



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

---

# Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 002**

Tuesday, December 21, 2021

---

Chair: Mr. Kody Blois





## Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

Tuesday, December 21, 2021

• (1535)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.)):** Okay, everyone. We're going to get started. I'd just like to inform all members of the committee that the witnesses who are here in the room virtually or in person have had the opportunity to have their technical test and their language functioning training.

[Translation]

I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to the second meeting of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House Order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person, in the room, and remotely using the Zoom application.

Regarding the speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do the best we can to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members, whether participating virtually or in person.

[English]

To those who are in the room, I would ask that you abide by the health principles that are being enforced by the Board of Internal Economy.

We're here pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on December 16. The committee is commencing its study on the interim suspension of certification of all potatoes from P.E.I. to the United States.

I just want to take the opportunity.... I know we have a couple of members who are joining here who are not regular members.

Mr. Calkins is here on behalf of Mr. Steinley. Welcome, Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Morrissey is here on behalf of Ms. Taylor Roy. Welcome, Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. MacDonald, I know you are going to be participating in the meeting, so welcome to you.

Our witnesses from CFIA are Ms. Siddika Mithani, who is the president; Ms. Sylvie Lapointe, who serves as the VP of the policy and programs branch; and Mr. David Bailey, who is an acting executive director in the policy and programs branch.

Our representatives from the Government of Prince Edward Island are Deputy Minister Brian Matheson and Carolyn Sanford,

who serves as the director of animal health, regulatory and analytical laboratories.

Welcome to all of our guests.

We are going to get started. I remind everyone to silence their microphone when they're not speaking. We're going to get started with five-minute opening statements, first from CFIA by Ms. Mithani, followed by Mr. Matheson.

I will turn it over to you, Ms. Mithani.

**Dr. Siddika Mithani (President, Canadian Food Inspection Agency):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to address AGRI committee members today.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge that I'm addressing you from Ottawa, on the unceded, unsundered territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin nation.

[Translation]

I will address the committee in English, but I invite members to raise their questions or share their comments in the official language of their choice.

[English]

I have asked two individuals from the CFIA to join me today to help address the pressing questions that the members of this committee will wish to advance. They are Sylvie Lapointe, vice-president of the policy and programs branch, and David Bailey, chief plant health officer of Canada and executive director of the plant health and biosecurity directorate.

First and foremost, on behalf of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency as a whole, I want to acknowledge the deep impacts that our colleagues and their families and friends who live and work in P.E.I. are experiencing as a result of the two latest findings of potato wart in October of this year.

Mr. Chair, let me start by stating that the CFIA works with stakeholders to develop national farm-level biosecurity standards and producer guidance documents for several crop and animal-based sectors. The development process is supported by CFIA in partnership with the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food under the Growing Forward agricultural policy framework. Crop biosecurity prevents, minimizes and controls the introduction and spread of plant pests at the farm level.

Let me start with the overarching potato wart domestic long-term management plan, which was agreed upon with the United States and was put in place following the first detection in P.E.I. in the year 2000. As part of this plan, land restriction controls are put in place on individual fields to restrict the movement of affected potatoes, plants, soil and other articles that could result in the spread of potato wart outside of the regulated fields.

There have been 33 detections of potato wart in P.E.I. in the last 21 years, including one detection in 2020 and the two recent October 2021 detections. With three detections in 12 months and two ongoing investigations, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, or APHIS, indicated that they would seek to amend their existing federal order to prohibit the import of all fresh potatoes from P.E.I. U.S. federal orders prohibit or restrict the importation or entry of any plant, plant part or article if they determine that the prohibition or restriction is necessary to prevent the introduction or dissemination of a plant pest into or within the United States.

With knowledge of pending changes to the existing U.S. federal order, it was deemed necessary to proceed with a voluntary suspension of export certification of P.E.I. fresh potatoes destined to the U.S. The CFIA also introduced separate new measures through a ministerial order to restrict the movement of potatoes from P.E.I. to the rest of Canada as a means of preventing the spread of the pest. The current risk mitigation measures prevent the transmission of potato wart from fresh potatoes produced in regulated fields. These risk measures align with those in the 2015 U.S. federal order. The CFIA stands firmly on the science behind these measures and believes they reduce any risk of potato wart spread to a negligible level.

APHIS is seeking clear scientific data demonstrating that the resumption of trade is safe, and it is looking for assurances that the quarantined area is controlled and does not pose a risk. To this end, the CFIA is committed to sharing details from its ongoing investigations into potato wart in P.E.I. As you will know by now, timelines associated with an investigation such as this depend on a number of factors. Although we are accelerating efforts for sampling and testing, the completion of the investigation is difficult to project, and its accuracy cannot be compromised by expediency for fear of not satisfying the import requirements of a desired market.

Mr. Chair, in an effort to keep my remarks as brief as possible, I may have neglected to cover specific items of interest or to provide the desired level of detail. My colleagues and I remain available to take questions. We will endeavour to answer them to the best of our ability.

• (1540)

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

We'll proceed to Mr. Matheson.

You have five minutes, please.

**Mr. Brian Matheson (Deputy Minister, Department of Agriculture and Land, Government of Prince Edward Island):** Thank you very much.

Good afternoon, committee members. I would like to thank you for the invitation to speak with you today.

My name is Brian Matheson. I'm the deputy minister of the Prince Edward Island Department of Agriculture and Land. I'm joined today by Dr. Carolyn Sanford, our policy and regulatory ADM within the province.

My comments today will provide you with information on the value of the potato industry to P.E.I.; the current potato wart situation and the associated impact this has had on the economy and on the mental health of farmers in the province; programs implemented by the province that offer financial assistance to respond and adapt to the trade restrictions; and key points to consider in the future.

The closure of U.S. borders to Prince Edward Island potatoes has had negative consequences for the province, its economy and potato farmers. P.E.I.'s potato sector is extremely important to the province's economy and culture. Its impacts extend beyond this jurisdiction's borders. The P.E.I. potato sector has an economic impact of \$1.3 billion on P.E.I.'s economy, with over 5,000 jobs supported in Prince Edward Island. In addition, the sector contributes \$544.7 million to other Canadian provinces, adds \$784.6 million to the national GDP, creates over 2,000 jobs outside of P.E.I., and contributes over \$24 million in taxes outside of our jurisdiction. The sector, therefore, contributes to economies across Canada.

The vast majority of P.E.I.'s potatoes and potato products are exported to other provinces or abroad. In 2019, international exports of P.E.I. potatoes, which include fresh, seed and processed potatoes, totalled \$406 million. The United States represents 84% of P.E.I.'s total international potato exports. It is therefore an extremely important market for Prince Edward Island.

On October 1 and October 14, 2021, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency confirmed that potato wart was identified in two separate processing potato fields in P.E.I. As a result, on November 2, exports of P.E.I. seed potatoes to the United States were put under suspension. On November 21, the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada minister announced that CFIA would voluntarily suspend trade of fresh potatoes—both table stock potatoes and fresh potatoes for processing—from P.E.I. to the U.S., in addition to the seed ban. A ministerial order was also introduced that announced new risk mitigation measures for fresh potatoes moving across Canada, which included a ban on the domestic movement of P.E.I. seed potatoes. These decisions have had negative consequences for P.E.I. producers.

I would like to underscore that P.E.I.'s potatoes are safe, nutritious and of the highest quality. The potato wart domestic long-term management plan, put in place following detection in 2000, outlines the mandatory minimum survey, testing and surveillance activities required, with the objective to mitigate the risk of spread of potato wart outside of the restricted areas in P.E.I. We are confident that the management plan is working. P.E.I. potatoes continue to be safe and of the highest quality, and continue to be shipped safely and consumed safely across Canada.

There are several additional long-standing processes in place that provide assurances that P.E.I. potatoes are safe. When shipping P.E.I. potatoes across Canada, it is standard practice for fresh potatoes to be washed or dry-brushed and/or treated with a sprout inhibitor prior to being shipped. Additionally, potatoes are regularly subjected to visual inspections through our post-harvest virus testing program, our agriculture insurance corporation, local processors and local packers. These measures add additional mitigation to the risk of introduction of disease and result in the high quality and outstanding reputation of the P.E.I. potato.

P.E.I. farmers have experienced tremendous loss due to the trade suspension. The closure of the U.S. market has not only had a direct economic impact for P.E.I.'s potato producers—about \$100 million to \$120 million per year in sales—but also created unease among other markets, both domestic and international, that receive P.E.I. potatoes. The province and industry are actively working to provide reassurance to other markets that P.E.I. potatoes are safe and maintain the highest standards of quality.

Furthermore, it is important that I highlight the negative impact this situation is having on farmers' mental health. Such situations as the closure of the U.S. border compound existing mental health stressors for farmers. The department has heard from industry that there have been increases in farmers seeking counselling support. To support the mental health of farmers during this difficult time, the province has increased funding to the farmer assistance program to allow farmers to access counselling support. To provide short-term financial support, the province has also launched a \$10-million potato wart emergency fund to assist industry with responding to immediate impacts.

• (1545)

Other initiatives under way include a wage support program for potato exporters. This program will provide a wage subsidy for—

**The Chair:** Mr. Matheson, I apologize. I don't mean to intervene, but we are at five minutes, and I even gave you a few extra seconds. I know my colleagues will be eager to ask questions. I'm sure you will be able to get those points out.

**Mr. Brian Matheson:** Sure.

**The Chair:** Thank you to both of our witnesses.

We're going to move to the question period. We're going to start with Mr. Barlow for six minutes.

Mr. Barlow, let me just say this. I know we're waiting to see who will come next for the Conservatives. If you want to text that to me or the clerk, we would appreciate it.

We'll move over to you for six minutes.

**Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC):** Thanks, Mr. Chair. Dave Epp will follow me in our next round.

Thanks to the witnesses for making time for this important issue. I know many MPs, and certainly the potato farmers of Prince Edward Island, are very keen on hearing some of your responses and insights on why these decisions were made. I'm sure many growers are paying attention to this today.

Ms. Mithani, thank you very much for making time and for being with us. I want to ask some questions of you first.

Did anyone in CFIA or the federal government consult with the P.E.I. government or the Potato Board in Prince Edward Island on this decision to suspend the export of fresh potatoes to the United States?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** Thank you very much for the question.

Mr. Chair, we have been working on the potato wart issue with the province and with the stakeholders for a very long time. As the detections came in, we worked and collaborated with industry on the information that was requested. We've had a very strong and extensive relationship with our stakeholders as we have been working on the potato wart issue.

**Mr. John Barlow:** Ms. Mithani, specifically on the decision to have a self-imposed ban on the exports, before that decision was announced, did you have that conversation with the government of P.E.I.?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** Mr. Chair, I think it's important for us to understand that this was not a self-imposed ban.

The plant protection regulations state that unless we meet the requirements of an importing country, we cannot issue export certificates. The conversations we were having—

**Mr. John Barlow:** With all due respect—

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** The conversations we were having—

**Mr. John Barlow:** I'm sorry, Ms. Mithani, but we have a limited amount of time. I appreciate that.

To my question specifically, did you consult the Government of Prince Edward Island or the P.E.I. Potato Board before announcing the export ban on fresh potatoes from P.E.I.?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** As I've clearly articulated, it was not a decision on an export ban. It was the fact that the regulations did not allow us to issue export certificates to the U.S. when there were concerns from the U.S. with respect to the fact that the potatoes were not meeting the requirements of the importing country.

It was very simple. It was the fact that we were unable to issue export certificates because we were not meeting the importing country's requirements.

**Mr. John Barlow:** Thank you for that clarification. So did you have that conversation with the P.E.I. government before you made the announcement that you were going to be unable to...? It sounds like a no to me, since you were unable to answer that.

What about the decision, then, Ms. Mithani, to declare that all of P.E.I. was infested with potato wart? Was that a decision that came specifically from CFIA? The wording around that, "infested with potato wart", seems fairly extreme.

• (1550)

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** I would say that the language around using the word "infestation" is actually based on the authority we have within the regulations, which speak about declaring an infestation and, as a result, issuing a ministerial order, which was done at the time.

**Mr. John Barlow:** Is the CFIA confident in its potato wart management plan?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** Mr. Chair, we are absolutely confident in our long-term domestic potato wart management plan. It has been in place since—

**Mr. John Barlow:** I'm sorry, Ms. Mithani. Again, I have limited time. That's what I needed to hear.

This plan is enshrined in a 2015 U.S. federal order, as well. Is that correct?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** No. The long-term management plan was developed and implemented just after the first detection. In 2015, it was modified to align with the federal order that came in 2015.

A long-term management plan is an evergreen plan. It is always there, and there is always an opportunity to modify or change it, depending on the evaluation of the results—

**Mr. John Barlow:** Thank you.

Both countries have agreed to this plan. The CFIA, from what I understand, managed these detections according to that plan. Why is the U.S. border closed to P.E.I. potatoes if you followed this

monitoring plan that was agreed upon by both countries? Why is our border closed to the exportation of fresh potatoes from P.E.I.?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair.

I would say that the U.S. does not share Canada's view that there are effective and appropriate risk mitigation measures for fresh potatoes from P.E.I., given the pervasiveness of the potato wart in the province. Both sides are guided by sound science principles. The difference in perspective really comes from the interpretation of the science results.

**Mr. John Barlow:** Okay, so what has changed? We have this agreement between both countries—

**The Chair:** Mr. Barlow, I apologize. We're at six minutes.

I know that either you or Mr. Epp will be able to carry this on. I want to make sure we stay on time.

**Mr. John Barlow:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. MacDonald, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Heath MacDonald (Malpeque, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

I just want to reiterate some of Brian's earlier comments on the devastation to this industry in Prince Edward Island. We're looking at hardship financially, and certainly mentally, as he mentioned, and in terms of our reputation as a global supplier of potatoes, so it's extremely important.

There have been some good questions already that I'd like to follow up on. They're relevant to where the findings of the potato wart were found. They were found in regulated fields. Is that correct?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair.

I would like to ask David Bailey to respond to the specific questions on the findings.

**Mr. David Bailey (Acting Executive Director, Policy and Programs Branch, Canadian Food Inspection Agency):** Thank you, Chair, for the question.

Yes, the findings were found in fields that are regulated and that are for processing.

**Mr. Heath MacDonald:** Thank you, David.

Was the soil management plan that was agreed to by the USDA and CFIA in play? Was it being followed?

**Mr. David Bailey:** Yes, the long-term management plan was being followed. In fact, it is the long-term management plan that sets the conditions for the investigation, which allows us to demonstrate that we have data and information to show where the pest is and is not. That will be used as part of the conversations with the United States in order to reopen trade.

**Mr. Heath MacDonald:** We talked a bit about this in an earlier question relevant to January 2015. I'm going to come back to that question as well. We need to know—and the farmers need to know—what is different now that wasn't different then.

They made modifications to that order from the U.S. Has anything been explored relevant to the U.S. making more modifications, based on you saying that you believe 110% in our long-term management plan?

**Mr. David Bailey:** Thank you, Chair, for the question.

There are a couple of key points here. Fundamentally, what has changed is the United States' level of risk tolerance when it comes to this. Second, it is the number of finds in a short period of time: having three finds in the course of less than one year.

Of course, from a risk assessor's perspective, they are looking at the 21-year history of the island, as the president outlined at the beginning in her opening remarks, with 33 different finds over the course of that time—three in the last 12 months. This has caused our United States counterparts to have a pause and look for information in order to manage their own risk assessment of P.E.I. and understand our risk mitigation approach. This is about their risk tolerance.

Thank you.

• (1555)

**Mr. Heath MacDonald:** Our management plan has worked for 20-some years. We ship to 23 countries around the world. We've never once sent potato wart to any of those countries, because of the management plan, but all of a sudden red flags go up because we had two samples test positive for wart and the U.S. decides, based on everything that's coming back, based on soil samples, which I'm sure we'll get into a little later....

To me, and to a lot of the farmers, there seem to be issues here relevant to the communications. What were the original communications to the USDA on behalf of CFIA and on behalf of our industry?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** I would say that since the detection of potato wart in 2021, we have continued to work with them. As David Bailey has explained, it is the accumulated number of detections that the U.S. has been concerned about. Our discussions with the U.S. have really been based on what data analysis and information they require in order for us to resume trade.

What we have heard from the U.S. APHIS is that they would like the results from the national potato wart study. They would like results from the investigation into the 2021 detections of potato wart. They want to do a pest risk assessment. They also want to talk about delimitation of potato wart in P.E.I.

We are working with them on a continuous basis to provide the information.

**Mr. Heath MacDonald:** Thank you for that.

There's a mantra in the air that there's miscommunication between our industry, our farmers, and CFIA. Can we access or can you provide all the correspondence to date that you've had with USDA and APHIS?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** Conversations and discussions with regulators, from regulator to regulator, are considered confidential. However, I can tell you that we have many conversations to disseminate the information we get from APHIS on a regular basis. We have a number of working groups and sub-working groups. There is collaboration with respect to how we can advance the current issue and what we require—

**Mr. Heath MacDonald:** Mr. Chair, I have just one more.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. MacDonald.

**Mr. Heath MacDonald:** Okay, thank you.

**The Chair:** We're at six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Perron, you may go ahead. You have six minutes.

**Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here this afternoon.

I want to make sure I fully understand the reason why trade was suspended. We just heard that correspondence between the U.S. and Canadian regulators is considered confidential, and that bothers me a little. I want to understand the reason why we suspended our own exports.

The question is for Mr. Bailey or Ms. Mithani.

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** Thank you for your question.

I'm going to ask Ms. Lapointe to answer.

**Ms. Sylvie Lapointe (Vice-President, Policy and Programs Branch, Canadian Food Inspection Agency):** Thank you for your question.

As the CFIA president mentioned, the regulations prescribed under the Plant Protection Act stipulate that, when we are unable to meet the requirements of an importing country, we do not have the necessary legal authority to issue an export certificate. Since we knew the U.S. could not accept seed potatoes or washed potatoes from P.E.I., we had no choice but to temporarily suspend exports to the U.S.

• (1600)

**Mr. Yves Perron:** Thank you, Ms. Lapointe.

Will the fact that we were the ones to suspend exports make it easier to resume trade, or will it make no difference?

**Ms. Sylvie Lapointe:** In our experience with U.S. federal orders, they can't be changed. We have never had a situation where we've been able to get the decision rescinded. As you pointed out, the fact that we control the temporary suspension will make it easier to re-open the border.

**Mr. Yves Perron:** Very good.

I've read up on the issue.

Is the cleaning process that was adopted in 2015 to eliminate the risk of spread of potato wart still considered effective?

**Ms. Sylvie Lapointe:** We consider the process to be effective.

That is why the ministerial order issued by Ms. Bibeau, the minister, still authorizes the movement of washed potatoes from P.E.I. throughout Canada. Not only are the potatoes washed, but they are also treated with a sprout inhibitor, as per regulations. We are confident that table stock potatoes from P.E.I. do not pose a risk when it comes to spreading potato wart.

**Mr. Yves Perron:** Correct me if I'm wrong, but as I understand it, P.E.I. potatoes are being sold across Canada and are not considered to pose a risk of spread to potato farms in Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick or elsewhere. Is that correct?

**Ms. Sylvie Lapointe:** That's correct.

**Mr. Yves Perron:** There is something that escapes me, and it may be due to the fact that I don't quite understand the agreement with the U.S. If there is no risk in selling the potatoes and if we are using a cleaning process in Canada that works, why did you suspend exports to the U.S., instead of trying to explain to the Americans that the process is working, that the potatoes pose no risk here and that, likewise, they pose no risk there?

**Ms. Sylvie Lapointe:** Thank you for your question.

As you mentioned, it's virtually impossible to have a U.S. federal order rescinded. Our approach vis-à-vis the U.S. is to engage in technical discussions based on science and the measures we've taken to mitigate the risk, with the goal of reopening the border.

**Mr. Yves Perron:** Thank you for providing clear, concise and specific answers. I certainly appreciate it since we don't have a lot of time.

This is just my impression, but I wonder whether Canada's response has more to do with fearing U.S. reprisal than with holding its own. I don't mean to conflate the issues, but the recently imposed softwood lumber tariffs come to mind. To put it mildly, I think the U.S. is taking a cavalier stance on this issue. The looming American protectionism vis-à-vis electric vehicle manufacturing is another example.

To avoid being hit with a threat from the U.S., Canada is reducing or stopping its own potato exports. Canada is undermining its sector because it fears the consequences would be worse otherwise.

Is my take on the situation accurate, or do I have it all wrong?

**Ms. Sylvie Lapointe:** Thank you for your question.

As a representative of the agency, I can't comment on broader trade issues with the U.S.

I can, however, assure you that, if we hadn't made the decision to temporarily suspend exports, the U.S. would have closed the border to seed and table stock potatoes from P.E.I. What's more, given the fact that we had no legal authority, doing so was our only option.

**Mr. Yves Perron:** All right.

I referred to something that is bothering not just me, but also a number of parliamentarians these days: the American attitude.

Nevertheless, I understand the situation. Let's say we accept this language.

What do we need to do to get trade back on track? As I believe Mr. Matheson mentioned earlier, we are talking about 84% of P.E.I.'s market. That's huge. The product losses will be considerable.

Have you drawn up a timetable? What steps must be taken to resume trade, considering that the products are already being sold across Canada without issue?

**Ms. Sylvie Lapointe:** Thank you for your question.

**The Chair:** Sorry to cut you off, Ms. Lapointe, but could you please keep your answer to 10 seconds, if possible.

• (1605)

**Ms. Sylvie Lapointe:** Thank you.

**Mr. Yves Perron:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Ms. Sylvie Lapointe:** We don't have a specific timetable, but in our view, making progress on the issue of table stock potatoes and getting the border reopened is absolutely crucial and urgent, because we see no risk with respect to potato wart.

**Mr. Yves Perron:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Perron and Ms. Lapointe.

We now go to Mr. MacGregor for six minutes.

[English]

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP):** Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for helping guide this committee through this issue.

I will direct my first question to the CFIA. I'm hoping the CFIA will help this committee walk through this process.



The fields where the potato wart was recently detected were already under management plan regulations, so those potatoes were already ineligible for export to the United States and to the rest of Canada.

I'm hoping you can walk us through the metrics that are put into place that will lead to a suspension order for exports. If those potatoes were already under a management plan, they were not going to be exported. They were not in any danger of infecting other jurisdictions. Is it a single detection of potato wart that leads to an entire province-wide ban? Is CFIA not able to employ traceability methods and cauterize a wound and isolate a single farm? Can you just help the committee understand why detections in fields that were not eligible for export led to an entire province-wide ban? What metrics are in place that help you extrapolate to "This is a wider problem"? Can you just help us understand that, please?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** I would say this is not about just one detection causing borders to be closed or an infestation in the province to be declared.

The long-term management plan has allowed us to look at and to control the spread of the potato wart. From the perspective of trade with the U.S., as I have said, the issue with the U.S. has been the interpretation of the level of risk tolerance. That is the science discussion we are having.

With respect to it being in the regulated fields, maybe I can ask David Bailey to explain a little bit how these fields are regulated and what this means.

**Mr. David Bailey:** Yes. Thank you, President.

It seems on the surface that it's a simple thing, that there have been two little finds. In reality, as I said earlier, there has been a succession of finds: 33 finds over 21 years, with three in the last 12 months.

It is really the number of fields that become implicated. From a very straightforward perspective, there's the field in which there was the find, but then there are other fields that are related to the finds, and those fields add up. In this current context, we're looking at a large amount of acreage that needs to be assessed. It is the size of that acreage to be assessed that creates the pause on the part of those who look at risk, particularly from a risk tolerance perspective on behalf of our American counterparts.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Thank you.

On risk tolerance, I appreciate that the investigation is ongoing and that you're not able to give this committee a clear timeline as to when it will be complete. I know scientific results from that laboratory testing are being provided to the USDA.

Is there any sense of what, from the United States' perspective, is an acceptable level of risk? As you said, those are ongoing conversations. Do you know what the end goal is that will help you achieve your ongoing investigation? At what level will this issue be resolved?

**Mr. David Bailey:** The United States has been fairly clear that they are looking, obviously, for the outcome of the investigation and the data related to that. They are also looking for information about the recent detection—what we would call "trace back and

trace forward", the history of that field and activity in those fields. They're looking for how we would delimit, what we call "delimitation surveys". They are looking at gap identification, key points and those kinds of things.

They are also looking for the outcome of our national potato wart survey, which had already been started prior to the finds. They are looking at any risk mitigation measures for what is, down the road, ideally, not quarantined. If you separate what is quarantined and what is not, it's how we will manage the space that doesn't have the pest, meaning pest-free areas of production. Fundamentally, they want to review their own potato wart pest risk assessment. This is their own science work that they will do.

We are trying to work with them on that. We have provided them with our own pest risk assessment, which we recently updated. These kinds of things are the things the United States is looking for in order to understand the nature of the problem from their perspective before we can have the conversation about opening trade.

• (1610)

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Thank you.

Representatives of the Government of P.E.I. may want to step in on my next question.

I just want to know a little bit more. When we have an outbreak of a pest in our crops, it suggests that the soil ecology is out of balance. We have pests such as potato wart springing into abundance. Can you walk the committee through mitigation efforts to try to combat this disease? What, so far, has shown success, etc.?

**The Chair:** That's in 25 seconds, please.

**Mr. Brian Matheson:** Carolyn, do you want to take that?

**Dr. Carolyn Sanford (Director, Animal Health, Regulatory, and Analytical Laboratories, Department of Agriculture and Land, Government of Prince Edward Island):** Certainly. Thanks for the question.

I guess I'd be cautious about using the words "spring into abundance" in terms of potato wart. It's a soil-borne fungus that isn't in a sprint or a marathon by any means, but it does like specific climate, temperatures and irrigation. I think we were fortunate—or unfortunate—this summer to have probably some ideal situations that helped us detect the pest.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Sanford. Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

We're going to go to our second round of questioning. You have five minutes, Mr. Epp.

**Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for your time today.

Having listened to the testimony, I think what is clear is that what has changed seems to be American confidence in our system. I'm hearing from the witnesses that—

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Perron:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The interpreter is indicating that the sound quality is too poor for them to interpret.

Can we get a new microphone?

Sorry to interrupt, Mr. Epp.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Is it okay now, Mr. Epp?

**Mr. Dave Epp:** I have put the mike a little higher. Does that make it a bit easier on your ears? I apologize for that.

What appears to have changed is American confidence in our management plan and our system, so my first question would be for the CFIA, for Ms. Mithani.

Would you table with the committee the agreement you have with the Americans, with APHIS, as to what conditions will be required in order to resume trade?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** We have provided information to our stakeholders, as well as the province, around our discussions with the United States and APHIS. Those conversations continue. We have provided that information to all our stakeholders.

Through the working group we have, there is a discussion prior to our meeting with APHIS and then a readout following the meeting with APHIS. That information is available. We can make it available to you.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Do you have an agreement with APHIS on what the conditions will be?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** We do not have an agreement. These are technical discussions as a result of the detection in October of the potato wart. These discussions are scientific. There's information sharing. There is, following discussions, normally a letter that says what we've discussed and what we are looking at. That information has been shared as a readout with the industry and the province.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** What I'm hearing is that this is the crux of the matter. The crux is that there isn't agreement, that there is a dispute. I would assume the officials would have gamed out the process by which to address this issue. By going to a voluntary ban, we've removed from ourselves any potential dispute resolution mechanisms, if I understand correctly, if we get to that point.

If I may ask, what is the present resolution process in place right now if we can't reach agreement with APHIS?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** I think it's important to understand that this was not a ban. This was based on the regulation in our plant protection regulations that if an importing country has concerns with our product—here, based on the concerns that the U.S. had—we are not authorized to issue export certificates. That was the rationale for the suspension of the issuance of export certificates.

We continue to speak with the USDA and APHIS—

• (1615)

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Thank you. I've asked for the things to be tabled.

Could I ask if the CFIA has received any direction, from either the minister or the PMO, to go the compensation route rather than fight with the Americans at the border?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** The discussions that we are having with the USDA are scientific and technical discussions.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Yes. Did you receive any direction from the Prime Minister's Office or from the minister as to the route that you are to go to address this issue with the Americans?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** We have had no direction from anybody. These are technical discussions that we have with the USDA to try to resolve the scientific issue of a difference in the interpretation of the level of risk tolerance. From a CFIA perspective, with respect to table stock potatoes, we feel that the mitigation measures that have been put in place do give us a negligible risk. From a USDA/APHIS perspective, this is not the same, so there is the difference in interpretation of scientific results or scientific argument.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Right, so what's the mechanism for resolving that?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** The technical discussions continue. We are looking at what information APHIS requires in order for us to satisfy their requirements for table stock potatoes. This is a preoccupation for the CFIA. This is something that we are working continuously and very hard on.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** I'd like to shift to the Prince Edward Island government.

Were you consulted in the development of the strategy to address this issue or were you informed after the fact?

**The Chair:** You have 10 seconds, unfortunately. That's all we have. Over to you, sir.

**Mr. Brian Matheson:** We have been in discussions since the wart was found in the fall. I'm not sure that we were involved in discussions of strategy, but we have been involved in some of the outcomes that could have taken place.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Matheson. Thank you, Mr. Epp.

It's over to you, Mr. Turnbull, for five minutes.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Through you, I'll direct my questions to Ms. Mithani.

Would you characterize this as a trade disagreement or a pest issue?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** CFIA is a regulator. We have a mandate to protect the health of plants and of animals as well. This means that from my perspective, from the CFIA perspective, this is a pest issue.

Our mandate is to ensure that we prevent the spread of potato wart across the country and internationally. We have found detections. Our long-term management plan is in place so that we are able to detect very quickly and put mitigation measures in place. This continues to happen.

P.E.I. has had a long history of producing the highest-quality potatoes for Canadians and international consumers. The Government of Canada shares the pride of our P.E.I. producers. The fact is that the long-term management plan has really allowed P.E.I. to move hundreds of potatoes across the country and internationally, so it is working.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you. I know that other members have suggested in their line of questioning that perhaps this risk management plan is not working. Isn't it true that you can have an instance of potato wart and still have an effective risk management plan? There are soil and climatic conditions that are ever-changing, and it is difficult, I'm sure, to account for every possibility. This is akin to trying to predict the weather, is it not?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** I would agree with your analogy around climate and how this happens. It's a good one. I would also say that these are conditions and these are plans.... The long-term management plan is a plan that's evergreen. It provides the CFIA the opportunity to modify change as required.

It is just the same with the ministerial order. A ministerial order can be modified, revoked and changed as required. This has been the best way forward in terms of trying to protect the potato program across the country and to ensure that P.E.I. potatoes can still go across the country and to other places too. We continue to work with the U.S. to try to come to a resolution on the issue we are having right now.

• (1620)

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Has this happened before, Ms. Mithani? Have there been instances of potato wart that have affected trade relationships with the U.S.?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** In the year 2000, when we had the first detections of the potato wart in both table stock potatoes and seed potatoes, we did not have access to the U.S. market for six months. This is not something that is unusual. It requires time. It requires information. It requires scientific investigation and data to support our position, which is exactly what we are doing right now.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Did it happen in 2014 as well?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** I do not have the details at hand on 2014, but I imagine it was the same.

Maybe David Bailey can answer that question.

**Mr. David Bailey:** The points of note, as the president has said, are 2000, 2014-2015, 2020, and now 2021. Last year there was a restriction from the fall through to the spring of this year by the United States. You can see that each time the question of potato wart comes up, the United States becomes more concerned and

raises questions of confidence and risk mitigation and their risk tolerance, for all intents and purposes, to clients.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Right. It seems that instances of potato wart aren't necessarily corresponding to the government in power per se, but in fact are related to other factors.

The only other question I have is around the role of producers and the province in terms of biosecurity practices. That risk management plan, I'm sure, is a highly collaborative effort. We've heard a lot about CFIA's role in today's conversation, but I haven't heard a whole lot about the other partners in that relationship.

If you could speak to that briefly, I'd be grateful.

**The Chair:** Mr. Turnbull, unfortunately, we're out of time. I know Mr. Matheson and Ms. Sanford certainly saw that question, and perhaps they'll get an opportunity to address that later.

[*Translation*]

We now go to Mr. Perron for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Yves Perron:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Once again, I'm going to turn to Ms. Lapointe, and I'll be keeping to the same line of questioning as Mr. Turnbull.

I asked about a timetable, and you said that you didn't really have one. You are in talks with the U.S. In fact, you have scientific discussions.

Could you please explain to the committee members and to the farmers who have tuned in what conditions need to be met for trade to resume? Do you have assurance that those conditions are guided not by bias, but by science?

You say there is scientific documentation, but we can't see. That raises questions in our minds.

**Ms. Sylvie Lapointe:** The answer to your question has two parts.

The discussions concerned are extremely technical and scientific. All are based on scientific advice and risk assessments. The first part, for us, is opening the border back up to table stock potatoes. That issue needs to be dealt with urgently and is a priority for the agency.

The second part involves a longer-term effort around seed potatoes. On that front, the U.S. wants to see the findings of our investigation into the two most recent detections, which covers 11 farms and 348 parcels of land.

Then, the U.S. wants to see the findings of our national investigation, which will be complete in January. The Americans also want to know whether we can put zoning measures in place in P.E.I. to identify high-risk parcels of land and fields, and to try to open parcels of land with a minimal risk of potato wart. In addition, the U.S. wants to conduct its own phytosanitary risk assessment, which, in its view, should take around four months.

There's a long way to go. We are trying to expedite things on our end, by facilitating conversations and providing as much information as possible.

• (1625)

**Mr. Yves Perron:** Thank you for your answer.

**The Chair:** Sorry, Mr. Perron, but you have just five seconds left. That isn't much time.

**Mr. Yves Perron:** Very well. I'll make a comment, then.

Two months plus four months equals six months. In 2000, it was the U.S. that closed the border. I'm not sure what we have to gain by closing it ourselves.

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

Go ahead, Mr. MacGregor.

[*English*]

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm interested in the theme of reciprocity. Back in 2006 the CFIA had to ban the import of potatoes from the state of Idaho because of potato cyst nematode. In that case the U.S. government or the state government did not act proactively. It fell to Canadian officials to put the ban in place.

I'm wondering whether since 2006 there have been examples of the United States Department of Agriculture or any state-level governments acting proactively in the manner that we have seen in this current case, such that they have proactively stopped the export of U.S. agricultural products to Canada. I'm wondering whether they have a similar system in place whereby they've acted proactively, or has it always fallen upon our federal agency, the CFIA, to do that work for them and put a ban in place?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** I would like to go back to the fact that we did not put a ban on ourselves. We did not do it for ourselves. It was based on the regulatory requirement, as I've said. The plant protection regulations speak to the fact that we can issue an export certificate to an importing country only if we meet its requirements. Given the concerns the U.S. had, we were not meeting its requirements, and therefore we would not have been able to issue export certificates.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Yes, but to my question, I think this is semantics. One way or another, there are no P.E.I. potatoes going to the United States right now.

Are there examples since 2006 of the United States government acting proactively in the manner that we have, or has it fallen on the CFIA to identify those pests and put in place our own stops at the border to prevent U.S. agricultural produce from coming into our country?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** Maybe David Bailey can speak to some of the other federal orders that may have been in place around 2006.

**Mr. David Bailey:** Yes. Thank you, President.

I can't speak to the specifics of what another country may or may not have taken on for—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Bailey and Mr. MacGregor. I apologize, because it's a really good question. Maybe I'll get the authority to ask it at the end, or perhaps, Mr. MacGregor or our next Conservative speaker will.

We do want to go to our third round of questions. We have a limited amount of time, so I'm going to use my discretion and go to four minutes each for the Conservatives and Liberals.

I think Mr. Barlow's unmuting.

My apologies, Mr. MacGregor.

**Mr. John Barlow:** Well, I guess I'll pick up on Alistair's question, if that's okay. He asked about the ban. Ms. Mithani said that we couldn't provide the export certificates because we didn't meet their requirements. Well, we have an agreement in place. It's been in place since 2015. What requirements changed? If we have agreements in place with the United States, what requirements changed so that all of a sudden we couldn't provide that export certificate?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** It was the detection in 2021 that caused concern to the U.S. regarding potato wart, and therefore, based on that concern, we were not meeting their requirements. Therefore we were unable to issue export certificates based on that. That was the reason.

**Mr. John Barlow:** It seems to me that if you have an agreement in place, you can't have one party change those requirements without having a discussion with both sets of parties. It sounds to me as though the United States changed the game and we just capitulated.

With regard to part of that, New Brunswick asked the CFIA to ban the import of potatoes from the United States because of ring rot, and the CFIA refused, saying that the agreement we have in place is sufficient. Why does this seem to be a one-way deal, in which Canada is banning these things? Why is this a one-way trade ban, whereby we don't do it when the United States has an issue with ring rot but we're more than happy to do it when it's an issue with a Canadian product? That's why I find this frustrating.

To Mr. Matheson or Ms. Sanford, we've talked about the 33 different cases in which potato wart has been identified in Canada. At any time, if potato wart has been found in the United States, has it been traced back to origins in P.E.I., and if not, why not?

• (1630)

**Mr. Brian Matheson:** To the best of my knowledge, it has never been found in the United States based on a case from P.E.I. I would assume that's because the management plan is working and that things are working appropriately.

**Mr. John Barlow:** Thank you.

To the CFIA again, the National Potato Council claims there's been a 75% reduction in soil sampling. Is that the case? Has CFIA's soil sampling been reduced that significantly? If so, why has it been reduced? If that is not the case, why isn't CFIA pushing back to debunk that misinformation that is continuing to be spread south of the border?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** That is misinformation.

I will ask David Bailey to explain. There are a number of factors that have to be considered in terms of how many soil samples are taken on a yearly basis. It really depends on a number of factors, as I said. Soil samples are done based on a regulatory requirement. They may be done—

**Mr. John Barlow:** Ms. Mithani, again, I don't need the details of it. That is what the National Potato Council is saying in the media. Why is CFIA not pushing back on that misinformation, then? Maybe you are and we're just not seeing it.

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** Mr. Chair, I would ask David Bailey to respond. We have pushed back. We have actually corrected those statements in the media, as well.

David, if you want to explain....

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

**Mr. David Bailey:** Let's sum it up as bad math on the part of the American potato council.

It is not something you can average. Soil sampling and the amounts taken each year are a factor of investigations, export samples, which are provided on demand by growers, the national potato wart survey in our current context, and other things. The number of soil samples fluctuates over a period of time, and you can't average it out, which is what the National Potato Council tried to do. We have sent corrections regarding that to the various media outlets.

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

It's over to Mr. Morrissey for four minutes to finish off the panel.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

My question is to the president of CFIA. It's for clarification. There's been some confusion.

On November 21, when the Canadian minister issued a statement that Canada would voluntarily suspend certificates to cross the border, was that the only measure taken at that time, or did the American government act at the same time, Ms. Mithani?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** When the minister announced the voluntary suspension, it was a suspension based on the recommendations that we had given. There were no other changes, to my knowledge, that were done as a result of the U.S.

Maybe David can speak to that.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** David or Ms. Mithani, what did the U.S. government order its border security to do?

**Mr. David Bailey:** The United States issued directions to its customs and border patrol services to not accept shipments from P.E.I. through any border point into the United States by midnight on November 22.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Then the minister's decision really had no impact on that. The U.S. decided to close its border on November 22. Am I correct?

**Mr. David Bailey:** That's correct. Whether we took some action or not, we would be here having the same conversation today.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Well, thank you for explaining that. Some people have been playing loose and fast with the fact that the minister simply moved arbitrarily and that she could change her mind and the border would reopen. It's important for the committee to understand that the U.S. government closed the border at the same time.

Ms. Mithani, over the past number of years, in 2000 and 2015, in all the incidents that occurred involving P.E.I. potatoes, did CFIA follow the same science-based process to resolve those disputes and open the market?

• (1635)

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** Absolutely. We have always used the management plan to continue to work to make sure that we protect P.E.I. potatoes and prevent the spread of potato wart in the—

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** The process you're using today is the same process you used in all the incidents in the past.

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** Yes.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Suffice it to say that CFIA does not take political direction on how to deal with science on these issues.

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** Absolutely, Mr. Chair. That is correct.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Okay. It's important to do that.

Is the management plan that was in put in place, the one that we're referring to, solely a CFIA document? How is the management plan developed? Could you expand on that? Is it developed in concert with the Government of P.E.I. and the potato marketing board, or is it solely a CFIA document?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** I will turn to David Bailey to answer on the specifics.

**Mr. David Bailey:** When the long-term management plan was originally created just after the 2000 find, it was created in partnership with the PEI Potato Board as well as the Province of P.E.I. It is really a joint document, from that perspective, in its creation. It is simply a regulatory tool to help us collectively manage endobiotic fungus.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Mr. Bailey, it is important for this committee to understand that this is not a document of CFIA in relation to the assumption that CFIA totally controls it. It is a management tool prepared by the industry, CFIA and the Government of P.E.I. Thank you.

Ms. Mithani, could you explain the difference between a federal order versus a ministerial one? If Minister Bibeau had not acted, what would be the implications of a federal order? This is for you first, and then I will go to the province for a quick comment. Which would have had the most negative impact on the P.E.I. potato industry?

**The Chair:** If you could take a quick 30 seconds, Ms. Mithani, we could then go quickly to Prince Edward Island. Thank you.

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** The difference is that once a federal order is up, it is very, very difficult to—

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** That's a federal U.S. order.

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** Yes. A federal U.S. order is very difficult to change. We looked at the past, and there were no examples of a federal order being lifted before. Therefore, the best thing to do at the time was to have an order that we had control over.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** A federal order from the U.S. would have had long-term negative consequences for the P.E.I. potato industry. Am I correct in assuming that?

**Dr. Siddika Mithani:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Mr. Matheson, could you comment briefly on what the province would have risked in a federal order versus the CFIA voluntarily suspending?

**Mr. Brian Matheson:** I can't make a comment about that. That's outside the authority of—

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Okay. That's understandable. I understand that you can't comment.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Morrissey. I did give you a bit of extra time just so we could allow Ms. Mithani.

Thank you very much to all my colleagues and to the witnesses for their testimony.

That ends panel one.

On behalf of the entire committee, I would like to thank the witnesses for taking the time tonight to be here with us. I'll let you excuse yourselves.

Folks, we are going to be just two or three minutes at the most for a pause before we get into our next panel. We're going to let the clerk take some sound checks. We're going to suspend momentarily, but please don't go far. Thanks.

• (1640) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1640)

**The Chair:** Members, we're going to get started again.

Thank you to our witnesses.

We have our second panel here today. On behalf of the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, we have with us Tom Rosser, the assistant deputy minister, and on behalf of the P.E.I. Potato Board, we have the general manager, Greg Donald.

Welcome, both of you.

We have five minutes for opening remarks. We're running a bit behind, but we're going to get started right away.

Mr. Rosser, it's over to you for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Tom Rosser (Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, for inviting me to appear before the committee this afternoon. Congratulations on being elected chair of the committee.

[*English*]

I want to thank the committee for holding this special meeting on the potato wart situation in Prince Edward Island and its impact on farm families, workers and agribusinesses.

As you heard earlier, the CFIA investigation continues, as quickly as possible, to give the U.S. the data they want so we can resume exports of fresh potatoes from P.E.I. Until that happens, the situation remains difficult and stressful for producers, for their families and for those who work in the supply chain, from grading to packing to trucking and so on.

The potato industry is a significant economic driver on the island. The department has been working hard to determine how best to support producers in the industry and help relieve some of the significant financial pressures they are facing. Some support has already been made available to producers under our business risk management programs. The P.E.I. and federal governments recently collaborated to amend the AgriStability program so that potato producers can enrol up to December 31, 2022, and receive interim payments of up to 75%. Farm Credit Canada has reached out to help producers, with flexible payments and other options to relieve cash flow pressures. These measures help, but they are not enough.

Yesterday Minister Bibeau announced a federal investment of \$28 million to help P.E.I. potato farmers with the management of surplus potatoes. This funding will be used to support the diversion of surplus potatoes by redirecting the surplus to food banks and other food security organizations. It will help in facilitating increased sales to processors and supporting environmentally sound disposal of surplus potatoes. Funding will also support marketing activities to develop long-term strategies to manage future challenges. AAFC officials will work with the P.E.I. Potato Board, national food bank organizations, the province and other stakeholder groups to deliver this funding.

We will have more details to share very shortly in the coming days and weeks. We aim to get this urgent support to producers as soon as we possibly can. The funding is a first tranche of federal supports, while work continues to assess impacts and find solutions for affected P.E.I. farmers, in collaboration with the provincial government.

Meanwhile, we're pulling out all the stops to meet the U.S. technical requirements and get our message to our U.S. partners. It's science-based messaging that we are delivering—namely, that the trade in fresh potatoes from P.E.I. remains safe when appropriate risk mitigation measures are in place.

Collaboration is key. We plan to take a team Canada approach. We're working with a potato working group made up of government and industry to keep us all on the same page and focused on our common goal. Yesterday the minister also announced the appointment of Fred Gorrell as the new co-chair of the potato working group. Mr. Gorrell is very well known within the sector and comes with years of experience as a former assistant deputy minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and leader of our market access secretariat.

We are continuing our concerted effort to engage with our U.S. partners at all levels. Earlier this month, Deputy Minister Chris Forbes met with his counterpart in Washington, Deputy Secretary Bronaugh. They discussed collaboration on restoring market access for P.E.I. potatoes. The minister is in regular contact with Secretary Vilsack, and she met late last week with Ambassador Cohen. The Prime Minister has raised this issue with President Biden, and Minister Ng with her counterpart in Washington and many members of Congress. There are many other high-level engagements with senior U.S. officials.

We're doing what we can to keep up the pressure, but none of this can happen fast enough for producers. Resolving the trade issue with the U.S. is the minister's top priority and will remain so. Everyone is fully engaged and focused on resolving this difficult situation as quickly as we possibly can.

Thank you for your attention, Mr. Chair. That concludes my remarks.

• (1645)

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

[*Translation*]

Go ahead, Mr. Donald.

[*English*]

**Mr. Greg Donald (General Manager, Prince Edward Island Potato Board):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and members of this committee, for inviting me to speak today regarding the current crisis that the Prince Edward Island potato industry is facing.

I know that other speakers have talked about the fungus. It's a disease that we've been dealing with very well for the last almost 21 years here in P.E.I. As has been mentioned, the long-term domestic potato wart management plan has served us well to prevent the spread of potato wart as well as manage any future detections in order to avoid a repeat of the pain of 2000.

The plan has worked. This year, as discussed, wart was found in two processing fields that were already under restrictions by CFIA because of previous finds. When we heard of them this year, we were concerned, but our immediate reaction was that the plan worked exactly the way that it was supposed to.

Having said that, this time the tone of the communications from CFIA was changed. As we listened to the change in tone on the part of CFIA, our organization responded by reminding CFIA of the very solid third party visual data that would provide additional evidence that the rest of P.E.I. was not infected with potato wart. CFIA did not acknowledge that data and chose to focus only on soil sampling. We learned from other countries that have potato wart but still export all over the world, the Netherlands being one such example, that visual data plays a huge role in the management of this disease.

We understand that USDA threatened to close the border to all Canadian seed potatoes. To prevent that loss of trade, particularly for western Canada, CFIA suspended the shipment of P.E.I. seed potatoes to the U.S. CFIA also promised the U.S. it would also find a way to suspend the shipment of P.E.I. seed potatoes to the rest of Canada. CFIA's easiest way of doing this was a ministerial order. To justify this, it used the words that the entire province of P.E.I. is "infested with potato wart". The U.S. then turned around and used this against us, and we are where we are, with a complete ban on the shipment of all P.E.I. potatoes to the United States.

CFIA says the risk from shipping washed sprout-inhibited potatoes from non-restricted P.E.I. fields is extremely low. Indeed, we are shipping potatoes across Canada to offshore markets based on internationally accepted risk mitigation measures. The U.S. is apparently not accepting those measures, even though it is a basis for how they ship potatoes around the world, including Japan and into Canada. There are regulated or quarantined potato pests in 16 different U.S. states, and potatoes from those states enter Canada based on those mitigation measures. We talk about equivalency in phytosanitary measures, but that is not the case in P.E.I. this year.

We asked for a \$60-million diversion program to destroy potatoes that will not be able to move to market because of the U.S. ban and the ministerial order. Yesterday Minister Bibeau announced \$28 million for that, and local media said it was the first phase of financial assistance for our farmers. Today we learned that the funding will not cover any of the costs or value of the potatoes. It is intended to cover only the cost of hauling the potatoes out of storage and running them through snow blowers. We were shocked. We asked for 12¢ per pound to establish a floor price for the Canadian market, but now AAFC has effectively established a floor price of 4¢ per pound.

We spoke with AAFC and the minister's office about this today and we're hopeful that they will revisit this crippling decision. It is yet another blow to our farmers. They deserve none of this. It will also mean much lower prices for potatoes grown in every province for the rest of the winter.

I have a few key questions before I wrap up. Does the CFIA have confidence in our wart management plan or not? If it does, it should communicate that more forcefully to the United States. The export of washed and sprout-inhibited fresh potatoes has worked smoothly for the last 20 years as a result of this plan. What has changed? Potato wart has not spread to other provinces or countries from Prince Edward Island. A just-completed national survey by the CFIA resulted in no potato wart detections in any other province in Canada. That's great news, and it's further confirmation of the strength of the wart management plan.

I'm just going to add that the potato industry on P.E.I. is willing to work with the CFIA to provide additional safeguards or assurances to the U.S. to reopen the border. We know that the same goes for our provincial government, which has had our backs since the start. We have made suggestions, as has the provincial government, but we don't know if those offers have been shared with the U.S.

In my career working in the potato industry, this is the largest crisis we have yet faced. The stress on our farmers and packers is immense. Not only are farmers trying to figure out what to do with potatoes they can't sell this winter; they're also trying to figure out whether to plant potatoes next year. Unless there's immediate progress made, I'm afraid that a number of our family farms will exit the industry and that irreparable damage will be done to our industry and the Prince Edward Island economy.

We appreciate the committee looking into this situation.

- (1650)

In our minds, it is not just another trade irritant with our biggest trading partner; it is one that could be resolved if the will is there.

The U.S. is short of potatoes, and bars in the U.S. want our potatoes—

**The Chair:** Mr. Donald, I don't mean to interrupt, but you are at time, and we want to stay on time. I know that you'll have the opportunity to answer questions.

We're going to start with our panel for six minutes each.

Mr. Barlow, it looks like you might be moving ahead.

**Mr. John Barlow:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Go ahead. You have six minutes.

**Mr. Greg Donald:** Thank you.

**Mr. John Barlow:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Mr. Donald, for being here.

Mr. Rosser, it's good to see you again. I'll start with you.

Certainly nobody wants this to be a long-drawn-out process. We were supposed to have dispute resolute provisions within CUSMA, so I'm curious: Does the minister's suspension of certification prevent Canada from utilizing the dispute settlement mechanism that is in CUSMA?

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** I would say that the committee that we have established—the working group—is looking at all options. We have trade experts there. We are certainly looking at this from a trade angle as well as a plant health one.

**Mr. John Barlow:** Okay. It is a bit disconcerting that this isn't an ironclad “yes” or “no” at this point and that this wasn't discussed. No disrespect to you, Mr. Rosser, but I was hoping that this would have been an ironclad “yes” or “no” before this decision to suspend the certification was decided upon.

In 2000, when we had potato wart first detected, we did use the dispute resolution under NAFTA. If we've used this before and we fought to keep this dispute resolution in CUSMA, why are we not using it?

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** Well, we certainly haven't given up the ability to use it. It is an option among others, but one thing that's certain about the CUSMA and WTO processes is that they are not quick. They extend over a period of a year or more. It remains an option. We are in active discussion with the industry and the province about what the available options are.



What's known about that one, as I said, is that it will not bring resolution nearly as quickly as we would like to in this situation.

**Mr. John Barlow:** Mr. Rosser, we're already hearing from CFIA that this could be prolonged well into 2023. We're not just talking about this year's harvest. We could be talking about next year's harvest, potentially, and I would hope that all tools are being used to ensure this is resolved as quickly as possible.

Mr. Donald, I'll turn to you. I think it's fair to say that in your presentation you see this as maybe more of a political mistake in terms of CFIA communication—and that maybe we were played a bit here—more than this being a decision based on sound science.

**Mr. Greg Donald:** Yes, I would agree with that comment. I believe it started out with the detection, but the way it was communicated kind of created the opportunity for it to become more than a scientific conversation.

**Mr. John Barlow:** Before this export certification ban was placed—and you heard the semantics around this being a ban—was there any consultation from the government with you and the potato board in terms of what actions were going to be taken and what the ramifications of those actions would be?

• (1655)

**Mr. Greg Donald:** Just so I'm clear, are you referencing since this year's detections?

**Mr. John Barlow:** When the export ban was put on earlier this year, before the minister made that announcement, was the potato board in P.E.I. consulted in terms of the actions the current government was going to take?

**Mr. Greg Donald:** No, we were not.

**Mr. John Barlow:** We've now heard publicly that the CFIA is saying that this could be prolonged into 2023, as I've said. What kind of impact could this have on the P.E.I. potato industry, but more specifically on the farmers themselves and on the farm families who are being impacted by this?

**Mr. Greg Donald:** On the last question you asked, Mr. Barlow, I just want to answer that we were informed, as I said, of some of the wishes or interests or threats, I'll say, from the U.S., based on what they want. It wasn't discussed with us what those actions were that were put in place.

I'm sorry, but I'm still thinking about that. What was your question?

**Mr. John Barlow:** Okay. I have a limited amount of time, so if I have time for that, I'll go back.

**Mr. Greg Donald:** I'm sorry about that.

**Mr. John Barlow:** No, no, that's okay.

Can I just get clarification? On that \$28 million that Minister Bibeau announced, not a single dime of that is going to the farmers themselves. This is merely a fund to destroy product. Did I hear you correctly?

**Mr. Greg Donald:** Yes. Our understanding today is that it is the destruction costs to remove the potatoes in the warehouses, put them in the field and put them through snow blowers, and that's a portion of the \$28 million. It's \$21 million.

**Mr. John Barlow:** This is not a compensation package for the producers in any way. They are still looking at you to access AgriStability as your management plan. Would you look at AgriStability as a product that was ever designed for a catastrophe like this? Is this what AgriStability is there for?

**Mr. Greg Donald:** I can't answer that, but what I am hearing from my producers is that if a producer has a year-end in July, for example, it will be this time next year before they'll know the impact of this situation on their financial situation.

First and foremost, they want the border open. They don't want assistance. But if it's required, yes, they're going to need something relatively quickly. I don't think AgriStability has the ability, from what I understand of it, to do that.

**Mr. John Barlow:** What is the reaction from growers to hear that this is maybe going to last until 2023 before—

**The Chair:** Mr. Barlow, I apologize. We're at six minutes.

Mr. Donald, perhaps you can table that and answer it in one of your future questions.

**Mr. John Barlow:** Thanks, Chair.

**The Chair:** It's over to you, Mr. MacDonald, for six minutes.

**Mr. Heath MacDonald:** I have a couple of questions for Mr. Bailey.

We've talked a lot about soil testing. Soil testing coming out of the U.S., in every article you read and every podcast you listen to relevant to potatoes—

**The Chair:** Mr. MacDonald, I'm going to interrupt you. Mr. Bailey was part of the last panel.

**Mr. Heath MacDonald:** He's not here.

**The Chair:** We now have Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and Mr. Donald.

**Mr. Heath MacDonald:** All right. This is for anybody from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

Why is there such a particular emphasis put on soil testing with the other mitigation that is being done on Prince Edward Island? Are you aware of the other mitigation?

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** I'm afraid I don't feel I'm in a position to answer that question. I'm sure my colleagues from CFIA or with the committee earlier could get back to the member and to the committee in written form. I don't think I can help on that one, I'm afraid.

**Mr. Heath MacDonald:** Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Donald, just quickly, could you tell us for the record what other mitigations Prince Edward Island farmers carry out?

**Mr. Greg Donald:** There would be many sources of mitigation in terms of preventing the spread of the disease in particular. Is that what you're referring to?

**Mr. Heath MacDonald:** Yes.

**Mr. Greg Donald:** There would be biosecurity measures, which would be cleaning and disinfecting between fields. It's one of the best management practices—it would be one of the EIs—but there are also all kinds of observations. Eighty-seven per cent of our crop has crop insurance, and they take samples. I think they take a 60-pound sample every 10 acres. For all of our potatoes that go to Cavendish Farms, which is half the crop, they take two 25-pound baskets for every tandem truckload, which I think is about 85,000 truckloads a year.

I could go on and on. There are many ways that the crop is... Things are done to prevent, using best biosecurity practices, but also to observe whether or not the disease is present. In all of those observation ways, they've never seen the potato wart, for example; so through observation.

• (1700)

**Mr. Heath MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Donald.

I want to quickly go back to an issue that was raised. Obviously the U.S. has several pests, such as the nematode pest, subject to quarantine in several states. Basically, they use the same marketing policies as we do to export into Canada as Canada exports into the U.S. Has this been raised in any of the discussions relevant to CFIA? I'm wondering if anybody here can tell me that this trade issue has been a discussion, or a flag raised, and that there could be possibilities of Canada doing the same thing maybe to the U.S. in regard to the Idaho potatoes or those pests that are so high in quarantine.

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** Mr. Chair, I could try to take a stab at that. Greg may well wish to add to it.

As I mentioned earlier, we have created a working group with the province and the industry and the full value chain represented there. Part of what we discuss there are trade measures and trade options as part of the menu of things we can consider as part of a way forward on this issue. We do have a forum where we can talk with those most affected on the various options to try to move this issue forward with the United States.

**Mr. Heath MacDonald:** I'm hearing that there was a discussion relevant to that with the U.S., or was that internally within Canada?

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** We've created a forum within Canada to talk about what our options are for addressing this in terms of plant health, in terms of supporting producers who are affected and in terms of trade levers and trade measures that are available to us.

**Mr. Heath MacDonald:** Thank you.

My final comment, Mr. Chair, is that this is a very serious and drastic situation that farmers and producers on Prince Edward Island are being held to. I just want to stress the sense of urgency to come to a resolution.

Communication is key to this. I've certainly been fearful over the past little while that communication has been lacking in some re-

gard in some essentials. I want to know if anybody here can tell me the role Mr. Gorrell is going to play in this whole situation.

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** Mr. Chair, perhaps I could try.

Greg Donald will be Fred's co-chair, so he may have a sector. He knows the trade world and he knows Canada-U.S. relations and he understands the industry. We've created this forum, this working group, and he will chair it. That will bring the relevant players to the table. I think a big part of his role will be to make sure that communications back and forth between interested parties and Canada are as clear as possible to try to minimize any misunderstandings or miscommunication.

**Mr. Heath MacDonald:** Thank you.

Go ahead.

**Mr. Greg Donald:** If I could add to that, Mr. MacDonald, we were pleased with the announcement that Fred Gorrell will be joining the effort. Today was our first working group meeting, and as Tom said, he did co-chair that meeting, and we hope that he'll take an active role in the discussions between the USDA and the CFIA in that exercise.

Thank you.

**Mr. Heath MacDonald:** Thank you.

That's fine, Chair.

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

[*Translation*]

It is Mr. Perron's turn for six minutes.

**Mr. Yves Perron:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for meeting with us this afternoon to discuss this important issue.

Mr. Rosser, the witnesses in our first panel told the committee about the U.S. requirements. We asked them whether there was a timetable for getting P.E.I. potatoes back on the U.S. market. There isn't one because the requirements that have to be satisfied are quite stringent and have apparently increased in number since 2015. However, the methods that have been introduced to clean the products and contain the disease are still proving effective in Canada.

That makes me think we are once again dealing with protectionism in disguise on the part of our neighbours to the south, similar to what we've seen in the case of softwood lumber and electric vehicles. My fear is that they'll want to drag this on.

Is there a backup plan if no agreement is reached in the next few months?

One of the previous witnesses told us that the U.S. wanted to conduct its own study and that it would take four months. Do you know about that?

If we don't come to an agreement with the Americans, what is the plan to help farmers who are in need of support?

• (1705)

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** Thank you for your question.

My CFIA counterparts talked about their discussions with the Americans. It is true that the investigation you mentioned will take some time to carry out. We plan to do everything in our power to expedite the process, but it's also important to bear in mind that the situation is fluid.

As Ms. Lapointe mentioned during the previous panel, we think it's possible to get fresh potatoes back on the U.S. market. From our standpoint, the science supports the interprovincial potato trade. We hope the Americans will be open to the possibility before all the scientific research is completed.

Our discussions with P.E.I. and Puerto Rico are continuing, to see whether a resolution can be reached. It may take time to resolve the issue, but that doesn't mean the situation will stay exactly as it is in the interim, as the scientific research is completed.

**Mr. Yves Perron:** Thank you, Mr. Rosser.

Our neighbour may not be acting in good faith, then. What I gather from your comments is that the seed potato issue will probably take a while to fix.

How exactly do you intend to help farmers in P.E.I.?

You brought up AgriStability, but a witness told us they didn't think the program was really suited to the circumstances. Over the past few months, amid the crisis stemming from the pandemic, the department has often told farmers that programs were available. However, the programs are very slow to respond to situations.

Do you plan to make any supports available to farmers?

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** Part of the solution may lie with AgriStability, which is an existing program, as you pointed out. The program provides protection and support to farmers who are most affected by the situation. More than 80% of P.E.I. farmers are enrolled in the program.

Clearly, farmers need more help because of the situation, and that's why, yesterday, the minister announced \$28 million in funding to provide farmers with more support than is accessible through the business risk management programs.

**Mr. Yves Perron:** The funding will go towards destroying the crops. Will it not?

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** It will go towards more than just that. Yes, the funding can be used for that purpose, but it can also be used to buy potatoes or to help food banks buy them. The funding is meant to help processors use more P.E.I. potatoes.

We're going to speak with industry and provincial representatives to find out what their priorities are and figure out how the funding will be used.

**Mr. Yves Perron:** Thank you.

Mr. Donald, is the funding that was announced enough, or do you need significantly more?

Have you already estimated what the losses will be? How much do P.E.I. farmers need?

[English]

**Mr. Greg Donald:** Thank you for the question.

Our estimates, which were communicated a few weeks ago and again in detail a week ago, are \$60 million. Those are the needs of our producers.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Perron:** Is that on top of the \$28 million that was announced yesterday?

[English]

**Mr. Greg Donald:** That's not including the \$28 million that was announced yesterday.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Perron:** That would mean you still need more support, on top of what was announced.

Do you have the same impression I do, meaning that this is protectionism in disguise on the part of a trading partner who is cheating more and more often?

• (1710)

[English]

**Mr. Greg Donald:** Just as a clarification, \$60 million in total is what we requested. The funding announced yesterday would provide up to \$21 million that could go directly to the producers. Waiting—

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Sorry, Mr. Donald and Mr. Perron, but Mr. Perron's time is up.

We now go to Mr. MacGregor for six minutes.

[English]

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Donald, maybe I'll start with you.

First of all, thank you for joining our committee today and providing your perspective, and also for speaking on behalf of all your members about the trials and tribulations they are currently going through.

In your opening statement, you mentioned that other countries have managed to successfully continue exporting potatoes despite the detection of potato warts. I think you may have mentioned the Netherlands.

Do you have any further information on that? Can you expand a bit more on that? I'm curious as to how they were able to do that, whereas we seem to be dropping the full hammer on this problem.

**Mr. Greg Donald:** The Netherlands is the world's leader in exportation of seed potatoes. That region, northwestern Europe, has had potato wart since the 1900s. They've been managing the disease through identification of pest-free areas—as has been done similarly in P.E.I.—and other management techniques, including resistant varieties, etc.

It's something that's been there for a long time, and they continue to export potatoes around the world. The number one way to mitigate it is through visual observations.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** In the regime they have in place for tracing the origin of potatoes, you say they're able to sort of compartmentalize different regions so that if there's an outbreak, they can quickly act upon it. How does that compare with what our provinces are doing, in the example of Prince Edward Island?

**Mr. Greg Donald:** Up until this year, fields that were associated with a detection were considered restricted fields. All other fields were considered pest-free. To this day, I don't know why CFIA made a change in their protocol or their own plan this year so that they consider P.E.I. to no longer be pest-free. That started by impacting our export business, and the way it was communicated to Canada and the U.S. predisposed us to the issue that we're dealing with right now with the U.S.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** It's a real head-scratcher that an entire province's export is being affected by what was located on a couple of farms. In your conversations with your U.S. counterparts, is there any sympathy on that side, or any acceptance that we have proper management techniques in place so that it wouldn't negatively affect an entire province's exports?

**Mr. Greg Donald:** You would have to be more specific about who in the U.S.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** I guess it would be U.S. government officials or their related potato industrial boards and so on.

**Mr. Greg Donald:** Most of the people we've talked to in the industry want our potatoes, which has kind of made this very hard for us to understand. In a lot of cases, in the early days they weren't even aware of it. Most of the pressure was coming from the National Potato Council, I believe, and directly to USDA. That's where the concerns were.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Thank you.

Mr. Rosser, you've been listening to our back-and-forth here. I understand completely, and with respect, that this may be a question that CFIA is more able to answer, but can you illuminate for us why an entire province's export industry is being affected when the wart was discovered in only a few select farms? Going forward, can we not learn a lesson from this where we can work with our American counterparts to establish a better management plan whereby if a disease is detected, we can quickly isolate it and lock those farms down, but not have the entire province suffer as a result?

If you have any comments on this line of questioning, it would be greatly appreciated.

• (1715)

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** Mr. Chair, for a more technical reply, my colleagues from CFIA would probably be better placed. I would offer a couple of thoughts, maybe just drawing on the earlier testimony.

One, this measure was taken because the U.S. authorities made it abundantly clear that if we didn't take measures to restrict exports from Prince Edward Island, they would do it for us. We deemed it advantageous that the decision to put them on or remove them remained in Canadian hands.

With respect to U.S. stakeholders and a very active dialogue at all levels with the U.S. government, my recollection is that Secretary Vilsack has expressed sympathy and understanding of the situation that this creates in Prince Edward Island. I would note as well that beyond the Canadian embassy in Washington, our network of consulates across the United States has been enlisted to help identify those stakeholders in the U.S. industry who could potentially serve as allies in our engagement on this issue with the United States.

Lastly, I know that colleagues from CFIA have had discussions with their counterparts in the Netherlands and other countries so that we can learn from the experience of others. We have been very focused on the immediate response to the current situation in recent weeks, but we are also thinking about the longer term and doing some outreach to learn from the experience of others in managing situations like this.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Thank you. I'll leave it there, Mr. Chair.

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

We'll go back to the five-minute slot, starting with the Conservative Party and Mr. Epp.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** I'll begin, and then I'll split my time with my colleague Mr. Calkins.

I'm a bit confused, so let me go back to a previous answer from Mr. Rosser. There's nothing that precludes an agreement with the U.S. coming to terms at any point, but do we or do we not have access to the CUSMA dispute resolution mechanisms as a fail-safe?

Back in 2000 we settled this dispute without a management plan in six months. Do we or do we not have access?

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** Yes. I mean, from a.... The Americans do have obligations in their use of phytosanitary measures, and we are certainly bringing that perspective to dialogue around a way forward.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Let me take it to the implications to the market if we have a longer-term protracted dispute if we don't use that mechanism efficiently. What was the purpose of putting the date of 2023 in there, saying that this could last until 2023?

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** Mr. Chair, I don't know if that's a question for me. Again, it's more based on dialogue with the United States and some of the scientific measures or scientific work they have requested. That is an estimate of how long it will take to undertake the various measures they've outlined.

As I tried to explain in earlier testimony, it does not necessarily mean that the current export measures will remain frozen in place exactly as they are for that entire period, but that was an estimate of how long it would likely take to complete the work that the Americans have requested of us.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** I'm trying to determine whether this is a scientific dispute or a trade dispute. If it's a trade dispute, we have dispute resolution mechanisms. If we are doing this until 2023, that will mean another season lost. Someone's going to fill that American market, or a large part of it, and it will be lost to our Canadian producers. That will affect the potato producers in my riding.

What would you say to that, with the 4¢ floor that my producers here or now the producers in western Canada are expecting for this year's crop, with no opportunity for P.E.I. to export to the U.S. in 2022?

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** Mr. Chair, I'd simply say that there is no 4¢ floor. We are hopeful that we may see a speedy resolution in terms of P.E.I.'s access for at least some products into the U.S. market. It's very common in the agriculture world that phytosanitary and scientific issues intertwine with trade ones. I can assure the committee that we are looking at our circumstances in this situation through both prisms to inform a way forward.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Thank you.

I'll turn my time over to Mr. Calkins.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Epp.

My question, Mr. Rosser, is this. You brought up in your answers to previous questions the notion of exploring all options available to us, including trade levers. Those were your words. You used those words. The president of the CFIA maintained throughout the entirety of her testimony that this is simply a scientific and technical discussion between American and Canadian representatives at that level. What is it, actually?

The Government of Canada's response seems to be different depending on the department. If you're considering trade levers, then it's obviously a political-economic dispute. At what point are we going to recognize this for exactly what it is? This is protectionism by the protectionist government in the United States, which is using a non-tariff barrier through this regulatory framework, which it can do from time to time, which it has done from time to time, which it hasn't done every time because every time we've detected potato wart, this has not been a problem. The tone has changed, so when is our tone going to change in response?

• (1720)

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** Mr. Chair, I'd just say that Dr. Mithani's mandate, her agency's mandate, is to look at this as a scientific and plant health issue and that's the perspective that they bring to it.

On the working group that Greg Donald and Fred Gorrell co-chair, CFIA is represented, as is Agriculture Canada and the trade experts at Global Affairs. Our objective is to bring all perspectives to it. Certainly if we can see resolution, see progress made, on this on a scientific level, on a plant health level, that will offer, I think, the greatest possibility for a speedy resolution to this, but it's not

the only prism through which we as a government are examining this issue.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** I assume I have some time left, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** You have seven seconds, unfortunately, Mr. Calkins.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** I would like to have a long, protracted conversation with Mr. Donald if I get the opportunity.

**The Chair:** We're going to go to Mrs. Valdez.

It's over to you.

**Mrs. Rechie Valdez (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair. I just want to tell the committee that I'm sharing my time with the MP for Kitchener—Conestoga.

My questions are for Mr. Rosser.

First, who has the authority to stop production on a specific farm? Second, what is the role of the province in managing the pest?

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** In terms of a legal and technical response, my colleagues from CFIA might be better placed to offer a more detailed answer than I am.

I would say, though, that in managing this, there is very close collaboration, daily collaboration, between the relevant officials at CFIA and the province, but in terms of the legal details of who's responsible for what and who can order what on a farm, I would suggest that the committee address those questions, perhaps in writing, to the participants on the previous panel.

**Mrs. Rechie Valdez:** I know you mentioned in your opening statement, just to clarify, the \$28 million that was announced, which will be used to assist the funding to direct potatoes to food banks and food security organizations. The fund is not there just to destroy potato product. Can you confirm that?

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** That is correct, Mr. Chair. It is for many uses. It can be used to help with destruction, but our first priority, which I believe is shared by the industry and the province, since these are good-quality potatoes, is to make use of them productively wherever possible, be that at food banks, for export, for further processing, or for other potential uses.

**Mrs. Rechie Valdez:** Thank you.

I'll pass it over to the MP for Kitchener—Conestoga.

**Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to thank both of the panellists.

To continue on the question that was asked, we know that potato wart is a serious agricultural pest, but it's not a threat to human health. Maybe you wouldn't mind expanding, in the short time we have, on some of the creative solutions that will not only support our farmers this winter, given the destruction of potatoes, but also help make the best of this difficult situation in a collaborative way through giving to food banks and diverting potatoes, through other means, to people who need them.

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** Mr. Chair, perhaps I could try an initial answer, and Greg Donald may well have a perspective as well. As a department, we do have some experience with food surpluses that built up during the COVID episode as a result of the partial closure of the hotel and restaurant sector and with helping food security organizations to procure that food and make use of it. We are using that network and some of the lessons learned from that experience to see if we can make a portion of this surplus available to food security organizations across Canada and potentially elsewhere as well.

We're looking at an active discussion with potato processors not just in P.E.I. or Atlantic Canada but also in other regions of the country as to whether there might be a possibility for them to make greater use of the surplus. We're open to other possibilities, whether those be animal feed or biofuel feedstock, recognizing that not all of those solutions are going to help us tremendously in terms of dealing with the surplus at hand. We're exploring all possibilities that we can identify.

• (1725)

**Mr. Tim Louis:** That's perfect. Thank you.

I will continue with you, Mr. Rosser.

You mentioned the team Canada approach that we're taking and that a working group has been formed to bring relevant players to the table to decide what measures are available to us. You mentioned some of the organizations, but can you share with this committee which organizations are at the table and what perspective they bring to our discussion?

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** Greg Donald is the co-chair. He may well have a perspective on it, but there is also a representative, in fact, Dr. Sanford, who was part of the earlier panel, is a member of that committee. A number of representatives of the P.E.I. Potato Board are also present on it. There are representatives of some of the major processing organizations, the Department of Global Affairs, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. Off the top of my head, those are where the members are drawn from, but perhaps Greg might have something to add.

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds, Mr. Donald.

**Mr. Greg Donald:** I think you've pretty much covered all of the people who are attending it.

I just want to say that our farmers do not want to dump and waste potatoes. We have been shipping loads of potatoes to British Columbia, right across the country, and we'll continue to do that. Farmers do not want to destroy good food. At 4¢, for a yield of 3,400 weight per acre, that works out to \$1,360. It cost \$3,600 an acre to grow those potatoes.

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

My apologies, but we have to keep moving.

[*Translation*]

Go ahead, Mr. Perron. You have two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Yves Perron:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to give Mr. Donald an opportunity to talk further about market diversification. Obviously, the thought of wasting perfectly good food is enough to make me sick.

Have you started looking into other export markets?

Do you see that as a possible avenue?

[*English*]

**Mr. Greg Donald:** We had about 21 countries that we exported to, but given the way this has been handled and communicated by CFIA, we have lost a number of those markets. I don't know where we can go internationally to get more markets. This is about 10,000 truckloads of potatoes. It's a massive pile, and seeing as it's a perishable product, it will keep for only about another month. We're talking weeks. We don't want to, but we will have to start destroying potatoes. There is not time. Time has run out. I just can't stress that enough. This has to be dealt with right away. We need to have that border opened.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Perron:** Sorry to cut you off, but two and a half minutes isn't much time.

You mentioned, in your earlier comments, how CFIA had made the announcement.

If you could give some constructive feedback on the way forward, what would it be?

If something similar were to happen five or 10 years down the road, how should CFIA's approach be different?

[*English*]

**Mr. Greg Donald:** It would be that if they have confidence in their own plan and the plan that they have agreed on with the U.S., the plan will work exactly the way it's supposed to. They would project confidence that they have this, that they've got this. That's what changed the most this year. That didn't happen.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Perron:** I see.

Do you feel, as I do, that, oftentimes, Canada is a bit too afraid of the U.S.?

[English]

**Mr. Greg Donald:** Yes. Our potatoes are perfectly good. I want to give an example. We talk about sprout inhibition. I think the U.S. exports upwards of \$220 million worth of fresh potatoes to Japan. Idaho, as pointed out earlier in presentations, has a quarantinable pest. The same mitigation measures of washing and sprout inhibition are good for that market. How come they're not good for our potatoes from Prince Edward Island? If it's good in our own country, how come it's not good for our potatoes going to the U.S.?

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Donald and Mr. Perron.

Over to you, Mr. MacGregor.

[English]

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Rosser, maybe I'll start with you. I want to know a little bit more about the ways in which we proactively deal with disease and pests. Are you able to provide the committee with a little bit of an overview of what AAFC devotes in its budget to mitigation measures for pests like potato wart? Where is the major source of research going on? Is it the centres in Atlantic Canada?

I'd like to have a little bit of an overview of what proactive steps are being done and if we're close to any kinds of breakthroughs in managing this disease.

● (1730)

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** Yes, we do have, going back to the 1950s, a history of working specifically on potato wart. As I understand it, our centres of expertise have traditionally been at our centre in Newfoundland, where they've been dealing with potato wart since the early 20th century. I understand that we have researchers elsewhere in the Atlantic region also doing research on resistant varieties and other things.

Beyond the science work that we do on potato wart and other pests, we of course have a market access secretariat whereby we try to deal in an international and trade context with facilitating the export of Canadian-produced products, so we do come at this from different angles, but yes, we do have a critical mass of scientific expertise that for decades, I guess, has been conducting research related to potato wart.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Thank you, Mr. Rosser.

Mr. Donald, I have only about 30 seconds left here. I understand that P.E.I. potato farmers would get their greatest source of income over the next few months from the exports. If you want to take a few more seconds to talk about the financial situation they're in—you did mention that a lot of farms may not be able to make it through this year—go ahead and add further comments in that regard.

**Mr. Greg Donald:** I live here. I work for these folks. It's dire through our whole community. A question was asked earlier about 2023, which I didn't answer. It's unacceptable. We have warehouses full of potatoes right now. They don't know what to do with those potatoes, let alone know what to plant next spring. I hear of farmers who are—

**The Chair:** Mr. Donald, I apologize. We are already over time.

I have 10 minutes left. This is an important conversation.

I'm going to move that we get 10 more minutes of conversation in, so we're going to go to the Conservatives for five minutes and to the Liberals for five minutes.

Go ahead, Mr. Barlow.

**Mr. John Barlow:** Thanks.

If you don't mind, Mr. Donald, maybe you could just quickly finish up your thoughts there.

**Mr. Greg Donald:** I was just saying that folks are contemplating whether to continue or not. They may not be able to financially, but some are then deciding that they can't.... It's hard farming as it is, with the weather and all the uncertainties, but this is a government-made issue. It's just unacceptable how this happened and where we're at. A lot of them are thinking about getting out of the business, if they aren't forced out. We're going to lose farms over this, for sure.

**Mr. John Barlow:** Certainly I appreciate Ms. Valdez's question about more specifics on the \$28 million and that it's not all disposed product. It will be transported to food banks. Ironically, it will be many of those Prince Edward Island farmers who will be accessing those food banks and getting their product back, because they've had no revenue and no way to make a living, which I find extremely depressing.

Mr. Rosser, are there any plans other than AgriStability, or asking producers to drain their AgriInvest account, in terms of a possible compensation package? Is that being discussed?

I'll reiterate that I know that producers would much rather be exporting their product than relying on compensation, but as Mr. Donald said, this is a perishable product and time is running short. Is the minister looking at some sort of compensation package, and what would that look like?

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** Mr. Chair, I would say that we have a number of programs in place. The \$28 million yesterday was intended as support to deal primarily with the surplus. We will discuss with Mr. Donald and his organization and negotiate the details and parameters of how that will be operationalized. We would hope that this would, if not provide compensation, then at least provide some support in addressing the surplus that many producers have of potatoes at the moment.

We will also continue the discussion as events unfold and new challenges arise. We're willing to work with the province and the industry for as long as it takes to help see this situation through.

• (1735)

**Mr. John Barlow:** What date was the minister informed of this justification or this threat from the United States? Who gave the minister the advice to put in the ministerial order to ban—semantics aside—our P.E.I. potato exports?

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** I believe that in her testimony Dr. Mithani confirmed that the minister was acting on the advice of the agency. I would say that the final decision followed weeks of detailed and often daily discussions at various levels with the province, with industry stakeholders, with the United States. It was not something that was done quickly or casually.

From roughly the second detection, which I believe was October 15, until the order was put in place on, I believe, November 22, there were very regular and intense discussions with the province and others concerned before a final decision was taken.

**Mr. John Barlow:** We've had Minister Ng go to Washington. We've had the Prince Edward Island government, along with with representatives of the Potato Board, go to Washington. How come the minister herself hasn't gone down to Washington to plead our case here or have those discussions?

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** Mr. Chair, I would note that the minister has spoken on at least three occasions, I believe, with Secretary Vilsack about the situation. This is a multipronged approach. I have little doubt that Minister Bibeau would travel to Washington on very short notice if she were advised that this would be the most advantageous thing for her to do for our Canadian advocacy strategy. She has been very actively engaged on it. I'm sure she will at some point make personal representations in the U.S., but to this point she has engaged through telephone conversations with the secretary.

**Mr. John Barlow:** Mr. Donald, as Mr. Rosser said, the minister received recommendation from CFIA with weeks of consultation. Was the potato board consulted on this decision to ban our exports, or did you agree with this decision if you were consulted?

**The Chair:** You have 15 seconds.

**Mr. Greg Donald:** No. We had a series of updates and very little engagement until just the last week or two. We were informed of the decision when it was made.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Donald. Thank you, Mr. Barlow.

We will finish up our panel with Mr. Morrissey for five minutes.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Rosser, going back to the \$28 million, this is on top of the \$10 million that's been announced by the Government of Prince Edward Island. Is that correct?

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** That's correct, yes.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** In your opening statement, you said that this is, to use your words, the "first tranche" of federal support. Did I correctly interpret you?

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** That is what I said. That is correct. Our focus now is to make the best use possible of those funds—

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** At the present time, then, there's \$38 million on the table. It's been identified preliminarily as a \$60-million issue, or that it could become that, but \$38 million is currently available to producers. It's important to know that this is to producers.

I want to go to Mr. Donald briefly, because in an earlier question from one of the committee members, you referenced the Netherlands and the protocols that are put in place in the Netherlands. They ship all over the world. Do the Netherlands, as part of their risk management tool, take potato land out of production if it's detected to have potato wart?

**Mr. Greg Donald:** I don't know the answer to that. I believe they still farm that land. It's still in agricultural production—

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Yes, but I'm talking about potatoes. I am told that the Netherlands ban potato planting in infested fields for 20 years.

**Mr. Greg Donald:** I can't answer that. I don't know that for sure.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** You can't.

**Mr. Greg Donald:** I thought maybe they still planted starch potatoes in some of that land, but I guess I don't know for sure.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Does P.E.I. ban any potato planting in land that potato wart has been detected in?

**Mr. Greg Donald:** The management plan is a CFIA plan. It's a federal government plan. In that plan, after many, many years, once it's found that the field is pest-free or below a certain threshold, they can plant potatoes in those fields, but we have started an initiative to eliminate all the indexed fields. We're going to plant them into trees—that's the P.E.I. industry and government.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** That's a good step, because again, from the earlier testimony, Mr. Donald, the management plan that you refer to as CFIA's is not CFIA's. They said it's a management plan that was developed jointly with the industry and the Government of P.E.I. that CFIA enforces.

Mr. Donald, perhaps you could comment on the possibility of a U.S. federal order that could have come down. What are your thoughts on that, given the implications? If the U.S. agriculture department had issued a federal order closing the border, would it be more difficult to negotiate than CFIA dealing with APHIS, our American counterpart, on a scientific basis?

**Mr. Greg Donald:** I guess I'll ask you a question, Mr. Morrissey. How do you know they were going to put a U.S. federal order in place?



• (1740)

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** That's the information that was provided to the Government of Canada through the agriculture secretary. At the same time, on November 22, the Government of the United States ordered their border security to not allow any potatoes across the border, whether they were CFIA-certified or not.

The reality is that the Government of P.E.I. was involved in those discussions on the issue of the U.S. government issuing a federal order. There's been evidence given by CFIA and various other participants on the panel that this order would have been much more difficult to deal with and to get resolved or changed than the steps taken by the Government of Canada to date.

**Mr. Greg Donald:** Has the Government of Canada seen, or have you seen, a copy of the U.S. federal order that was drafted?

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Mr. Donald, let's not be argumentative. They didn't issue it. They backed off from negotiations from the Government of Canada to ensure that we followed the scientific CFIA route. Everybody in the industry has acknowledged and advised that this route would have less of a negative impact on the industry than a federal order.

I have a final question for you, Mr. Rosser. There was some discussion—and it hasn't come up—about the national potato wart survey that was done this past summer across Canada. Is that something you could speak to? I would have preferred to ask the question of CFIA, but could you comment on the national potato wart survey?

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds, Mr. Rosser. Then we have to wrap up.

**Mr. Tom Rosser:** Just very briefly, Mr. Chair, this is something that the CFIA is better placed to speak to than I am. My understanding, though, is that the work is expected to be completed shortly, in the coming weeks.

I'm sure my colleagues at CFIA would be happy to provide additional details in writing.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Morrissey. Thank you, Mr. Rosser.

If you'll indulge me as the chair, this is not to ask a question, but just simply to thank our witnesses on both panels for their participation and to thank all members on the committee for the important questions that were raised today.

I know that stakeholders from Prince Edward Island and across the country are watching our committee work. Certainly—I think I speak on behalf of all parliamentarians in this group—we share the concern and want to do everything we can to help with support, as does the government.

To the members, we certainly appreciate the good questions and, to the witnesses, your time, especially this close to the holiday season. Thank you very much.

With that, I would move that we close today's meeting. I want to wish everyone a merry Christmas and happy holidays.

To my clerk and to the analysts, we look forward to seeing you and everyone else in the new year with the subcommittee. Please keep your eyes peeled for that email.

The meeting is adjourned.





Published under the authority of the Speaker of  
the House of Commons

---

### SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

---

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

---

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

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

---

### PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

---

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

---

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :  
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>