incentive-based systems, as she put it, in dealing with HACCP and putting them in place. You found that you've been dealing with incentive-based systems.

It sounds like you have a fairly cooperative relationship with CFIA. Have you been able to work at that level, or has it been a more regulatory system? I think you said in one comment that "we realized that if we didn't get involved, somebody was going to do this for us". I'd like your thoughts on that.

Mr. Ron Lennox: You're absolutely right. Our relationship with CFIA during the development of the program was very positive. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada came in later as well.

I'm not so sure that I would say we're involved with any sort of incentive programs, but certainly the federal government and I guess the provinces were involved in the food safety and quality program as well and funded all our out-of-pocket expenses for the development of the program. They were fairly significant. Before I came here today, I checked that, and they were about \$350,000.

Our role was to provide in-kind contributions only. There's just no way we would have been able to come up with that kind of money internally, I don't think, to do that kind of project.

Mr. David Anderson: I would actually like to go to the Growing Forward traceability, but before I do that, I just want to ask you, then, do you find yourselves dealing with different situations in different provinces? Or, because you're exporting, is it pretty much a consistent standard that you have to deal with?

Mr. Ron Lennox: As I've said, there really aren't that many regulations on trucking itself, so what we're responding to are shipper demands, to a large extent, for food safety. That's really one of the primary drivers for why we developed this HACCP system. We didn't want to be faced with different sets of requirements for everybody we operated for.

We wanted to have our own program so that we could say, look, we understand your need for protecting the integrity of this load, here's what we're doing internally to do it, and we'd like those systems to dovetail. That was the principle.

Mr. David Anderson: What are the main elements, then, of your HACCP program? You talked about cleaning your trailers and standards and that. What would those main elements be, since primarily they don't have to do with food safety itself?

Mr. Ron Lennox: Do you want to answer that, John?

Mr. John Gyroky: Certainly. The main elements of our HACCP program travel all through our conveyances, through the cleanliness of our conveyances or trailers and our straight trucks. That also pertains to the sites where we cross-dock freight. Many of our customers, I think, have the understanding with the freight that at times when we're in the LTL business, the freight that we pick up on trailer A we might not necessarily deliver with trailer A. With our full truckload division, that would be the case.

But they are putting it on a trailer that has to go across a cross-dock facility or a warehouse, so our sanitation, pest control, cleanliness, and training of employees in personal hygiene and also in health and safety pertain to this program. On construction of our trailers, all of our trailers have aluminum-ribbed floors and Bullitex walls. There is no wood in the containers. They're all reefered units and dual-temp trailers. Our trailers can maintain two temperatures, a fresh and a frozen, within the one unit.

All those things pertain to it. I guess it would be the building and all of our conveyances, along with our staff, through the pest control, the conveyance cleaning, and the regular monitoring of this. We do self-audits once a year and we're also subjected to an audit by Kasar Canada. That usually keeps me very busy.

Mr. David Anderson: Do I have a minute or two?

The Chair: Your time has expired.

Mr. Lennox and Mr. Gyroky, there's a move out there by some—I'll say extreme—animal rights groups to change some of the rules for transportation of livestock. I think some of them would like to take it as far as having carpet on the bottom of the trucks. We all know what the practicality of that is.

I guess my question on it is on some of the things that I'm sure you've heard about for what they are proposing or asking for. Do you think that, in any way, has any connection to food safety?

Mr. Ron Lennox: I'm actually not familiar with what exactly they've been saying, Mr. Miller, but—

The Chair: You maybe wouldn't want to know.

Mr. Ron Lennox: Okay. I mean, I can imagine, but does it pertain to the safety of the food? Probably not. What we're talking about is.... There are animal welfare codes that the carriers have to comply with in order to move livestock, and that's what carriers adhere to. Are they perfect? Could they be made better? Short of the carpet on the bottom, I don't know, but I don't see it as a food safety issue per se.

• (1835)

The Chair: Just part of that code you talked about is one example. I brought a number of cattle from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta down to my part of the country. I think the line is west of Moose Jaw or Regina. Any cattle that are in transportation on their way to Ontario have to be unloaded in Thunder Bay. That is costly, but I certainly don't dispute it or argue about it.

Mr. Ron Lennox: I very briefly described our program. There's the core, with the sanitation, pest control, all the prerequisite programs, and the standard operating procedures, as well as some commodity-specific modules, depending on what's being carried. One of them is on live animals. But most of the references in there are to these various codes for animal welfare, making sure they're transported humanely.

The Chair: Thanks very much to all of you.

These bells are calling us for votes. We will have to get back, and the chance of us being back before our allotted time is probably nil.

So I'd like to thank all of you for coming here and participating in our food safety study. I'm sure we'll see you at committee again.

We'll recess until after the votes.

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_____ (Pause) _____

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• (1905)

The Chair: We will call our meeting back to order and thank our witnesses from CFIA for being here.

I understand, Ms. Swan, you're going to start.

Ms. Carole Swan (President, Canadian Food Inspection Agency): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, honourable members, ladies and gentlemen, we appreciate the opportunity to appear before the committee again. As I indicated to the committee at our last appearance, all of us at the CFIA were saddened and disheartened by the food-related illnesses last year, and we do express our sympathy to all those affected.

I would like to make three main points. First, I share the view that has been expressed by many of the witnesses who have appeared before this committee that food safety is a shared responsibility that starts with the stewardship of producers and concludes with an informed consumer. It is not the sole responsibility of any one group or organization.

These various responsibilities are set out in statute. Government is responsible for setting standards for food safety. Specifically, Health Canada is responsible for deciding what constitutes a health risk. The CFIA is responsible for setting strong standards for food production, verifying industry compliance with those standards, and undertaking enforcement actions and recalls when necessary. Food producers are responsible for producing safe food.

[Translation]

Second, I want to emphasize that CFIA employees are professionals and dedicated public servants. CFIA employees worked hard to identify, understand and respond to the factors that contributed to last summer's outbreak.

We took action to reduce the risk of this happening again. We took a hard look at what we could have done better. These efforts are described in the Agency's "Lessons Learned" documents, which have been shared with this committee and the general public.

[English]

Finally, I want to emphasize that the agency looks forward to the advice of this committee and that of the independent investigator, Sheila Weatherill, on how improvements can be made to reduce risk and enhance food safety for Canadians.

Thank you. I now turn it over to Dr. Evans.

Dr. Brian Evans (Executive Vice-President, Canadian Food Inspection Agency): Thank you, Madam Swan.

Mr. Chairman, honourable members, ladies and gentlemen, I appreciate as well the opportunity to appear again before this committee.

Despite the best efforts of the CFIA last summer, Canada bore witness to the tragic loss of life for 22 Canadians and serious illness for many others due to listeria contamination in ready-to-eat meats. It was a situation the likes of which we never want to see repeated. So the CFIA wholeheartedly supports the work of this committee and the independent investigator to provide recommendations that will further contribute to food safety in Canada and mitigate against any similar circumstance happening in the future.

Well before the appointment of the independent investigator and our first appearance before this committee, the CFIA undertook a thorough and frank review and analysis of our protocols, procedures, and activities as they related to the listeriosis outbreak. This important work was necessary to determine where vulnerabilities may have developed in an ever-changing and dynamic risk environment for our food safety system and to make immediate adjustments.

● (1910)

[Translation]

Armed with that knowledge and a resolve to maintain the highest standards of safety possible for the over 100 million meals consumed each and every day in Canada, we have turned our attention to the future. We have gained valuable insight as a result of the findings and lessons gained from the outbreak. Those insights have resulted in many key initiatives being brought forward which will demonstrably enhance protection for Canadians against this potentially lethal pathogen. Time does not permit me to outline all of the actions taken but allow me to cite a few examples for you.

[English]

Inspector training has been stepped up. This is especially necessary since we have mandated greater stringency in listeria environmental testing. Furthermore, we are strengthening our coordination with the other key players in the food safety network, such as Health Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and the provinces and territories and their public health units. Key among those partners, as Carole alluded to earlier, are the food producers themselves, whose commitment to the provision of safe food is also paramount.

Investments have also been made at the laboratory level. There is ongoing work to validate new and more rapid test methods and to increase our capacity collectively to conduct genetic fingerprinting. We are continuing to fine-tune a robust inspection regime called CVS, with the full engagement of our inspection staff, that aligns with HACCP principles, which is a strong and proven approach embraced by international leaders in food safety.

While the CFIA has taken these measures to enhance protection against the risk of listeria, taken alone they will not be enough. We need to look at the food safety network holistically to ensure that all contributors take strong action to prevent a similar tragedy from occurring in the future. Just as a chain is as strong as its weakest link, vulnerabilities in any of the elements of the production continuum can have dire food safety results. That is why I have been heartened to see representatives from other government authorities, industry, academia, and unions come before this committee to share their perspectives and commit to improvements to the system. We all have a role to play.

[Translation]

In hindsight, it is clear that opportunities were missed to both reduce the consequences of the contamination and to reduce the potential for contamination to occur.

It is our collective earnest desire and obligation to do better.

While improvement is always possible and necessary, I reject the notion put forward by some that CFIA resources and staffing were inadequate to meet the situation. The CFIA has more resources now than at any time in its history.

[English]

Food safety inspection numbers have steadily increased since the inception of the agency, as has the educational quality and competencies to perform these tasks. The same can be said of lab technicians and food safety investigators who were key players in determining the source of the contamination. Professionalism, passion for public service, and recognition of the importance of the work they do is the hallmark of CFIA employees. Those who say otherwise serve a different agenda and constituency.

The tragic loss of life may have been reduced or avoided if this type of food, with its known associated risk to vulnerable populations, had either been heated prior to serving or had not been served to the elderly or people with compromised immune systems, in line with the long-standing guidance from Health Canada. The contamination of product may have been averted or detected earlier if positive environmental results had been reported or assessed in more detail.

Another significant contributing factor to the timelines of the situation was the speed and quality of information flow between public health and food safety authorities. The proper collection, identification, handling, and testing of food samples was also a contributing factor to the time necessary to confirm contamination at production and not during preparation.

While information flow may not have been ideal, it is evident that all jurisdictions brought a high level of intent to protecting the public and getting to the answers as quickly as possible. While lives were unfortunately and regrettably lost or forever changed, your search through the evidence will inform you that no effort was spared and undoubtedly it prevented further illness and loss of life.

[Translation]

By all international standards, the food safety investigation was thorough and rapid, resulting in actions to recall even before the confirmation of the typing of the listeria as the same as the illnesses and a week before the first death was confirmed as due to the deli meat contamination.

• (1915)

[English]

There is one overarching theme that I would like to leave you with today, and that is complexity. The interaction and interventions of many players are required to provide safe food. That necessarily introduces complexity to our food safety regime. This complexity is further compounded by the globalization of food production, changing consumer demands, demographic shifts, new production and processing technologies, and so on. The nature and the sources of risks to food safety are evolving rapidly, and our inspection systems must keep pace.

To use a military metaphor—and I do so with some reluctance, in light of what was celebrated over the past weekend in terms of D-Day remembrance—the war against food safety risk is currently being prosecuted by an alliance of units, each with its own specialty and command structure. The enemy they face is dynamic and evolving. The terrain on which they fight is constantly shifting. That is a very challenging and complex environment. To expand on the metaphor further, what is required is a broad view of the campaign

and an understanding of all the assets that can be brought to bear on the challenge before us. Vision and strategy are required at the highest levels, while strong, coordinated execution is required from all the supporting units.

The CFIA is one of these many key assets in the defence against food-borne illness. We look forward to playing our part in executing the broader strategy that will be put forth by this committee and from the office of the independent investigator.

In closing, let me assure all members of the subcommittee that any and all who bring in earnest an ability to contribute to high standards of food safety and their effective implementation in Canada will find a committed, willing, and collaborative partner in the CFIA.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Swan and Mr. Evans.

We'll now move to questioning.

We will go first to Mr. Easter, for seven minutes.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank you folks for coming.

We called you back because there are some discrepancies between what you presented as CFIA officials at the initial meetings you attended and what other witnesses have told us. I'll get into that in a moment.

Both Ms. Swan and Mr. Evans have mentioned the independent investigator, Ms. Weatherill. Do either of you know if the minister has been interviewed yet? Maybe the parliamentary secretary can tell us.

Does anybody know? As of two weeks ago, he had not been.

Ms. Carole Swan: Mr. Chair, I'm not aware that...

Hon. Wayne Easter: He hadn't been, as of two weeks ago.

Anyway, Mr. Chair, maybe somebody could find out.

Mr. David Anderson: I think Mr. Easter has incorrect information. It's my understanding that he was interviewed. I'm not sure where he's getting his information.

Hon. Wayne Easter: He said he had a chat with her, but was he interviewed? Could the parliamentary secretary bring that to committee? We need that information, and it seems strange that he has not.

In any event, to be brutally honest to the officials from CFIA, I had more confidence in the Canadian Food Inspection Agency before we started this process than I do now.

I think everybody tries to do their best in the system, and I don't want to be overly critical. My point of view is that there was undue pressure on CFIA, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and others due to the political situation at the time. We can't seem to get an answer on that either. Certainly the Prime Minister and those in ministerial positions knew there was an impending election, and there seemed to be some concern over political fallout. Whether that had any influence on some of the delays that took place, I don't know. It seems to be a question we can't get answered.

I don't want people thinking this is a comment on them personally, but I do question that in this town we have a predominant majority of people in management positions who may not have come out of the industry they're supposed to be managing. In terms of senior management at CFIA, how many people are there in that level of management? What's the number? Second, how many have actually worked in the field of food inspection in their lives?

I don't want this to be taken personally by anybody, but I will admit right up front that I have a bias that in this town much of the management hasn't worked in the very industries in which they're required to act either as deputy ministers or managers. I have a problem with that, because I don't think the understanding is there on the ground.

Can you answer that question in terms of the number at the senior management level and the number who have actually worked in the field?

• (1920)

The Chair: Mr. Anderson.

Mr. David Anderson: I have a point of order. We've seen Mr. Easter try to basically smear people's reputations and the way they do their jobs throughout this set of hearings, and I think he's doing that again tonight. I'm a little bit disappointed in him, because if the folks in the senior management were all part of industry, he'd be complaining about that as well. Now he seems to be complaining or trying to find out whether they are a part of it or not.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I have a point of order. That's just Mr. Anderson's rhetoric.

I have a serious issue here, Mr. Chair.

Mr. David Anderson: That has nothing to do with whether they can do their job or not. I think Mr. Easter needs to actually take a look at what he's doing here and why he's trying to derail this hearing one more time. I'm very disappointed in him.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I want to make a record of this—

The Chair: It's not a point of order, but what you're saying, Mr. Easter, is that unless all of us on this committee were involved in agriculture we don't deserve to—

Hon. Wayne Easter: No, that's not what I'm saying. And if it's not a point of order, then why are you commenting on it, Mr. Chair?

I expressed at the beginning, and I express in all seriousness, that this is not a comment on any people in management, but it's something I'm concerned about.

Can somebody answer my question in terms of how many are actually involved in the system and understand it in its entirety?

Ms. Carole Swan: Mr. Chair, thank you for the question.

I can tell you that at the most senior levels of the CFIA we have a mixture between people who have a background in one of the three predecessor departments that formed the CFIA, some people who have actually worked in the field in the CFIA, and others who have come to the senior level of the CFIA more recently.

If you look lower in our executive ranks, you will again find that mixture. A number of people have “grown up”, as it were, in the CFIA. A number of people have joined the CFIA more recently. I can tell you that without question the CFIA, both at senior levels and levels throughout the organization, are committed to the mandate and responsibilities of the CFIA, regardless of where they come from originally.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Thank you, Ms. Swan.

On the question of inspectors, I think, Mr. Prince, you indicated that inspectors spend 50% of their time on the floor of the facilities. That was certainly contradicted by the Agricultural Union president and inspection personnel in testimony before this subcommittee. I expect that you've seen the evidence. Could you give us your interpretation?

Secondly, whoever has responsibility for training... I think it was mentioned in your presentation, Brian, that training is important. But I was told by one of the witnesses here—after the meeting, I will admit—that he had seven opportunities to take training but he could only take one of those training sessions because there weren't enough personnel to replace him to take training. That's the other factor. And we do know the episode this summer and this fall on the swapping that happened, where people were found not to be trained to do the job.

I have two questions, really. What is the time on the floor? Is it 50%? Is it less than that? On training, are people actually able to take the training—due to the lack of replacement personnel, so that they can in fact take it?

Mr. Cameron Prince (Vice-President, Operations, Canadian Food Inspection Agency): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Easter for the question.

With respect to the amount of time that inspectors spend on the plant floor versus record review, the 50% is a number we stand by as a number that globally describes the amount of time inspectors across the country, in a wide variety of plants, spend on the plant floor. There is a wide variety of sizes of plants, risks associated with plants, the number of CVS tasks that have to be done and the nature of those tasks, so it may be that in one plant an inspector may find that it's 30% or 35%, or it could be the other way. We have data that would substantiate the 50%, so I simply want to emphasize that there's no magic number here. The 50% time spent on the floor versus record review is not necessarily directly related to food safety outcomes. It's about the whole system. It's about doing the right thing, doing the tasks that get at the greatest level of risk.

In answer to the second part, the training, I want to emphasize that all inspectors who delivered the CVS program, when it was initiated last year—every single inspector—had the appropriate level of training with the required amount of training necessary before they could enter into their full-time duties in implementing CVS. These inspectors received what we called FSE, food safety enhancement, HACCP training. There are three modules there; they received those. They learned about audit there. They learned about HACCP. And then that was added to with the CVS training, which was three and a half days, followed by mentoring by more senior inspectors. As a result, we feel very confident in saying that as far as CVS implementation and HACCP, our inspectors who have been involved have been fully trained.

As to your point about freeing people up in order to get the training, I would acknowledge that is an issue, not with respect to CVS food safety essential training, but training that.... In slaughter plants, our inspectors must be there, and we always have to have a full complement of inspectors there. That makes it difficult at times to schedule training. That is the reality of our business, but that is not to say that essential training in relation to HACCP and CVS was not implemented.

• (1925)

The Chair: Mr. Bellavance, seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: On the listeriosis issue, I am sure that no one deliberately did anything to cause that situation and that no one wanted it to happen, but it did happen.

There are two aspects concerning how the crisis and the period after the crisis were managed where I feel the various parties involved should not be contradicting one another so much. That is why it is important to be hearing your testimony once again, since a number of other witnesses have come before the committee since your first appearance, and we have heard contradictory evidence about the crisis.

The time has come to make sure that taxpayers... People often say that it is the public who pays the salaries of members of Parliament, ministers, etc. And we are accountable to the public. The same is true for the public service. All of your salaries are paid for by the public, which has a right to all the transparency, and of course, the whole truth, since this crisis resulted in deaths and people certainly had cause for concern. This failure in the food safety system definitely caused a crisis of confidence as well with respect to our food safety system.

I would like to point out some of these contradictions to you. Of course, I have no need to ask you to be transparent, since I did so in my introduction. On April 20, 2009, when you appeared before the committee, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency told us that the information about the listeriosis outbreak had been received on August 6, 2008.

We then received testimony and a report from Dr. David Williams, the Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario. He told us that he had notified the agency about the situation on July 29, 2008. In an e-mail dated May 27, 2009, the Ontario Minister of Health and Long-Term Care also told us that notification had taken place on July 29.

That is a discrepancy of just a few days, but we know that in a crisis of this kind days and hours are extremely important when it comes to taking action and dealing with the problem head on. Where does this contradiction come from? Explain that to me.

• (1930)

[*English*]

Ms. Carole Swan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I can assure members that the CFIA comes here with full transparency.

Before I answer that question, I would suggest that while I recognize that confidence, perhaps, has been shaken—there is anytime there is illness or death—to state that there is a crisis of confidence in our system is perhaps a little overstated. I think we all need to recognize that food safety is a challenge.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Ms. Swan, I am going to interrupt you because I am not suggesting that confidence has been shaken. I do not know if you talk to local people like I do, but I can tell you that people's confidence in the food safety system was indeed affected by what happened. There was a great deal of concern.

I am not saying that people stopped eating. On the contrary, we make sure that people in that situation get the reassurance they need. I am not trying to create panic, but I do not feel I am exaggerating when I say that people's confidence in our food safety system has been shaken. When this happened, 22 people died. So people had a right to wonder what had happened.

So please answer my question about the date. That is what I am interested in. That is the question I asked you. You told us when you testified that the agency was informed on August 6, whereas we were told by the Ontario Health Minister and the Chief Medical Officer that you were notified on July 29.

Why is there this discrepancy between the two dates?

[*English*]

Ms. Carole Swan: Mr. Chair, let me begin, and I will ask Paul Mayers to give more detail on the system I'm about to describe.

In fact, the CFIA was first informed directly of information on possible listeriosis illness on August 6. On July 29, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care in Ontario posted a message on a network called the Canadian Network for Public Health Intelligence, noting that there was an increase in listeria cases across Ontario and asking health units to post new listeria cases on an integrated public health information system.

There was no mention at that time in the posting of this information of a cluster of illnesses, or of an outbreak, or of a link to food. In short, when this information was posted on a network by the Ontario ministry, there was nothing for CFIA or the Public Health Agency to act on at that point in time. I just want to be very clear that this information was posted on an Internet network as opposed to a direct communication to CFIA. The direct communication to CFIA came on August 6.

If you would like, Paul can explain—

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: No, that will do for the moment.

On July 29, you were aware of the message, even though you say that it was not directly addressed to you.

Yes or no?

[English]

Mr. Paul Mayers (Associate Vice-President, Programs, Canadian Food Inspection Agency): Let me be clear. We had no knowledge on July 29 of an outbreak, nor did anyone else in the system. The CNPHI, the Canadian Network for Public Health Intelligence, system and the Kiosk system that is used to exchange information are simply a means of reporting information in the public health system.

The CFIA monitors that system, as do our partners in other provinces and our colleagues in Health Canada and the Canadian Public Health Agency. That system, as our president noted, simply provides a means for the public health communities to draw attention to when changes from the normal background occur.

That's what happened in this situation. They indeed posted information that there were some additional cases of listeriosis occurring in the province of Ontario, and they asked public health units to be vigilant in their reporting. At that time there was no directing of information to CFIA, nor was there any information that could even provide a linkage as to a potential source or attribution for those cases.

The Chair: Sorry, I don't mean to interrupt.

Mr. Paul Mayers: That's quite all right, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You're finished? Okay.

Your time has expired, Mr. Bellavance.

Mr. Allen, seven minutes.

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

Mr. Evans, I'll refer you back to page 2 of your notes that you read into the record as part of your presentation. It's the fifth paragraph down, where you say, "I reject the notion put forward by some that CFIA resources and staffing were inadequate to meet the situation." I take it that you mean the situation last year.

Let me just quote another piece from a document that was put together on January 26, 2009, the summary of findings and action plan, for the minister and presidents of CFIA. It says, "inspection program experiencing workload challenges in meeting delivery requirements". Can someone square the circle for me? Clearly, Dr. Evans, you're saying you don't have an issue with staffing and the report to the minister says the inspection program experiences workload challenges in meeting delivery requirements. That was this year—January.

• (1935)

Dr. Brian Evans: Mr. Chair, thank you for the question.

I don't think it's a difficult thing to square that circle. What I indicated in my opening remarks was simply that there have been those who have brought testimony to this committee suggesting that an additional number of inspectors would have prevented this from

happening. What I said in my report is that an absolute number of inspectors is not the solution to this problem. We've heard testimony from many witnesses who have talked about the fact that a physical inspection presence will not detect these types of issues, which are not available to be seen by the eyes and cannot be picked up by any sensory process. It has been testified by many that there was an issue around this particular circumstance that brought forward new knowledge around the potential for certain equipment to harbour material that had not been proven before, so my assertion is one of saying that an absolute number of inspectors was not going to prevent this problem from happening.

To further square the circle, Mr. Chair, on the issue around challenges in terms of workload issues, again in this plant we have evidence that has been presented, and can be further documented, that in fact all the CVS tasks required in this plant were delivered, and delivered to over 100% of the requirement as outlined in terms of the food safety program in that plant.

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Now that we've made a triangle, perhaps you can explain to me—and I'll look at Ms. Swan on this because this is from a report from you to the minister, that you experienced workload challenges; the "inspection program [is] experiencing workload challenges in meeting delivery requirements". What did you mean by that?

Ms. Carole Swan: Following the listeria incident, as part of our lessons learned, we took a very hard look at our inspection forces, at our inspection programs. It is a normal part of dealing with a large inspection force that we are obliged to move resources to areas of highest risk on occasion. We also, as Cam has mentioned in regard to a question asked earlier this evening, have sometimes a challenge in terms of making sure that we have adequate relief for some of our inspectors, primarily in slaughter, to be able to leave their posts to take training. I think it is fair to say that we use the inspectors that we have the best we possibly can. In looking at how we deliver our inspection programs, we did look at workload, and we have made some changes as a result of that, particularly in terms of the number of facilities inspectors have. Workload is something we must take into consideration. It's something we continuously look at.

Mr. Malcolm Allen: I think I understand that, because I've seen your numbers, and I appreciate Mr. Prince's getting those numbers to me eventually. This whole sense of how we count or don't count, and how we do them....

Your sets, sir, really give me four sets of data on one set of numbers that has been presented to us, and none of them comes to the same number. I'll leave that just as a comment, rather than a question. If you go back in the record and look at them, none of them adds up to the same number. Not one of those four sets of numbers actually comes to the same number at the end. So I don't know, somebody failed arithmetic somewhere.

Let me ask you, Ms. Swan, about a phone log, or lack thereof. Going back to last year, do you remember having phone conversations with representatives of Maple Leaf Foods at any point in time last year?

•(1940)

Ms. Carole Swan: I would have had a number of conversations with representatives of Maple Leaf Foods, both in terms of the closure of the plant and the very detailed protocol that the agency put in place in order to allow the plant to have a phased re-opening.

Mr. Malcolm Allen: During those, did you keep any logs?

Ms. Carole Swan: I don't typically keep logs. I may keep a scribbled note on occasion. I don't have a large system of keeping logs. No, I don't.

Mr. Malcolm Allen: So the information provided to us at committee, because we had asked for it, was that you had conversations with Maple Leaf Foods on August 25 and 28, September 12 and 17, October 10 and 14, and November 7 of 2008, and you didn't have any logs. Do you have any memory of what those conversations would be about?

It just seems to me that in the middle of a situation as serious as we were witnessing last year, it is really unusual, at least in August—perhaps not in November, but at least in August—that you wouldn't have made some notes about a conversation you had with representatives from a plant that we now know had contaminated the food. You made not one note you were able to give to us.

Ms. Carole Swan: Mr. Chair, let me tell you that all of the decisions about plant closure, plant re-opening, and plant protocol were made at the regional level, at the level of people who were most familiar with the plant.

I do not have the log of conversations in front of me. Michael McCain on occasion would call me. These were not issues that related to the specific issues of what was happening in the plant. Those decisions very clearly were being made at the operational level.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Allen. Your time has expired.

Mr. Anderson, you have seven minutes.

Mr. David Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

One thing I wanted to point out, to answer Mr. Easter's questions, is that the minister did meet with the independent investigator, and the minister's office is willing to send an e-mail to the chair and clerk tomorrow with the date of that meeting. So they will provide the information.

The Chair: Is there a point of order?

Hon. Wayne Easter: When the parliamentary secretary is doing that, could he tell us how long the minister met as well? We don't want it to be a five-minute fireside chat.

Mr. David Anderson: I don't have that information here, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Evans, I want to go back to the inspectors issue. You said in your comments that you have adequate resources. Do you feel that you have the number of inspectors you need?

I'd like you to talk a little bit about the role some of the lab folks play as well. When Mr. Kingston was here, he seemed to say that it had to be all inspectors all the time, and it's clear that there need to be some other people involved in this issue as well. Would you talk about that a little bit?

Dr. Brian Evans: Thank you, honourable member.

Mr. Chairman, my comments, I think, echo those that have been made previously by myself and others in testimony before this committee. The fact is that food safety is not delivered by any one point of inspection. Food safety is a continuum of activities. It is a culture of commitment that starts, as has been indicated by many before, with the stewardship that we benefit from in Canada from an industry that at a producer level takes the food safety commitment very seriously.

I believe you've had testimony from others who have talked about on-farm HACCP programs and the commitment that various industry sectors have brought to incorporating HACCP principles as prerequisites to the HACCP that we apply at slaughter and at processing.

Again from that perspective, what we have done at CFIA is ensure that the resources allocated to us as an agency cover the spectrum of risk, so that we can mitigate risk at multiple points along that continuum, from our activities of ensuring that the animals entering the food system are healthy, through good disease control and zoonotic control programs to ensure that animals at the point of slaughter receive appropriate ante-mortem and post-mortem inspection to ensure that only healthy and fit animals are used to produce food in this country. That oversight extends through multiple layers of processing, including deboning and further processing, with inspection activities that support the type of work that is absolutely essential to dealing with the types of risks, such as listeriosis, that you cannot detect through physical inspection processes. We have ensured that we have appropriate lab capacity to adequately sample and perform tests that are delivered to gold standards to validate what the environment is telling us now and what end product can tell us as a subset of verification of the activities.

I think you have heard testimony from academic and other experts who reiterated that you cannot inspect or test your way to food safety. The reality is that technologies can be applied to achieve food safety outcomes, but what is critical to the agency is ensuring that we have the capacity at all points along that production continuum with the appropriate competence to ensure that there is no weak link in the chain that we can identify.

I am very confident that as an agency we continue to make good investments in terms of our recruitment and in terms of our training, both within CFIA and in working with those who train inspectors before they even join the organization, through outreach to agricultural and veterinary schools and through the teaching curriculums, to make sure people come to the agency with a wealth of experience and knowledge that will be critical to food safety.

•(1945)

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Kingston talked about inspectors when he was speaking to us as well. I don't know whether he implied or said that inspectors in the RT plants each have an average of four to six plants for which they are responsible.

Are all plants the same size as that 97B plant, and are those numbers accurate?

Dr. Brian Evans: Mr. Chair, thanks to the honourable member for the question.

Mr. Prince in his testimony has fairly clearly indicated that the deployment of our inspection staff is a reflection of both the size and risk associated with the types of plants they provide inspection services for.

I believe that in the commentary he was providing to the committee, Mr. Kingston was making reference to more than just processing plants. The reality is that it has been recognized that within various complexes an individual may work in a processing plant, including meat processing; he may also have responsibility for cold storage, which has a whole different set of CVS tasks and time commitments associated with it. We recognize this and have taken significant efforts as a result of direct engagement with our inspector community to ensure that the workload associated with various complexes is looked at and adjusted accordingly.

I think it's important that we recognize that the food industry in Canada is not static. We have new plants that open; we have plants that close. As CFIA, we have a regulatory obligation to provide inspection services. In many cases, plants want to go to double or triple shifts, and we have to adjust our inspection regime to meet those demands. To the fullest extent possible, that is done with the full understanding that we will provide that level of service and will provide it in a way that maintains the food safety standard that is warranted to protect Canadians.

Mr. David Anderson: We've had a bit of a discussion about the issue of shared responsibility. Ms. Swan made those comments when you were here the first time, and tonight we had another witness who talked about the fact that there is a shared responsibility across the spectrum on this issue.

Is there any reference in the Food and Drugs Act or the 2003 Codex or those kinds of things that would affirm what you're saying?

Dr. Brian Evans: Maybe Paul Mayers could speak to the regulatory statutes.

Mr. Paul Mayers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Food and Drugs Act is clear in its direct placement of the responsibility for providing safe food on the producer. As an example, section 4 of the act states:

- (1) No person shall sell an article of food that
- (a) has in or on it any poisonous or harmful substance

The CFIA Act equally makes clear the responsibility of the CFIA in oversight. In her opening remarks, Ms. Swan noted the shared responsibility that we have with Health Canada, whereby Health Canada sets the standards and the CFIA provides the regulatory oversight in relation to compliance.

Provincial legislation sets out quite clearly the responsibility for foods produced and distributed within a province in terms of assurance of the safety of those foods.

And internationally, as you noted, the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the standard-setting body for foods, also recognizes

the shared responsibility that exists among all players in the food production continuum and the role that consumers have in handling and preparing foods to facilitate their safety.

So indeed, there are a number of such documents that recognize that shared responsibility.

Mr. David Anderson: Do I have a couple more minutes?

The Chair: I'm sorry, your time is up, Mr. Anderson.

Mr. David Anderson: I can keep going, if you'd like.

The Chair: I know you can.

Ms. Bennett, you have five minutes.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I have some concerns that in these issues that cross a number of government departments and a number of jurisdictions, we haven't had a clear message from anybody as to how you go forward. There are three reports from your agency, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and Health Canada. Probably the clearest report is the one coming from Ontario, in that they just have one report and the recommendations are very clear. I guess I'm concerned that even if there are three reports.... The Public Health Agency of Canada report came out in December, but your report, which only came out in April, doesn't really deal with the things that were raised in the Public Health Agency's report.

The lack of a revision to FIORP and a communications plan is not dealt with in your report. And I guess the idea of the MOUs....

It was clear that H1N1 was easier to deal with because there was practise and meetings and pandemic preparedness and whatever. I think a lot of people feel this really caught people off guard in a certain way. There doesn't really seem to be a plan. FIORP hadn't been revised since 1999, before the Public Health Agency even existed. Communications was the big, huge problem in this. Canadians didn't seem to know who was in charge or who was calling the shots, other than Michael McCain, who was the face of this.

I want to know how you will go forward. You have three different reports that contradict one another. Can you table with the committee how you're going forward, to make sure this doesn't happen again? You seem to have a different view than the Public Health Agency or Health Canada or the Ontario government.

The second part of that is if there is a plan, are you testing that plan in tabletop exercises? How often will you plan to do that? And what can we see going forward that would give us any confidence that this wouldn't happen again?

● (1950)

Ms. Carole Swan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The three lessons learned documents that were prepared by the three federal departments/agencies involved were in fact developed individually by the agencies, but with a great deal of communication and connection amongst the three. The areas of responsibility have some overlap. When we look collectively at the lessons learned—and we have, along with our counterparts in the Public Health Agency and Health Canada—I think it's very clear that the lessons learned by all three of them indicate that we do need improvements. We need improvements in better early warning systems. We need strengthened control measures. We need better engagement with public health partners.

We are committed to following up individually as an agency and together with our partner, the department of Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada, in actually implementing specific actions in relation to the lessons learned. We take this very seriously. We've been working on them. We continue to work on them.

Some of it has to do, in fact, with tabletop, as you mentioned. I think that's a very good way of testing to make sure that we have the right provisions in place to make sure that we're able to move forward.

On communications, I would say that during the period of recall there was great media availability both of Dr. Butler-Jones on the public health side and Dr. Brian Evans in terms of the food safety side. We attempted to make sure that Canadians understood the nature of the recalls. We were in a situation where we had multiple recalls owing to the extensive nature of the distribution of the contaminated food. We are looking at how we put out recall information. That is something that we are going to follow up on in detail.

The Chair: Very briefly.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Go to another round, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Shipley, five minutes.

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

Thanks again to the witnesses for attending this evening.

If we look at where we were, where we're going, and where we are now in terms of food safety, public health safety, we've heard from not only your federal counterparts, the agencies, but also from provincial witnesses who have been here. We've all looked at and gone over lessons learned from the event that happened last summer. We're now going through another event with the H1N1 influenza.

On the circumstances of last summer and some of the circumstances that have unfolded with the H1N1 influenza, what has improved and what is being changed due to the lessons learned? Do you have any comments on that?

• (1955)

Dr. Brian Evans: An important reality that I hope this committee embraces is that this is about continuous learning. This is about continuous improvement in responding to a very dynamic and changing global risk environment we live in as it relates to both food and—as I'm sure the honourable member herself would say—infectious disease reality.

I believe efforts were made with the best available intent to deal with listeriosis—the availability to conduct technical briefings; the

availability of our food recall people to conduct hundreds of media interviews; efforts to make sure information was available not only through the website but through 1-800 call lines, where the general public could call in if they had any concerns or questions about products. Those were very heavily utilized. When one looks at that broad outreach, the mechanics of what we did in listeria are not significantly different from the mechanics of H1N1.

But some of the differences around communication on H1N1 are reflective of the broader reality in dealing with that type of issue. Whereas in listeriosis we were dealing initially with a single province, with the H1N1 we were dealing with multiple locations very quickly. So I think the general engagement happened very early with H1N1, just because of the very nature of how that disease was spreading. It spread very quickly in the community after the initial spreading from direct contact with those who had been travelling to high-risk areas.

The issue around H1N1 also forces us to think about an area where we have asked for the guidance of this committee: what is the threshold that should signal a public advisory of an issue? I think there are those who would suggest that to a large extent H1N1 had very good public penetration. There are probably those out there who would also say that the communications around H1N1 unfortunately probably led to a significant level of public anxiety, because people were getting information from international sources and others. So part of that is recognizing the threshold for informing the public without alarming the public. That comes back to the desire to seek from this committee their best advice on when public engagement is appropriate to take place when there is information that the public can act on.

Mr. Bev Shipley: There may be two different aspects to it. With listeria it's very complex; it's very difficult to actually identify the bacteria, where it came from, and what was involved with it. H1N1 was easier to identify as an influenza.

Is that correct?

Dr. Brian Evans: I believe testimony you've heard from a number of sources is that the incubation period for listeria can be quite protracted in healthy individuals and somewhat shorter in those who have other underlying health issues. As was indicated by representatives from Ontario, that epidemiological investigation takes a long period of time dealing with something like listeria. The issue earlier on is that because listeria and a vast majority of food-borne illnesses in this country are the result of inappropriate handling and preparation of food, there's the need to go further and determine where the source of contamination took place. So certainly the investigation phase on listeria was much longer than you would see on influenza, where there's very rapid spreading by direct contact.

• (2000)

Mr. Bev Shipley: I think one of the things we heard, maybe it was last week, was an allegation that CFIA acted too slowly, that you didn't communicate with your provincial partners on a timely or very effective basis, that you didn't take the proactive steps that should have been there to block their assistance, block their intervention. I'm wondering if this is true.

I want to go back to the second part you touched on, that there's some suggestion that maybe we should start to use a precautionary principle rather than the principle that is used now, which is based on science. My concern would be that you get alarms going out before you know what the circumstances are. I'm just wondering, I don't think we ever want the agency to be perceived as crying wolf. We have to base ourselves on something, and science seems to be that something.

Do you have any comments about that?

Dr. Brian Evans: Thank you for the question.

Honourable Chair, I think the fundamental principle, again, is one of finding that correct balance where you can give information to the public that is actionable for them, so they can take that information and turn that into an action they can take to protect themselves. I think it's very clear, in reviewing the circumstances of last summer, that while there was a tragic loss of life of 22 people, when one looks at the totality of the health information, the vast majority of those illnesses and more dire consequences were the result of exposures of those individuals to the food source before CFIA was even aware there was a potential food contamination issue. The incubation period was one where the exposure had taken place before we were brought to the table.

In exercising the efforts from the 6th of August to the 16th, with regard to the sharing of information, when one looks at the evidence, in terms of what information we had available, what information Toronto Public Health had available, the reality is that we were all collectively working to find that solution as quickly as possible. The CFIA, on the 13th of August, took the initiative to bring the community together when we became aware of secondary investigations beyond the primary investigation by Toronto Public Health. We started to make sure that everybody was sharing the information they had in as timely a way as possible and that this information could be used by everybody around the table within the scope of their regulatory and jurisdictional authorities.

It concerns me that there is a suggestion that we were in any way obstructive to the work of other jurisdictions. I think that suggestion is most unfortunate and disrespectful, given the body of evidence that has been assembled around that. The reality is that from our perspective, the decision to go to recall late on the 16th, early on the 17th, was arrived at when all we knew was that we had L. mono and we could confirm there was a contamination at a production source. We didn't have the PFGE pattern. Because of that, we couldn't even confirm that this product linked to illnesses with a common PFGE pattern. That was seven days later, after the recall was issued.

So again, I believe that when one looks at the actions that were taken, with the evidence that was known at the time—two illnesses up until August 6, a second pair of illnesses on August 12—we were investigating four illnesses, and from that point forward, within four days we had done a recall. Against any international event I can find over the past number of years, international standards such as they are, people would look at that and say that was an amazing level of investigation, an amazing early determination, and the appropriate call in terms of a recall, to do that as early as they did it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Easter, five minutes.

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

I want to come back to the issue that Mr. Bellavance raised earlier, Mr. Mayers, because it relates to the timing on being informed, as you claimed, on August 6, wasn't it?

Anyway, we have an e-mail from the executive director of the communications and information branch of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Kevin Finnerty. I'll give this letter to the chair and you can get it copied, because I think this needs to be looked at a little more.

I'll quote the paragraph:

We understand that there was an error in the report regarding the teleconference that was held on July 30th. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) does not have evidence to suggest that the CFIA was included on this particular teleconference.

Then it goes on to say:

However, the ministry does have evidence that the CFIA was advised of the increase in the listeriosis cases in Ontario on July 29th by MOHLTC, first directly by telephone and email and then via a posting on the Canadian Integrated Outbreak Surveillance Centre notification service.

And it goes on from there.

I will table that. I don't expect any more answer than you gave, unless you can answer it now, but it does need to be checked and we need.... Somebody has their information wrong, either at your end or their end.

● (2005)

Mr. Paul Mayers: Thank you.

Through you, Mr. Chairman, the situation is no different than I described. We absolutely agree that, as Ontario notes, through CIOOSC, the CFIA was informed that there was an increase in the number of listeriosis cases being experienced in Ontario on the 29th, and I've noted that is the case. However, also as we've noted, the information presented on the 29th was just that, that Ontario was experiencing an increased number of listeriosis cases; no information on source, no indication that these cases were linked to food. In fact, there was no indication that these cases could be attributed to anything at that point. That is not in dispute.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Okay. They do say that you were notified by telephone and e-mail. Were you as well? In your earlier answer you kind of indicated that it was the posting on the Canadian Integrated Outbreak Surveillance Centre that you got your information from.

Mr. Paul Mayers: We certainly do get our information from CIOOSC—that is the acronym.

In terms of e-mail or telephone, I don't have that information personally, but it would be the same information.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Okay.

As well, this question is to you, Brian. In documents presented to the committee, notes from a meeting between Maple Leaf and yourself on July 24, 2008, they contain the following reference to meat inspection, and I quote:

Risk environment is changing and inspection mechanisms have to switch accordingly.

Cannot maintain public trust in the quality of our food....

And it is “maintain” the quality, not food safety. It says:

Cannot maintain public trust in the quality of our food if we continue to do things the way they've been done.

Can you indicate what you were referring to? Do you recall or can you give us an explanation on that? And I do want to emphasize for the record, and for anybody who may be listening, that the comment was in reference to quality, not food safety, because there is confusion between the two.

Dr. Brian Evans: Yes. Thank you for the question.

Again, my personal notes from that meeting I think very clearly indicated that this was a meeting that had been originally scheduled for February of 2008. It was delayed because I was not available to meet the Maple Leaf representative in February. We touched on a number of issues that day, seven or eight different agenda items.

With regard to the particular reference to the changing environment in which we operate and its impact on maintaining public confidence in the quality of food, that was really touching on the issue of traceability and the fact that, in fair terms, this is a company that exports to a number of countries around the world. They had specific interest in certain markets.

We were alluding in our discussions to two things. One was from the food safety perspective. Again, playing against that backdrop, you will recall that in the fall of 2007, the U.S. had brought in additional testing requirements to be applied to imports of products from Canada. The question we were dealing with at the time was that while those were brought in for a short period of time, the United States basically found that the Canadian imports were meeting their requirements and they reverted back to the standard level of testing. The question that Maple Leaf was raising was whether Canada was in fact prepared to provide that same level of testing on imports.

Again, what we were alluding to in our discussions was that where we have traceability, where we can determine, in fact, that countries are investing to the same standard as Canada in both food safety and food quality, then we should not be using the border as the way to try to level that playing field. In fact, the mitigations for traceability and the mitigations on food safety should take place pre-border by audits and verifications in those countries. The inspection systems in those countries should adapt to the global reality.

• (2010)

The Chair: Thank you.

Your time has expired, Mr. Easter.

Mr. Bellavance, five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: I only have five minutes, which is very short. So I will ask you a series of questions that you may be able to answer later, once you have taken note of them. I think that will be the easiest way.

Ms. Swan, my first question is for you and it concerns a letter that you sent and that was co-signed by Dr. Butler-Jones, from the Public Health Agency of Canada, and Mr. Rosenberg from Health Canada. On April 20, 2009, you wrote to the Ontario Health authorities to tell them that they had sent the samples to the wrong place. You indicated that they should have been sent to the Canadian Food

Inspection Agency laboratory in Scarborough rather than to Health Canada.

In his testimony on April 23, 2009, that is, three days after he signed the letter, Mr. Butler-Jones told us here in the committee that the Ontario Ministry of Health officials actually did the right thing by sending the samples to Health Canada. So I would like to know whether you too have changed your mind about this.

I would also like to know what you think the ideal ratio would be in terms of the number of plants that each inspector should be responsible for. Do you have enough inspectors to implement that ratio? In the case of the Maple Leaf plant where this unfortunate incident took place, we know that a single inspector was responsible for seven plants. I think that he is now responsible for just one plant. From the start of the subcommittee's study, it has been clear to everyone here that one inspector being responsible for five, six or seven plants was much too high a ratio. In your opinion, what is the ideal ratio? Do you have enough inspectors for that ratio?

Furthermore, is it normal practice for inspection reports to be changed well after the fact, as we have heard about here in testimony? Is it customary in the agency for inspectors to have to make changes to their reports weeks after writing them? Former agency employees have told us that that is not the usual practice.

Dr. Williams, who is also Ontario's Chief Medical Officer, told us that there was a lack of compliance with the CFIA's emergency protocol in the sense that you were supposed to set up an emergency operation centre and that was not done. I would like to hear your comments on that.

Finally, on the product recall, we heard testimony here in the subcommittee that you allowed Maple Leaf to issue voluntary recalls and that the alert was sent out three days after Ontario provided notification of the problem.

That is my list of questions for the moment.

[*English*]

Ms. Carole Swan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There are a number of questions there. Let me take them in order. First, in regard to the letter that we prepared for Dr. Williams and the issue of the use of the Scarborough lab, our intention was not to indicate that it was the wrong place to send the samples to, but rather a missed opportunity. But if it had been clearer that we were dealing potentially with a very serious food-borne illness, sending the samples to the CFIA Scarborough lab would have expedited the process and we would have had the results quicker.

Secondly, in terms of inspectors, it is true...and I have mentioned that we have looked at the appropriate ratio of plants to inspectors. I would point out that in the case of the inspector at Maple Leaf—and there were in fact two inspectors, and other inspectors—there was a combination of ready-to-eat meat plants and also cold storage. So there were different obligations for inspection, and different timeframes. We have taken a look, especially in our southern Ontario complexes, at what the workload should ideally be. When I'm finished, I will ask Cam to perhaps come back on that one in detail.

On the inspection reports, they were quite clearly added to. They were not changed in the sense of anything being deleted. During the very detailed investigation of what happened at Maple Leaf, when we sent in our very specialized food safety auditors, the food safety auditors recommended to the inspectors that in fact they should add additional information to the record. It was not that they should change the record, or edit the record, or remove anything from the record, but rather that additional information should be added to it for the purpose of understanding what had happened—which was our goal, to really understand what happened. I imagine that's not usual, in the sense that it's not usual that we have such extreme investigations of situations in plants where there have been such issues.

In regard to the emergency centre, one of the lessons learned was that we did not set up our national emergency operation centre for this. In retrospect, it would have been helpful, particularly on the documentation side, because it does contain some very stringent protocols for reporting daily information. At the time, however, we knew what we knew at the time, which was that we had a small number of listeria illnesses. We were tracing them out as a food safety investigation. We did put all of our resources, in terms of our recall and investigation, to this. So even though the emergency centre wasn't set up, we had a very thorough response, a very immediate response, with our food safety investigation.

On the question of recall and allowing Maple Leaf to do a recall, the minister does have the power to require mandatory recalls. In the vast majority of cases, industry does voluntary recalls. In this case, the recall was initiated very, very quickly after CFIA determined that in fact there was a sample from Maple Leaf that had tested positive for listeria. As Dr. Evans testified earlier this evening, at that point we only had an indication that it was a listeria species—that it was mono, not the PFGE pattern. So we couldn't, at that point, even necessarily directly connect it to a specific illness and a specific product, but in the interests of precaution, the recall was issued.

Cam, would you just speak for a minute about the issue of inspectors?

● (2015)

Mr. Cameron Prince: Yes.

I'll be quick, Mr. Chair.

It's very hard to talk about an ideal number of plants per inspector. I'm not trying to avoid the question, but the reality is that because plants have varying degrees of complexity, size, and geography, and the time it takes to get to them, there are a lot of factors that come into play when you're deciding how many plants each inspector will have.

Our information in the first year of CVS indicates that we are meeting the targets of CVS. We have just slightly over three plants per inspector, but again, I want to caution you that it varies widely. And it certainly does in the case of the inspector at Maple Leaf. Because the plant isn't fully back to where it was, we feel it is important that we have increased inspection and attention in that particular plant. So that inspector has one plant at the moment.

We adjust these constantly around the country. We adjust the number of plants per inspector based on the risk.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Allen, five minutes.

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

Perhaps I'll start with a comment. My colleagues always want to mention the precautionary principle as if it's not science. But it seems to me, if I remember my biology class from many years ago, that the precautionary principle really is about science. It's just simply an alarm bell, if you will. It's like the canary in the old coal mine. When the canary dies, you know that carbon monoxide is going up, so get out. That's called the precautionary principle.

So it's not as if this is not based on science. It's not voodoo economics, as we thought about what happened in the United States, when the previous President was there and someone talked about his economic theories. It is based on science.

I think, Mr. Evans, you would accept the fact that it is a science-based term, the precautionary principle. It is based on a certain amount of science. It's not an absolute. In other words, we don't wait for folks to die in the coal mine. They get out, because the canary died; that's why it's the precautionary principle.

Let me go back to this sense of.... You've clearly said, and what I've just heard now again, and clearly it's in your documentation, that you've increased the amount of inspection at the Maple Leaf Foods plant, the Bartor Road place, where all of this stemmed from.

In your comments, Brian, again on page 2 near the bottom, you said, "The contamination of product may have been averted or detected earlier if positive environmental results had been reported or assessed in more detail." That basically aligns with the summary of findings between Ms. Swan and the minister in part of the overview and the lessons learned. It said, "In depth assessment of plant revealed that MLF experienced challenges in environmental control and sanitation in May and June 2008." Those two match. I would call those two circles, and they certainly overlap.

What it says to me, and I'd like you to either confirm or not, is clearly we didn't have enough inspection there in May and June, based on what we've done now. Albeit, maybe we have one person in there, or two; depending on the shifts that are being run, you may not have that. Mr. Prince may decide it won't be necessary, that number going forward, because of the experience we had.

Clearly we weren't looking for a microbe when we talked about sanitation and environmental control. We were talking about things like condensation. We were talking about things not being cleaned properly. We were not talking about looking for the listeria microbe, which, everyone always keeps saying, you can't see.

You haven't found anybody on this committee, especially on this side, ever refuting that. Of course you can't see it. You know, I didn't buy these glasses that I wear today on the back of a comic book, where you can buy glasses that can see everything in the world. So we know that we can't see it. But we can see the environment when it's not good, and the report fully indicates that it wasn't.

Your additional comments here, Brian, are that if we had gotten a good assessment, it could have come from two places: (a) CFIA's inspector, if he'd had more time to be there, or (b) the inspector that the HACCP program allows to be inside the plant, based on the plant's HACCP program, if it had been reporting properly. If the program had been working correctly, it could have told us something, and we perhaps could have done something different.

Can you comment on that?

● (2020)

Dr. Brian Evans: Honourable member, Mr. Chair, I come back to the point very clearly that I believe that the work being done in the plant by the two inspectors certainly did determine that in fact sanitation protocols were being followed, as outlined in both their HACCP plans and as required under our verification tasks in terms of the sanitation work that was being done in the plant, post-operative and pre-operative. Those were being met, and they were being reported on by the inspectors in the plant.

The challenge, and I think we have identified it in the lessons learned, was the fact that there was no obligation at that time for the company to be conducting environmental testing, or, if they were conducting environmental testing, to be reporting those results to the CFIA. That was different from the reality that they were obliged to do end-product testing, that they were obliged to immediately notify CFIA of any results on end-product testing, and that we as the government were doing additional oversight in terms of end-product testing but were not doing environmental sampling.

In hindsight, it was determined that in fact the company was doing environmental testing. I believe they have testified as well that there was information being kept at the plant but not being provided to the inspector at that time. From our perspective, that is one of the areas where we felt we had to change immediately. That was done last fall, to make it an obligation for the company to report immediately on its environmental testing plan; to make sure that every company has an environmental testing plan; to ensure that government testing was carried out in parallel with that; and to introduce the requirement that in addition to notifying CFIA by the company, the accredited labs that conduct that testing also have to notify us directly, from the laboratories directly to CFIA, to ensure that we have a closed loop so it can't be reported to the plant and not to us at the same time.

We do recognize and do believe, honourable member, that this area did require immediate addressing. That was done last fall, as soon as that could be implemented.

The Chair: Thanks, Dr. Evans.

Mr. Anderson, five minutes.

Mr. David Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think we should maybe have a little better understanding of the extremes of the precautionary principle that have been taken, which Mr. Allen was referring to. You find yourselves in a situation where because a canary might die, we're going to shut the coal mine down. It often seems to be taken to that limit.

I want you to talk a little bit more about the mandatory environmental testing policy that you were just talking about. What's the status of that? You feel that has improved the food safety

system adequately. Do you have any comments on that? Is it important that this mandatory testing continue?

Mr. Paul Mayers: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for the question.

As Dr. Evans has noted, the importance of the environmental testing has been a key factor in terms of our lessons learned. That's why we took the step not only of requiring on a mandatory basis that companies integrate regular environmental testing in their HACCP programs, but that as an agency we would reinstate our own testing and in fact triple the level to which it was applied, in order to verify that the testing being conducted by the companies is indeed effective. So, absolutely, we would agree that the ability to identify listeria in the plant environment has been demonstrated through our assessment of this situation to be a key element, and we have therefore acted on that.

● (2025)

Mr. David Anderson: I want to talk about a little different technology that was suggested to us the other night, and it's one that's come and gone once already, and that is irradiation. Now, Mr. Pavlic, from the Beef Information Centre, actually likened it to milk pasteurization.

Do you have any comment on that? Do you have any strong positions on that?

Mr. Paul Mayers: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, the use of food irradiation as one of the elements in the toolkit is indeed an option that has merit. We recognize that, at present, there are limitations on the availability of food irradiation. Before irradiation can be applied to a food, it must be approved by Health Canada, and the current products for which food irradiation is permitted are a limited set. Nonetheless, it is a technology that can minimize food contamination through the destruction of pathogenic micro-organisms, so it does offer one possible means of destroying any potential contaminants that might enter the product post-processing. It is not the only option in that regard, but it would certainly work as described, like the pasteurization of milk does, which is to destroy disease-causing micro-organisms that may be present.

Mr. David Anderson: Do you see any food safety issues with that?

Mr. Paul Mayers: The food safety opportunity that irradiation presents would be to further minimize the potential for contamination of product by treating these products after they have been processed and packaged in order to, in essence, eliminate disease-causing micro-organisms. So it is indeed an opportunity; however, that opportunity in terms of processed products of these types is not currently available, as that has not yet been approved by Health Canada for use in this particular application.

Mr. David Anderson: You did a great job of avoiding answering that question.

I just want to come back to something I addressed last time when you were here, and that's the provincial standards, the federal standards. When Piller's were here, they spoke about the provinces coming up to one standard, and they thought Ontario's standard was a strong standard. Do you have any authority to override provinces to bring about a national standard the provinces would have to adhere to? How are you working on that subject? What are you trying to accomplish there?

Ms. Carole Swan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The federal government and the CFIA focus their efforts on those plants that either ship across provincial borders or internationally. However, I think it's fair to say that the concept of a common national standard is one that has quite a bit of appeal. We have been working at the officials level, with our colleagues in provinces and territories, to advance this to a level where we might in fact be able to make some progress.

Mr. David Anderson: Can I just ask you some of the details of that, then?

The provinces would adopt a common standard, so it would end up being a national standard because of that, or are you suggesting that there could be provincial standards, a national standard, and an export standard as well?

Ms. Carole Swan: We're still in discussion on this. Right now, we are talking to our provincial colleagues to see how we can make sure that we have as common a standard as we possibly can, recognizing that there are differing circumstances.

• (2030)

Mr. David Anderson: Okay. I think I'm out of time.

The Chair: Yes, your time is up.

I'd like to thank Ms. Swan, Mr. Evans, Mr. Prince, Mr. Myers, and Mr. Baker. Thanks for your—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Wait a second.

The Chair: You have a problem, Ms. Bennett?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Chair, I don't think we're quite done with this piece. I also don't think we can instruct the analysts before we've heard the witnesses, the very important witnesses, next week on public health, in terms of—

The Chair: That is for the next part of the meeting, Ms. Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: No, but what I'm saying is I think we still have questions, in terms of the holes. Also, Mr. Chair, we have yet to hear from the health ministers, Mr. Clement—

The Chair: Ms. Bennett, we've had a number of different witnesses. Some nights we have run out of questions for them and other nights we haven't had enough time. I'm trying to keep a balance today, but we have the agenda, so....

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: The committee is the master of its own work.

The Chair: That's right, it is.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Just see if you have a consensus to have the CFIA stay for another hour.

The Chair: We have the time on there. This part of the meeting is adjourned. We suspend for five minutes—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I would like to challenge the chair on this.

The Chair: I'd like to thank our witnesses for coming.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Chair, you can't do that without the will of the committee. The agenda for the meeting is just an outline. If we want to keep the witnesses for another 10 minutes or 20 minutes or half an hour, then we get to do that because we're the committee. This is not—

The Chair: In the words of some members, including you, as long as we know in advance that the meetings are going to be extended, that is fine.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes.

The Chair: And that's a comment.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Well, it's not going to be extended. We're going to replace the in camera work, which we can't do till we've heard all the witnesses. Another hour of being able to—

The Chair: Ms. Bennett, this portion of the meeting is over.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: No, no, Mr. Chair. You have this side of the House wanting something different, and—guess what—it's just arithmetic.

The Chair: Is that right?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: We win. You lose.

The Chair: All right. This part of the meeting has been suspended for five minutes, and we have to go in camera for the next portion of it.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: No, we don't, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You don't want to go in camera?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Chair, we want to finish with the witnesses.

The Chair: You have finished with them.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: No, we haven't.

Hon. Wayne Easter: A point of order.

The Chair: Anyway, I'd like to thank our witnesses for being here.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: No, wait, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Please honour my colleague's point of order.

Hon. Wayne Easter: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: You have no right to do this.

An hon. member: We're suspended.

The Chair: We're suspended.

Do you want to bring up a point of order in the next session?

Hon. Wayne Easter: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Is it something that needs to be brought up in camera?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Yes, it—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: No.

Hon. Wayne Easter: No?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I would like you to ask the witnesses to stay, because in camera we're going to ask for them to come back.

The Chair: Are you?

Hon. Wayne Easter: I think, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: A point of order. Mr. Easter first, and then Mr. Anderson.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I believe Ms. Bennett said that she was willing to challenge the chair on your ruling, and I believe you should call a vote on that challenge. That's been done. The government members, I believe two or three meetings ago, challenged the chair, and the chair lost on a ruling.

So I believe Ms. Bennett said that she challenges the chair, so you should therefore call a vote.

The Chair: Mr. Anderson.

Mr. David Anderson: Well, first of all, Mr. Easter has no right to do a point of order on that challenge anyhow—

The Chair: That's right.

Mr. David Anderson: —but this is asinine. We've come to the end of meetings before when the opposition has gotten nothing out of the meeting that they wanted, so then they have had this production at the end of the meeting.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It's for actual debate.

Mr. David Anderson: It's actually pathetic, because Ms. Bennett—

The Chair: Mr. Anderson has the floor, Ms. Bennett.

Mr. David Anderson: —does not even understand that this report has to go back to the main committee by Wednesday night. Is that correct? We've been given directions—

An hon. member: Yes, it is Wednesday night.

Mr. David Anderson: —by the main committee that this committee needs to report back to them. Now, if she wants to change that as well, I guess she's going to have to go to another committee and hijack it as well.

We have work to do.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: That's sad.

Mr. David Anderson: We need to suspend. The witnesses have been here. They have other things to do. They were scheduled in for this time and have been good enough to give their time. If she has other questions, I'm sure she could write them down. Mr. Bellavance, I think, said he has some written questions for them as well. So I think we should move on.

The Chair: Exactly. As you had said and agreed upon up to this point, there are some witnesses that we couldn't get here. And I believe it was Mr. Allen's suggestion that they get their submissions to us in writing so that they could be included in the report.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, I want to comment on Mr. Anderson's point. The fact of the matter is that the opposition is not trying to play games here.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is perhaps the most important agency involved in the listeriosis issue and in food safety. You have been challenged, Mr. Chair, that—

● (2035)

The Chair: I was challenged after I suspended the meeting, Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: You were challenged before you suspended.

On Mr. Anderson's point, Mr. Chair, what we've seen consistently from the government, right from the appointment of the investigator—the so-called independent investigator, Weatherill—is an attempt by the government to cover in terms of ministerial and government responsibility.

We see your chairing, Mr. Chair, consistently trying to take the side of the government and defend it, no matter what. You've been challenged by this side of the House in terms of your ruling. We are demanding that there be another hour, so you should accept that challenge. It's on your back if you don't.

The Chair: Madam Bennett, you have challenged the chair. There's no doubt in my mind that it was after I suspended, but I'm going to ask the committee if they want to amend the agenda. The agenda, as presented, is until 10 tonight. No, it's scheduled until 9:30. I take it you want to use that hour for the witnesses rather than the report.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think there's a consensus on this side that we need at least one more round with the witnesses.

I also would like the clerk to explain to us what time we have, in working backwards from the tabling of our report in the House of Commons to the tabling with the main committee. We really are uncomfortable not having had the ministers. Could the clerk just tell me, working back from the 23rd?

The Chair: You've had the minister here, Madam Bennett. Maybe you weren't here that night; I'm not sure.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: The Minister of Health—neither of them has been here.

The Chair: I think, Madam Bennett, you were a minister and you understand and know—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I resent the fact that the Minister of Health's staff called my office begging that she not have to appear.

The Chair: Do you have a point of order?

Mr. David Anderson: Sure. Ms. Bennett's imagination is getting away with her again. It may be late in the day. This is ridiculous. The Minister of Health, I understand, is making a written submission to the committee.

It's interesting. Now she wants to talk about the report and what we're doing with the schedule, which is exactly what we're supposed to be doing from 8:30 to 9:30. That's what we put that in here for. Now she wants to have that discussion.

We've sat here tonight. The people have been good enough to stay, as on the schedule. Mr. Easter went off here again. He's blaming the investigator and next he'll be going after the minister. He's blaming the chair. We've seen this regularly over the last month or so. He can't find anything he can go off on, so he has to go off on the procedure of the committee and blame other people.

We had a schedule, Mr. Chair. I think we need to stick to that.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Why?

Mr. David Anderson: Why stick to it? Because we—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Ms. Bennett, Mr. Anderson has been given the floor. It's his turn.

Mr. David Anderson: I guess that really disappoints me, Mr. Chair. This has happened all evening when we've had the microphone. I assume Mr. Shipley is probably going to want to say something in here as well. When we have the microphone, the opposition feels it's their right to shout us down. We've given them the time of the evening here to have their say. I haven't actually heard from Mr. Bellavance or Mr. Allen. I don't know if this is an organized thing. If these folks had come over to us a little bit earlier and asked if we wanted to do this, we probably would have agreed with them. They play these tricks at the end, trying to be sneaky and to see if there's some trouble they can cause.

The CFIA folks have answered pretty much all the questions. The last round over there didn't have anything new from what we've heard before, so I don't think they're keeping them here because they've got anything new. They're just trying to keep digging until maybe they can get one little thing they might be able to make into some sort of news story.

I was disappointed that Mr. Easter goes off once again, attacking the investigator and the investigation. Every bit of testimony of every witness who has spoken to that has said she has had the full cooperation of every witness. She's had the ability to go wherever she wanted to with her investigation. She's had the cooperation of the minister. She's had officials in there as much as she's wanted to. I don't know why he would have attacked her.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

• (2040)

The Chair: Madam Bennett, he didn't interrupt you, and I don't let him interrupt you, so give him the same respect.

Mr. David Anderson: This is really disappointing that you wouldn't let me have my say as well. We certainly let you talk.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Madam Bennett, you're out of order. Your turn will come.

Mr. David Anderson: I think Mr. Easter raised these issues and I think it's only appropriate that we respond to them, because clearly

he was incorrect in the things he said. The investigator has had full authority to do her investigation as she has chosen to do.

Every witness that we've heard, for weeks, Madam Bennett, even though you may not have been here at some of those meetings, has said that she's had that authority. She's had that ability. She herself said that no one has stood in her way in finding out what happened, and she is very, very satisfied with her ability to be able to do that.

The other point is that we've heard about her tremendous qualifications. There was no question of her character or her ability to do this investigation, so—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: [*Inaudible—Editor*]...to do with what we're discussing.

The Chair: Madam Bennett, you have a verbal motion on the floor and he's speaking to it.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Chair, I think I still have the floor...?

The Chair: You do.

Mr. David Anderson: I'm sorry that I'm being interrupted here, but anyway—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: [*Inaudible—Editor*]...a filibuster now.

Mr. David Anderson: Well, we don't need to filibuster. We need to talk about the issues that Mr. Easter talked about—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Madam Bennett, this is going to be the last time that I rule you out of order.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I want you to stop that, Mr. Chair. Talking about making a value judgment on my colleague's questions has nothing to do with what we're discussing in terms of how we conduct ourselves over the next hour.

The Chair: Madam Bennett, he has the floor, whether you like what he's saying or not.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Rule it out of order.

The Chair: You're out of order.

Mr. David Anderson: The strange thing is that I'm not talking about his questions. I'm talking about the comments he made a little bit earlier in this discussion. He talked about the investigator. I had mentioned her. He also tried to use the word "cover-up", as though there were something going on here and he hasn't had access to information.

Hon. Wayne Easter: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. David Anderson: Certainly he has gotten access to every bit of information that he's—

The Chair: A point of order, Mr. Easter.

A voice: I don't think you can interrupt a point of order, Mr. Chair—

Hon. Wayne Easter: I believe the question that is on the floor, Mr. Chair, and that we're asking you to rule on, is whether or not you're going to accept a challenge to the chair. The issues and the cover that Mr. Anderson is providing to the government have nothing to do with the challenge to the chair.

You've been challenged, Mr. Chair, on your ruling when this side of the table asked at least for another round to question CFIA officials who are here.

Mr. Anderson can go on all he likes. It's not going to make a whole lot of difference.

The Chair: And the question...?

Hon. Wayne Easter: The question is on your ruling, and we've asked you.... Ms. Bennett has asked you and has challenged your decision that the meeting would be suspended because what she requested was another round of questioning with CFIA officials. Then we could go forward.

The Chair: Mr. Easter, if you were listening, I believe the meeting is going on. I asked the question: is there consensus to go ahead? Mr. Anderson has the floor and is speaking to that.

Mr. Anderson.

Mr. David Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that. I guess I will probably be interrupted a few more times because they don't seem to be able or willing.... Here comes Mr. Easter apparently, again waiting to do another interruption.

Again, he starts talking about the fact that I'm talking to the issues, and that's exactly what I'm doing. Because we've had a good set of hearings. There has been no attempt to cover anything up. The CFIA has been here twice. These folks have had, I think, almost three hours with them, and they were good enough to come back. We asked them to come. They came. The minister came. Officials have been here. The industry has been here. Everyone has been here, and I'm not sure why the opposition can't be satisfied with that. I think it's because this didn't turn out the way they thought it would turn out.

We actually also have the fact that the opposition wants to attack you and your rulings here. We see Mr. Easter going after you as soon as he doesn't get his own way. It's either the minister's fault, it's the investigator's fault, or it seems to be your fault.

Mr. Chair, I'd just like to point out that we had a schedule, and we have stuck to our schedule in the past here and I think it's reasonable that we stick to it again. We were here at 4 o'clock this afternoon. We started with the folks we had initially, the Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition and the Canadian Health Coalition. The next group was the Canadian Trucking Alliance—

• (2045)

Hon. Wayne Easter: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: A point of order.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Could you ask the clerk, Mr. Chair...? I've been at meetings where the chair has been challenged before, and I believe, under the rules of procedure, it is such that the chair calls for a vote on that challenge to the chair immediately, without debate. Is that not correct?

Mr. Andrew Chaplin (Procedural Clerk, House of Commons): Yes.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Then why is that not happening?

Could you put that on the record, Clerk? Is that not the proper procedure?

The Clerk: The question on the challenge to the chair is put forthwith without debate.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, I have to ask why you are not putting that challenge to a vote immediately.

The Chair: Mr. Anderson has a point of order on that.

Mr. David Anderson: I had the floor, so I want to continue speaking, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: No, you called a point of order on Mr. Easter.

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Easter is interrupting me continually. I'm trying to make some points here and he keeps interrupting me.

I'd like to go back to the fact that we have to have this thing in on or before June 11. It's fine that we're going to spend an hour here and have more witnesses, but it says specifically, if I can read the motion—

The Chair: Ms. Bennett has a point of order.

Mr. David Anderson: How can she interrupt me if it's not debate?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It's a point of order.

Mr. David Anderson: You can't have a point of order. Mr. Easter just said you can't have one.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It's a point of order. If you heard the clerk, the question on the challenge to the chair must be put forthwith—

Mr. David Anderson: Then you can't have a point of order, so if I can read the motion—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes. It's not debate. What it means is that we cannot listen to you anymore.

The Chair: Madam Bennett, you challenged the chair on an issue. I asked for comment on that issue. If you go back and read the blues, it was to do with consent to continue the meeting, and Mr. Anderson asked to speak on that.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: The clerk has just said that he's not allowed to speak on it. The question must be put forthwith, so please, Mr. Chair, put the question.

The Chair: I think the question on that matter was dealt with because we came back to the matter that you wanted to do, which was to extend the meeting; I asked that question, and now we're speaking to that.

Go ahead, Mr. Anderson.

Mr. David Anderson: It's interesting that the opposition began the debate on this issue, and now that we've started talking, they say there can't be any debate on it. They've had regular interruptions here for the last half hour. For some reason they can speak and they can interrupt—now another one is going to do that—and they just don't seem to want to let us have the floor.

I want to read the motion we passed at the agriculture committee. It is—

The Chair: There is a point of order.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

Mr. Anderson, I am sorry for interrupting you, I know that it is very unpleasant.

I just heard the clerk's recommendations regarding what we have on the table. We should vote immediately to find out, without debate and without anyone taking up committee time, if we can have another round table with the people from the agency. Afterward, we can discuss our report.

Normally, the committee can sit until 10:00 p.m. on Mondays and Wednesdays. Unfortunately, we are losing precious time. We should call for a vote immediately pursuant to the standing orders, as the clerk said.

[English]

The Chair: The clerk is getting me some information.

Mr. David Anderson: That's fine. I think Mr. Bellavance has a good balance here with his suggestion that we do one round each. We will let the opposition have one round. That way we won't spend the entire hour, and they can ask their probing questions that way.

The Chair: I'm going to deal with the challenge to the chair. There was a question that the clerk was looking up for me. Now we're going to vote on the challenge to the chair.

(Ruling of the chair overturned)

The Chair: The suggestion is.... We have a point of order.

● (2050)

Mr. David Anderson: Are we here for one round, or are we here for an hour of questioning?

A voice: It's one round.

Mr. David Anderson: Why didn't you say that in the beginning?

The Chair: Mr. Easter will start. The round is five minutes.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Thank you. It took a while to get here.

In any event, coming back to the key to going forward on the public's information, it is getting proper information on how many inspectors are actually on the floor in certain plants doing certain jobs. Regardless of all the evidence that we've had here tonight, we do have contradictions around that from the Agriculture Union.

I forget who answered that question, whether it was you, Mr. Prince, or Mr. Mayers, but the information presented to the committee was on meat inspectors available to work in meat processing and cold storage facilities. They said that in Toronto the

average was 4.6, and in Montreal, 4.7—that's facilities per inspector, sorry. In northern Alberta it was 5, and in Greater Vancouver, 5.9. Regardless of where the numbers are at the moment, in going forward—and I don't think it's in the lessons learned documents—how do we get credible, accurate information? What can CFIA do to get credible accurate information on how much time is actually spent on the floor?

We know for a fact that if the key inspector's computer is in the Maple Leaf plant, then he certainly is going to spend 50% of his time there because that's where he has to take his reports to put them in the computer. So it goes as time spent in that plant.

But is there not a better system than what we currently have? Are you working on getting to a system that can take out the duplications and give people who ask about time the proper information? There must be time in, time out, etc.

Could Ryan or Cameron, or whoever, answer?

Mr. Cameron Prince: Thank you for the question.

We saw the report, or the information, I should say, that came from the Agriculture Union. We were very anxious to analyze that and share that information. Since that time, we've understood...and we've had conversations with the union about the data they presented. We've shared information. Their way of counting was somewhat different from ours. Our numbers did not match up. We're working with them to get those numbers all lined up. So I don't really think that at the end of day there's going to be disagreement about the number of plants and the number of inspectors.

They had counted a different geographic area in Vancouver, not including the Fraser Valley, for example. We will come to ground with the union on those numbers, because they're there. It's just a matter of how they're counted. We didn't have an opportunity to have the dialogue before Mr. Kingston presented that information, and we've done so since.

You mentioned also the issue of computers and whether inspectors have sufficient access to computers. I can say that in Toronto, many of the inspectors have laptops, and they have a choice as to whether they take those laptops from plant to plant and enter the data there. In the case of the inspector at Maple Leaf, it may be that that is where he's most comfortable with entering that data. That makes sense. You go to your different plants, go back there and enter it.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I guess, Cameron—

The Chair: You're right on the edge, Wayne.

Hon. Wayne Easter:—the key point going forward is that we get it right, and that we're all—sorry, Mr. Chair—working somehow on the same numbers. We need to have accurate information.

The Chair: Mr. Bellavance.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Prince, I will continue our discussion about the number of inspectors. You said that it is not easy to find an ideal ratio, because this depends on the size of the plant and on other factors. However, you mentioned a ratio of one inspector for every three plants.

Have I understood this correctly? Would this be an acceptable ratio for the agency? Without necessarily saying that it is an ideal ratio, would it be possible to try to achieve it?

• (2055)

[English]

Mr. Cameron Prince: As I indicated, I can't give you an ideal ratio because there are variabilities in the plants, and I explained previously why there is no set ratio. I can tell you that overall there is a ratio for all the plants and all the inspectors; there's a ratio of slightly over three plants per inspector. That means that some may have six and some may have one. We have that information.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: In this case as well, we note that there are some contradictions, right from the outset of the meeting. When Mr. Kingston appeared and provided information about his union, there was absolutely no question of having one inspector for every three plants. We were talking about four, five or six plants.

Is it true that the working agenda of the Toronto region shows a ratio of one inspector for every six plants in 2009? Is this information accurate?

[English]

Mr. Cameron Prince: Just to be clear on the question, yes, the one inspector for the Maple Leaf Barter Road plant had, I believe, six plants, maybe seven. Before, those were cold storages, which require less inspection effort. I don't believe it's correct to say that overall in the Toronto area the ratio was one to six.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: I do not know how you go about this, but I would like to know if there is an agenda that states that inspectors have a given number of plants to inspect for the year 2009. For the Toronto region, does the ratio require one inspector for every six plants?

[English]

Mr. Cameron Prince: Maybe I should step back and describe how the work is assigned. Our inspectors are grouped in complexes. We call them complexes, and that means a complex of plants. For example, there may be a group of 10 plants in western Toronto, and for those 10 plants there would be three, four, five inspectors. It depends on the nature of those plants. There are CVS tasks for each of those plants that must be done. Those inspectors share those plants and move from plant to plant, so if somebody is off sick, if there's a night shift, we can get the best use of the time of those inspectors to cover off all those 10 plants to make sure that all those CVS tasks get done.

We are on track, meeting the targets for CVS. In that example I gave you, you would have four inspectors for 10 plants and you would establish the ratio based on that. That is fairly typical. Again I have to say that it varies depending on geography; if they're all close together, perhaps you need fewer inspectors. If they're far apart, obviously travel time comes into play, and it's important that you adjust for that. So it's a very complex analysis and management challenge to assign inspectors to all these processing plants.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: According to the agency, 50% of the tasks are dedicated to data analysis and the remaining 50% is dedicated to inspection. I would like to know how many hours a day an inspector must spend in a plant while inspecting it.

Let us take, for example, the Maple Leaf plant, on Bartor Road, where the incidents took place. How many hours must an inspector spend every day, not in analyzing data, but in carrying out on-site inspections in the plant?

[English]

Mr. Cameron Prince: First, I would say all the work is inspection work. There is really no distinction in terms of food safety outcomes. Reviewing records, reviewing tests, reviewing sanitation records, this is inspection. It's looking at the records that are part of the HACCP plan in that plant. Those records are verified by going onto the plant floor, looking at the in-plant lab. There are a number of functions where you look and verify what's in the records. What we've said is that on balance, that's about 50% of the time. But that can vary on a daily basis. It can vary from plant to plant.

For example, the scheduled CVS task in a given plant on a given day might require the inspector to spend 80% of his time in the plant, either taking samples or doing other in-plant activities, and only 20% of his time doing record review. The next day it could be the reverse. It depends on the CVS tasks assigned to that inspector for that particular day and the nature of those tasks. So it is a fluid situation. There's no straight answer day by day for your question. Overall it's 50%, but it can vary greatly.

• (2100)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Allen, five minutes.

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

Ms. Swan, you had said earlier, when I had asked about phone calls, that you didn't keep notes but you thought you might have made some notes. We did request them and they didn't come forward. The only request I have is, could you go back and take a second look? There were seven phone calls with Maple Leaf during that timeframe and you've indicated you might have made some notes. If you could take another look for that, I'd appreciate it.

And the same for you, Brian. You made quite good notes in your phone logs, except for the one meeting in November where you made none at all—November 5, 2008, Maple Leaf Foods, Brian Evans. There is no phone log, and no notes, but prior to that there always were. Perhaps it was just misplaced. I would just ask you to go and look. I don't need you to answer. Just go back and take a second look, and if they're there, send them to us. If they're not there, then the same response is here, so I don't need a second response to say you didn't have any.

My question really is around what was sent to me in response to the questions about the inspection numbers and CVS tasks. The one task that wasn't completed out of five is number 4, which is the HACCP system design and reassessment. Now we have changed some things, and Brian, you talked earlier about recognizing some things at the Bartor Road facility and that you made some changes. Environmental testing is back, which is really part of the HACCP design plan.

The note in the documents provided to me indicates that we're not going to have that verification of that entire system for two years, because it's a two-year look, according to the note. In other words, they started it last year and it won't be complete for two years. So my sense is that because of the situation we faced, and we have changed the HACCP system in Maple Leaf Foods, why didn't we simply go in and do a complete verification of that particular system and do it right away? And if we are, why didn't you indicate it to us?

Mr. Cameron Prince: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, honourable member, for the question.

In fact, in reply to your last question with respect to why didn't we go right away and do a comprehensive look, we did that. The policy required an in-depth listeria review. We sent a team of food safety experts into that plant, and as a result of that there were some corrective actions required.

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Let me stop you there. And you know, Mr. Prince, I don't like to interrupt, but this was a question that I specifically asked the group when you were here the last time. The response you gave to me, and to all of us on the committee, was in this chart. It shows that 1, 2, 3, and 5 were all completed 100%-plus. Number 4, says "see explanatory note". So I go to the note, and I quote now your document back to me:

Section 4 verification tasks are associated with periodic comprehensive assessments of the company quality systems by a specialized team of food safety specialists once every 2 years. CFIA does not have complete data for Section 4 tasks at this point because they are to be completed over a two year period ending March 31, 2010.

You're now telling me that you've done it, or almost done it.

Mr. Cameron Prince: No. What I'm saying is that for the Bartor Road plant we did an in-depth evaluation. Now I want to move on to the section 4 tasks. We have started those tasks. They are to be done for all plants over a two-year period, and that's where we, as you indicated, bring in a specialist team to look at the whole picture in that plant, to look at the HACCP system. What I'm saying is that we did that for Bartor Road and now we're moving across all of the plants across Canada over the next two years.

Mr. Malcolm Allen: I have to say, Mr. Prince, that's not what you said here. You've just told me that you've done the Bartor Road piece, but you didn't indicate anything. You said you've done none here, absolutely zero. If that one plant gives you 2%, I would have taken 2% and you could have made another note to me that said, we've done Bartor Road, because that's really what I'm looking for, right? I'm not looking for some plant in Alberta where there wasn't an issue. I'm looking at a plant that basically had an incident that resulted in 22 people dying. You don't indicate that to me.

Sir, that's an absolute monumental oversight, not to report it to us. It really is, truly. No offence, but you could have said that to us. You're now telling us under testimony. You could have written it

down. I'm not sure why you wouldn't want to actually tell me, we've done a good job here, because that's a good job, Mr. Prince. You telling me now that you've completed CVS in Bartor Road and that is a good thing. I'm surprised you just didn't write that in the response to the question. I'm disappointed by that. I really am. That's unfortunate.

● (2105)

The Chair: Okay, thank you. Your time....

If you want to respond, you can, Mr. Prince.

Mr. Cameron Prince: No, that's fine, thanks.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Shipley, you have five minutes.

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Prince, if you want to respond to that... you were attacked at the end there. Mr. Allen is trying to make something out of nothing. If you want to respond to that, feel free to take some of our time to do that. Clearly you've been doing.... We've got two different things going on here: an investigation of the one plant and a series of checks that need to be done. Mr. Allen is trying to confuse people with that.

Go ahead if you want to. If not, Mr. Shipley has some other things to say.

Mr. Cameron Prince: I would just like to clarify that the section 4 tasks are a very important part of the CVS. We are working very diligently to put those section 4 tasks in place. That was part of the original design of the CVS, that those would come over a two-year period. They're an additional safety measure in the whole system, a stop-gap to make sure we have covered off all of the big-picture look at these plants. I believe those section 4 tasks are very important to look at all of the plants across Canada, to make sure the food coming out of there is as safe as possible.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Thank you, Mr. Prince.

I'll just pick up on that, because I think that's the critical part, quite honestly. It leads me to my comment. Maybe I'll have a question at the end of it.

We've listened to witnesses, and a little earlier we had comments come from the Beef Information Centre about the irradiation of meat. Then we had witnesses before us from Bioniche, who were here to promote their E. coli vaccine. As a company, they basically have come forward and asked the government to bankroll their test programs for the vaccine.

We're talking about irradiation of food and giving another vaccine to animals so that it will help in terms of food safety. I just wonder, when we actually just go back to having what we have produced in Canada, which is safe food, and just take that through the monitoring systems we've got, like HACCP and CVS, which is part of HACCP, I'm concerned, quite honestly, with the public perception of what might be happening when we start doing stuff to food that normally isn't done. It's all in the context of food safety. We're going to irradiate it now, or we're going to give vaccines to something else, so that we have less influence upon what we think is a natural product.

We had witnesses in here earlier tonight who were even concerned about some farm practices, even though we know farm practices have become better. Animals are better protected, better served now, have better diets now. Farmers are concerned more about the environment now than I think they ever have been, and contribute more to the environment than they ever have. Yet, if we continue to want to add stuff to our food system, I get concerned about the perception of what our consumers are going to think about our food.

Can you talk to me a little bit about what you think the effectiveness is of the conclusions of your test, and what the effectiveness of this vaccine would be on food safety?

Mr. Paul Mayers: Thank you for the question.

Mr. Chairman, the vaccine is subject to the regulatory oversight of the CFIA. Before the vaccine can be marketed, the CFIA assesses both its effectiveness as well as the safety of the vaccine for the target animals. In this case, the product was assessed, demonstrated to be effective in reducing the shedding of E. coli, and therefore was

approved. It provides to the producer one more option in terms of effective stewardship.

You have heard Dr. Evans on a number of occasions speak to the importance of a whole-chain approach to food safety. Food safety starts right on the farm, in terms of the stewardship of the producer, in terms of their animals, and in the feeds the animals have access to. It's the on-farm food safety practices that reduce the potential for the animal to have chemical residues or to be shedding pathogens that might ultimately contaminate the meat. In the case of this particular vaccine, it provides one more opportunity for the producer to have an option in terms of that effective stewardship.

• (2110)

The Chair: Your time has expired, Mr. Shipley.

Mr. Bev Shipley: It always comes back down to the farmer.

The Chair: Thanks again to witnesses for their indulgence in staying the extra time. We appreciate it.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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