HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

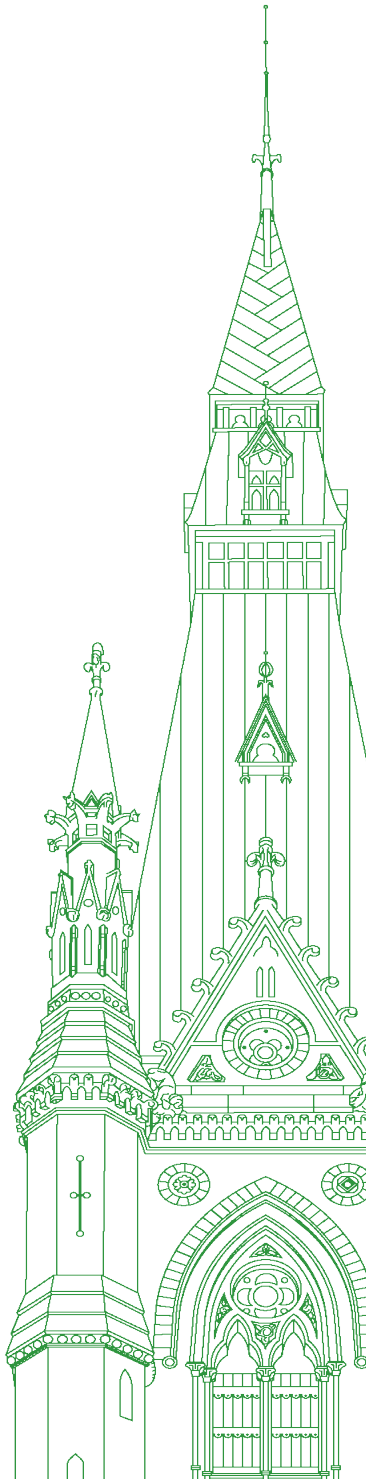
Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 061

PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT

Wednesday, May 3, 2023



Chair: Mr. Kody Blois

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

Wednesday, May 3, 2023

● (1630)

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC)): I call the meeting to order. We'll get started. I know that Kody will be here.

There he is.

I just want to say that it's really good to hang out with everybody today and keep this spot warm.

The Chair (Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.)): Sorry, colleagues. It was just a slight personal matter. I'm sorry for the delay.

Welcome to meeting number 61 of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

I will start with a few reminders.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. Just so you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking, rather than the entirety of the committee, and taking screenshots or taking photos of your screen is not permitted.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, April 17, the committee is commencing its study of animal biosecurity preparedness.

I would like to welcome our witnesses for our first one-hour panel.

From the Canada Border Services Agency, we have Shawn Hoag, director general, commercial program.

From the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, we have Dr. Mary Jane Ireland, executive director of the animal health directorate and chief veterinary officer for Canada, and Philippe Morel, vice-president for operations.

Welcome to you both.

We also welcome back someone who is no stranger to this committee: Mr. Tom Rosser, assistant deputy minister, market and industry services branch.

We had you here for almost two hours the other day, Mr. Rosser. You did great. Welcome back to the committee.

We will get started with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency for opening remarks.

It's over to you, Ms. Ireland. You have up to five minutes.

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland (Executive Director, Animal Health Directorate, Chief Veterinary Officer for Canada, Canadian Food Inspection Agency): Thank you very much.

Good day, Mr. Chair. My name is Dr. Mary Jane Ireland. I am Canada's chief veterinary officer and executive director of animal health at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. With me today is Mr. Philippe Morel, vice-president of operations.

We appreciate this opportunity to speak to the committee on biosecurity preparedness and the safeguards we have in place in case of threats to Canadian agriculture.

The CFIA is a science-based regulatory agency. Its broad mandate encompasses animal health, plant health, food safety and international market access.

Around the world, threats related to diseases, pests and the environment are constantly changing. The Government of Canada takes the issue of animal welfare and disease prevention very seriously. This responsibility is shared with the federal government, provincial and territorial governments, producers, transporters, industry organizations and others.

Canada has always relied on stringent import measures to safeguard our borders. Science-based import controls at international borders have successfully prevented the introduction of foreign animal diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease and African swine fever for many years.

In the event that a foreign animal disease presents itself in Canada, the CFIA has a robust animal health program in place to manage these events, to promote and regulate animal welfare, to support biosecurity standards and to facilitate trade and market access for Canadian animals and products.

As the chief veterinary officer for Canada, I co-chair the Council of Chief Veterinary Officers, which is a forum for federal, provincial and territorial CVOs to ensure a strong and safe animal health and agri-food system across Canada. By working together, we provide strategic direction for animal health and welfare using a “one health” and evidence-based approach to assessment, collaboration and consensus-building.

The CFIA works closely with veterinary colleges to support training of the next generation of veterinarians, and also has partnerships with universities and veterinary colleges to support research for animal health.

What is biosecurity? Biosecurity can be defined as measures, actions and attitudes needed to prevent the introduction and spread of disease. Biosecurity is a complex issue that continues to evolve.

To promote and facilitate the industry implementation of biosecurity measures on-farm, the CFIA has developed voluntary national biosecurity standards and guidance in collaboration with provinces, producer organizations, territorial governments and academia. These standards are in place for livestock and poultry industries, sheep and goat producers, and such other industries as apiaries, deer and elk, horses and mink farms. This standardization allows for producer organizations as well as provinces and territories to develop complementary biosecurity programs.

The CFIA also works with other government departments, such as Canada Border Services Agency and Environment and Climate Change Canada, to support biosecurity at our borders and to prevent diseases and pests from entering into Canada.

When a federally reportable animal disease is found in Canada, CFIA takes the lead in the response. As this committee is aware, the CFIA is actively addressing the highly pathogenic avian influenza outbreak that began spreading in Canada in 2021. The disease is significantly impacting poultry and other birds, not only in Canada but around the globe. As of April 24, there have been 319 premises with confirmed avian influenza in nine provinces, and about 7.6 million birds have been affected. Of those 319 premises, 54 continue to have active outbreaks in seven provinces.

When a disease like avian influenza is detected, surveillance and strong biosecurity measures along with rapid and effective action are important to limit the spread of disease and minimize the impact to producers in Canada.

The agency is also working to protect animal health by preventing the introduction of animal diseases. This includes preparing for African swine fever, ASF, which has been significantly impacting the pork industry globally but so far has not been detected in North America.

● (1635)

The government is working with provinces and industry to take every necessary precaution to prevent the introduction of ASF and to ensure that we are ready should an outbreak occur. The government is also currently working on planning, preparing and testing responses with industry and stakeholders, including provincial governments.

An investment of $23.4 million is supporting the pork industry's prevention and mitigation efforts, and another $19.8 million is being invested in prevention, emergency response planning, enhancing laboratory capacity, establishing zoning arrangements and contributing to international efforts to develop an ASF vaccine.

We are also putting measures in place to prevent foot-and-mouth disease, FMD, from entering Canada. The CFIA is also establishing a Canadian foot-and-mouth disease vaccine bank, as announced this year, with $57.5 million over five years and $5.6 million ongoing to both establish the vaccine bank and also update FMD response plans. This funding will secure sufficient doses of vaccine to protect Canada's livestock industry against large and uncontrolled outbreaks of FMD. This would help mitigate prolonged market disruptions in trade should an outbreak occur.

The CFIA has an emergency preparedness plan for FMD and other key diseases, including Avian influenza and Newcastle disease—

● (1640)

The Chair: Ms. Ireland, I don't mean to interrupt but I have to, because we are well past the five minutes. If you would just like to wrap up quickly, I would appreciate that, and we'll get to questions momentarily.

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I apologize.

In conclusion, effective biosecurity is crucial to minimize the negative impacts that animal diseases and plant pests can have on Canada's plant and animal resources, which in turn impact all Canadians and the economy.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now turn to Mr. Rosser for up to five minutes, please.

Mr. Tom Rosser (Assistant Deputy Minister, Market and Industry Services Branch, Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food): Thank you, Mr. Chair and honourable members. I appreciate the opportunity to be back again to talk to you about biosecurity preparedness, which is an extremely important component of animal health and the agriculture sector more broadly. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada supports the sector from the farmer to the consumer and from the farm to global markets.

Biosecurity is essential through all phases of producing, processing, and marketing farm food and agri-food-based products.

As you know, agriculture is a shared jurisdiction in Canada, and the department works closely with provincial and territorial governments to develop policies, programs and services that encompass biosecurity.

Canada's agriculture sector is very export-dependent, and continued access to international markets is critical, with nearly 70% of hog and pork products being exported and about 50% of cattle and beef products. In such an economically significant sector that feeds Canadians and consumers across the world and provides one in nine Canadian jobs, biosecurity and emergency disease preparedness are critical.

AAFC recognizes the significant impact that a large-scale animal disease outbreak would have on the sector and the need for governments and industry to work together to try to prevent them and prepare for those risks. Back in 2016, under AAFC leadership, federal, provincial and territorial governments and industry created the livestock market interruption strategy to enhance government and industry preparedness to deal with the impacts of a market interruption caused by a foreign animal disease. This strategy paved the way for future collaborative efforts related to animal health, deepening our understanding of government and industry roles and responsibilities.

The department provides leadership and plays a crucial convenor role to bring together industry and government to improve the livestock industry's position in case of a potential foreign animal disease incursion, working on issues such as African swine fever and collaborating via Animal Health Canada as a vehicle to do so.

The creation of the African swine fever executive management board, the ASF EMB, under Animal Health Canada has put Canada in a position of unprecedented preparedness for a potential foreign animal disease incident.

[*Translation*]

The executive management board allows government departments and agencies, including Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and industry to put into place the plans and supports needed to mitigate the impacts of African swine fever based on four pillars including biosecurity, preparedness planning, business continuity, and coordinated risk communications.

The tabletop exercise that will bring together several federal, provincial and territorial deputy ministers and industry leaders later this week to test current surplus hog depopulation and disposal plans is a good example to illustrate ongoing collaboration in preparedness planning efforts.

Also critical to flag is that the work on African swine fever, along with lessons learned from the recent highly pathogenic avian influenza outbreak, will benefit more than just the hog sector, as it can be used to inform prevention and preparedness efforts for other diseases of concern such as foot-and-mouth disease.

Recognizing that the committee's motion for this study included "other potential threats to food security", I would like to remind the committee that plant biosecurity issues can also arise. I am certain that members here today will remember that it was a fungus in PEI soil that caused all the challenges around potato wart in recent years. Borders were closed to prevent movement of this plant disease.

The Canadian Plant Health Council is a collaboration between Canadian governments, industry, academia and other partners to address priorities for the plant health sector, working together on preventive approaches and activities to protect forests, agriculture and other plants from pests, diseases and other risks. The council fulfills a multi-partner commitment to collaboratively implement the plant and animal health strategy for Canada.

In closing, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada has demonstrated and will continue to demonstrate a strong commitment to advancing animal health and welfare, through a "one health" perspective.

The government continues to work and employ resources that contribute to animal biosecurity preparedness. These initiatives contribute to the sector's sustainability, growth and competitiveness, while enhancing resiliency and public trust.

● (1645)

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rosser.

I now give the floor to Mr. Hoag.

[*English*]

Mr. Shawn Hoag (Director General, Commercial Program, Canada Border Services Agency): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, honourable members of the committee.

We appreciate the opportunity to speak to the roles and responsibilities of the Canada Border Services Agency in identifying and combatting biosecurity threats to agriculture at our borders.

In managing the border, the CBSA works closely with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to ensure that goods that may pose a biosecurity threat to Canada are interdicted at the earliest opportunity. The importation of food, plants and animals, and related products is regarded by the CBSA as high risk, given the potential negative impacts to the environment, the economy and the health of Canadians should tainted food, foreign animal or plant diseases or invasive species enter the country.

The CFIA, Environment and Climate Change Canada and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans establish the requirements for importing and exporting food, plants, animals and products. The CBSA in turn is responsible for ensuring the goods being imported to or exported from Canada are compliant with our partner government agency program legislation and regulations. The CBSA's role is to enforce these policies as they apply at Canada's border ports of entry.

The agency fulfills this role by employing a layered and risk-based approach to biosecurity, including assessing pre-arrival data for goods, receiving near-real-time recommendations from the CFIA, issuing targets and lookouts, conducting examinations and inspections and, where required, detaining and seizing goods, issuing penalties and ensuring that international waste is declared and disposed of using approved methods.

The CBSA screens travellers for inadmissible food, plant and animal products and ensures that commercial shipments are also reviewed or referred.

Based upon CFIA expert advice, the CBSA regularly updates our direction to our frontline officers to manage the handling, interdiction and release of at-risk goods. More specifically, the CBSA inspects food, plant and animal goods carried by travellers; certain low-risk commercial goods; wood packaging materials; goods potentially contaminated with soil; live animals that are low-risk; and the control, monitoring and disposal of international waste.

To increase compliance, the CBSA enforces the CFIA's agriculture and agri-food administrative monetary penalty system for contraventions to the legislation. Under this system, border officers may issue monetary penalties to travellers who fail to declare goods that could cause harm to biosecurity.

Finally, as part of budget 2019, the CBSA received up to $31 million over five years to acquire, train and work closely with the CFIA to deploy 24 new food, plant and animal detector dog teams at our high-risk ports of entry. Detector dog teams continue to be one of the CBSA's best tools for detecting food, plant and animal items.

The CBSA is also employing further funding to enhance prevention activities related to African swine fever.

This concludes my opening remarks, and we'll be happy to take any questions.

Thank you.

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

We'll now turn to Mr. Barlow for six minutes.

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I have a few questions. I'm going to try to go through them as quickly as possible. Maybe Ms. Ireland or Mr. Rosser could answer this first one.

You did mention the $57.5 million that was in the budget for the foot-and-mouth vaccine bank. The line that concerns me in that announcement is that it could appear that provincial and territorial partnership is a requisite to make sure that the vaccine bank goes ahead.

Can you confirm that the vaccine bank will go ahead regardless of provincial or territorial shared partnerships or shared funding?

Mr. Tom Rosser: Mr. Chair, thanks for the question.

We were very pleased to see the funding in the budget for the foot-and-mouth vaccine bank. It's been an industry priority for some time. There is substantial funding there.

I think we may have referenced in our opening testimony existing structures in place with industry and provinces—

● (1650)

Mr. John Barlow: I only have a certain amount of time, Mr. Rosser. I'm just asking if it will it go ahead regardless of whether funding is shared with provinces and territories, yes or no?

Mr. Tom Rosser: We're very confident and determined that it will happen.

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you. That's good to hear.

Now, Ms. Ireland, you mentioned an emergency preparedness plan that CFIA has for animal disease outbreaks. With the recent outbreak of avian flu, we certainly heard some great frustration from farmers towards CFIA regarding a lack of CO2. You're supposed to be on-farm within 48 hours when the avian flu is detected. We were hearing it was up to 10 days in some cases.

Do you have the resources necessary to handle these outbreaks when they happen? Was there something that was unexpected with the most recent flu outbreak? We had this in 2004. We had this in 2014. I really hope we not only have an emergency preparedness plan in place, but also the resources to make sure that when that happens, you can get into action and resolve the issue as quickly as possible.

Mr. Philippe Morel (Vice-President, Operations, Canadian Food Inspection Agency): Thank you for the question.

Yes, we have the resources we need. Certainly, during particular weeks in the last outbreak in the fall on the west coast, we had up to 10% of the agency deployed to respond to avian influenza.

You referred to the gas supply. We have a system whereby we prioritize which establishments need to be depopulated, based on risk. We were close to having not enough gas, but we were able to depopulate.

There was some waiting time, as you said. Some farms were depopulated in a longer period—up to 10 days—but those farms were also identified as the lowest risk, where the death rate was very, very low.

Of course, when we arrive on site and we see that 30% or 40% of the birds are dead, it's at the top of the list. When we see only some signs of distress in some birds, we can wait, because the birds are not suffering, and then it could take several more days.

It's not ideal to be at 10 days. We try to respond faster than that. It was only in two or three situations over the last year that it happened. It was not made at the expense of birds suffering, and we were there to give support.

The other thing I want to mention is that collaboration with industry and with the province was key there. Having the industry help us get gas supply was essential, particularly in B.C., where we had a lot of depopulations happening at the same time. Having the workforce from industry help us depopulate was also key.

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you, Mr. Morel.

I would think that another option would be to look at industry as a partner when it comes to euthanizing. I know you're saying that 10 days is unacceptable, but for those farmers, our stakeholders, that is a massive mental health issue for them. They know how to handle these things, so I would think that this would also be an opportunity that the CFIA should look at—allowing, or working to build a framework that will allow, the farmers themselves to take on that euthanizing, rather than having to wait for the CFIA. That's something that I would leave with you to take a look at.

This next issue may be a little bit off from what we were expecting to deal with, but it has arisen with Canadian fairs and agricultural societies. I had mine in Alberta call me earlier this week on the new changes being proposed to the health of animals regulations. You're asking farmers markets, 4-H clubs, rodeos and agricultural societies to take on the traceability and identification of animals being brought to those organizations for maybe a calf show or a 4-H show. They are very concerned about having to take on this responsibility. They don't have the manpower or the resources to do this.

Are you working with the agricultural societies across Canada to address this issue? We do not want to lose these groups in our rural communities.

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for his question.

We are currently consulting on new traceability regulations amendments as published in Canada Gazette I. Currently CFIA is consulting with industry in all sectors and having webinars and discussions on what is proposed in the regulatory package that was preconsulted on and then published in Canada Gazette I. We are consulting, and have been for some time, with the fair societies. We are very open to feedback and understanding and hearing their concerns. We'll work with them on looking at solutions.

I would say that in the context of what we are discussing today around biosecurity, the ability to understand where animals have been, where they are going and what other animals they have interacted with is essential. When we have animal disease in this country, it is essential to be able to trace and track and see who might be affected, and what animals, and to deal with them appropriately. This traceability regulatory package increases our ability to do that and our understanding of where animals are in a short period of time.

● (1655)

The Chair: Unfortunately, Mr. Barlow, we're at time. I know that you'll get another crack at it. Either you or Mr. Lehoux can raise that with Ms. Ireland.

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Thanks, Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses for being here today.

Dr. Ireland, I'll pose some questions to you to start. I am looking for a general sentiment from you. I know it's hard to generalize, perhaps, but how adequately prepared is Canada for the various biosecurity threats in agriculture, just in general? Can you give me a general sentiment? Are we well prepared, very prepared...?

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: Thank you very much for the question.

I think we're very well prepared. As we described in the opening comments, the CFIA has worked extensively with other federal departments and with industry and governments to ready ourselves to be prepared for an incursion and to prevent an incursion of a foreign animal disease. We continue to do that with avian influenza and we do that with foot-and-mouth disease, as well as with many other diseases that can enter the country, including African swine fever.

That includes helping to develop national biosecurity standards. That means strong import controls to prevent infected products or animals from coming into the country and having response plans ready in case they do. Those are our hazard-specific plans.

We need to continue to establish or monitor the global events and trends. What are the diseases we're seeing emerge? Where are they? They inform our policy, they inform our regulatory approach and they inform our import controls.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you.

We essentially have emergency preparedness plans, as I understand it, for every disease that we're aware of. Is that correct?

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: We have hazard-specific plans, which are playbooks for us, really, in terms of what we would do if a disease were to enter Canada. In addition, there are associations in provinces and territories that also prepare themselves should a disease incursion happen.

The CFIA remains ready for those and is constantly updating its approach, based on the global trends and analyses.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: When you say "constantly updating its approach", how often would you say that is?

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: We look at our hazard-specific plans as we understand diseases evolving in other parts of the world. I wouldn't say that we change them every month, but we certainly do review them and make sure that they are solid. We update them if it is required. We do that in discussion with other groups, as well, so that they understand what our response plan would be. We're all in it together when there's a foreign animal disease, and it's an "all hands on deck" situation.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I've heard that somewhere before, but thanks for that. That's reassuring.

I want to ask you this: In terms of how Canada stacks up with various other jurisdictions around the world, are we more prepared, would you say? I know it's probably hard to stack us up, but I seem to think that we're better prepared than many other jurisdictions around the world are. Would you say that's true?

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: That's a very broad question.

I would say that one of the things that we spend a considerable amount of time doing, and that I do as the chief veterinary officer, is discussing, collaborating and working with our international partners.

I belong to the Animal Health Quads Alliance, which is a community of CVOs from New Zealand, Australia, the U.K. and the U.S. We discuss matters such as response to avian influenza and African swine fever. We do work with other countries, our counterparts in international affairs, to make sure that we understand what other countries are prepared to do. There's a certain degree of alignment, for example, on a response to a disease like avian influenza. We're all under the same pressure globally with regard to this disease. It's unprecedented.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you.

How much time do I have ?

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Great.

I want to ask you about zoonotic diseases.

With the increase in climate change, the changing patterns, and the loss of biodiversity.... There are many factors, I think, that are involved, including monoculture within our agricultural systems, and all of them may play a role in the increased incidence of diseases jumping from animals to humans. Are we monitoring that as well? Is that part of the CFIA's role, or does the CFIA have to collaborate with Health Canada and others? Could you speak to that a little bit?

● (1700)

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: The vast majority of diseases that affect humans originally come from animals. Zoonotic diseases are diseases that can transmit from animals to humans and from humans to animals. It goes both ways.

The agency works, indeed, with other federal departments, such as the Public Health Agency of Canada, Health Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada, to take what we call a "one health" approach. That means, really, that we're interconnected. The health of animals is interconnected with that of humans and of the environment. When we approach issues, we take a "one health" approach. The veterinary community does the same.

That's also certainly been a theme for the chief veterinary officers of the provinces and territories.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: It must be very difficult to stay on top of all of the latest strains and diseases as they're emerging. Is that challenging in the environment that we're in these days? Is it increasingly challenging? How do you stay on top of it?

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: Well, it is challenging.

A couple of things help us with that. We have some of the best and brightest scientists at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and they work on such issues. We're also a member of the World Organisation for Animal Health. At the agency, I am Canada's delegate. When reports from countries come in, they are reported through an electronic system.

We have an international awareness. We have a situational awareness. We have, within the government, very strong connections with our health partners and our environmental health partners so that we can share information, and that's become increasingly important with regard to things such as avian influenza.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Turnbull and Ms. Ireland.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Perron for six minutes.

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

I thank the witnesses for being with us today.

I will start with Ms. Ireland.

Ms. Ireland, according to an article in the Canadian Veterinary Journal, Canada does not have a collaborative national surveillance system for animal diseases. Yet, I listen to you speak and I get the impression that there really is a surveillance system, and that you are part of it.

Can you tell me why the author wrote that and explain to me how the system works? Do you really have all the data? Do you have to look for information from other departments or agencies, which could cause delays?

Do you think it would be better to have an umbrella organization?

[*English*]

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: Mr. Chair, I would appreciate some clarification. Do you mean an overarching system, a data system to share between public health and environmental health colleagues? My apologies.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: Ms. Ireland, I am quoting from a 2017 article in the Canadian Veterinary Journal. It explains that Canada does not have a national, collaborative animal disease surveillance system.

I have been listening to your testimony from the beginning, and it sounds to me like there is such a system. I just want to see if there is a need for an organization, perhaps "supraministerial", responsible for monitoring diseases and centralizing information, or if the work is already being done now.

Mr. Tom Rosser: Mr. Chair, I do not think I have seen that article, but I know a lot has changed since 2017.

Animal Health Canada was created and other collaborative structures were put in place with the provinces and the industry to be better prepared to deal with African swine fever and other animal diseases.

I do not know if this directly addresses the issue raised in the article, but there have been many changes.

Mr. Yves Perron: If I understand your answer correctly, the loophole referred to in the article would have been corrected.

Mr. Tom Rosser: It is hard to confirm this 100%, but there has been progress in this area.

Mr. Yves Perron: All right.

On another note, do you believe you have the resources to prevent infections in animals? Earlier, Mr. Rosser, you referred to the $57.5 million announced in the budget. My understanding is that this money will be spent on the creation of a foot-and-mouth disease vaccine bank.

I have two sub-questions for which I would like to have quick answers, if possible. Will this amount of money be enough to set up a vaccine bank for the whole country? Should other vaccine banks be created for other diseases? I have in mind swine fever, although I do not know if there is a vaccine for that.

● (1705)

Mr. Tom Rosser: I would say yes.

In fact, we and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency have considerable resources for that. We have recently received funding to increase resources for the foot-and-mouth disease vaccine bank as well as to prepare for African swine fever.

Significant investments were made recently, and they will allow us to increase our efforts.

Mr. Yves Perron: Dr. Ireland, I have been made aware of a problem regarding vaccines against animal diseases. Once an animal has been vaccinated or when it is slaughtered for export, it would be impossible, when taking blood samples or other samples, to tell the difference between a vaccinated animal and one that is infected with a disease.

Is there any work being done on this? Do you think something could be developed quickly to overcome this problem?

[*English*]

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: Vaccines that are used to address foreign animal diseases have a very important characteristic that must be present: They must distinguish between natural infection and vaccination. It's called a DIVA vaccine. It will be very important that vaccines for FMD, or maybe ASF in the future, be DIVA vaccines so that we are able to determine that the animals have been vaccinated versus naturally infected with a disease. Ultimately, we want to make sure that animals that are infected with the disease are dealt with immediately and promptly to reduce the spread of infection.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: If I understand correctly, it is in fact possible to tell the difference between an infected animal and a vaccinated animal.

Does mass vaccination entail commercial restrictions? Some traces of the injected virus must be left in the animal.

[*English*]

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: On the use of a vaccine in the face of an outbreak, if maybe we could use the FMD vaccine, for example, countries import according to their own import requirements. Countries have their own import requirements for what they accept. Some will accept vaccinated animals and some will not.

Currently, avian influenza may be a better example. Most countries do not allow the import of vaccinated animals. Therefore, as we contemplate vaccination strategies and using vaccines in the face of an outbreak, we need to think about it and discuss it internationally and work with the World Organisation for Animal Health to ensure that we use vaccines properly and also are able to return to freedom to export products as quickly as possible.

In a foreign animal disease outbreak, a vaccine is used when you find the disease; it's not used to prevent it from coming into the country. In FMD, maybe someday avian influenza, maybe someday ASF, vaccination is generally used to address a disease outbreak when it happens. That will be the case with the foot-and-mouth disease vaccine: We won't use it unless we have an outbreak, and then we'll use it to prevent the spread and to return to freedom from the disease as quickly as possible.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you, Mr. Perron. I have given you a little more time because of the interpretation delays.

Mr. MacGregor, you have the floor for six minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here today.

Dr. Ireland, I would like to start with you.

Biosecurity seems to be a hot topic in Parliament. Not only are we examining it at this committee, but we also have some legislation that we're looking at. It had its first hour of debate on Monday.

In my research for that piece of legislation, I noted that most biosecurity incidents are the result of people who are authorized to be on the farm. Some reports have found that despite those risks.... You mentioned that the CFIA has voluntary biosecurity guidelines for some animal farming sectors. They are developed in co-operation with industry and government, but the adherence to those standards is not a legal requirement. Provincial legislation varies, and we're a very regional country.

Given the threat posed to some sectors by diseases such as avian influenza, which is keeping many scientists up at night, do we need to step it up a bit more and have a legal requirement for adherence? It's more in line with what Mr. Perron was asking about a requirement for stronger national laws and requirements, given the threats posed by some of these diseases.

● (1710)

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: Mr. Chair, I won't comment on the legislation. I will, however, talk about biosecurity.

You're right. Today, biosecurity and the national biosecurity standards are voluntary. The CFIA doesn't have authority to mandate that. I would say that they are dependent on a number of factors, including human behaviour and following best practices. I would also say that many national producer associations actually require their producers to follow their species-specific biosecurity standards.

Biosecurity can mean a number of things. Every farm is going to have their own biosecurity requirements. It needs to be very tailored. Do you have animals outside? Do you have visitors? Do you hire summer students who need to understand the importance of biosecurity?

We can set national biosecurity standards, and then producer organizations can tailor them to their own needs, but every individual producer needs to think about their own facility and what makes sense for their particular operation and then follow it.

The extraordinary incursion of avian influenza virus, brought in most likely by wild birds or wild bird migration, has really underscored the importance and also the challenges of maintaining very strict biosecurity each and every day. In the case of avian influenza, that is what's needed to prevent infections.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you for that.

For my next question, I'll turn to you, Mr. Rosser, specifically for AAFC.

Last week I had the pleasure of meeting with the Deans Council for Agriculture, Food and Veterinary Medicine. You may be familiar with their submission for budget 2023. They also referred to One Health Canada.

In their submission, Mr. Rosser, they did note, and I will quote here:

> Canada's capacity to lead is, however, threatened by aging, out-dated and the lack of cutting-edge infrastructure.

They really hammered home on that point. If we really want to cement our place as an agricultural leader in the world, especially in tackling biosecurity threats, there is a need to invest.

How is AAFC approaching the problem that has so clearly been outlined by the deans?

Mr. Tom Rosser: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for the question.

I say we do maintain a very good relation and active engagement with the Deans Council. We have had a discussion with them over a period of years about their infrastructure needs. We're working with them to try to identify potential sources of federal funding that may be brought to bear on some priority projects.

Within our existing program envelope, we don't have a natural solution to the problem. We're certainly aware of it and we're happy to work with the individual institutions and the deans as a whole to see what options might exist within the broader federal system.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Dr. Ireland, on that same line of questioning, you've talked about the close working relationship you have with them. Of course, you depend on those schools to refill your ranks. Going forward, what are the demographics like at the CFIA? What is the number of people who are close to retirement, or do you have enough people coming through? Is the education supply adequate to maintain your needs?

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: That's an excellent question.

At the agency, one of the things that I'm preoccupied with is the Canadian issue of a veterinary shortage. We have a shortage of veterinarians in Canada. That's not only a Canadian issue; it's actually a global issue. There's been an increase in pet ownership, and demands increased over the pandemic period.

We too at the agency are short of veterinarians, and we are trying to forge relationships and make sure that new veterinarians and veterinarians in school understand what we do and the exciting careers we have to offer them. We do a lot of work through summer student internship programs, and I try to work with the universities and the veterinary schools to make sure that we are top of mind for veterinarians when they graduate or if they want a career change.

There is a shortage also in private practice, and many of the schools, as the deans might have talked to you about, are increasing their enrolments to try to address that issue and are working with provinces for more provincially funded seats. However, we're all very seized with this issue because veterinarians are the key to animal health, environmental health and human health. We need a good supply of them and we're all working together.

The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association is also driving forward on making sure that we all understand best practices on keeping veterinarians, and we're working together internationally as well.

● (1715)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ireland. Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

Now we have Mr. Lehoux for up to five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being here this afternoon.

My first question is for both the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the Canada Border Services Agency.

At previous meetings, we heard someone state that one in 10 shipments of food entering Canada was selected for a tighter control procedure.

Is it still the case? I am thinking of the issue of chickens being passed off as spent hens, for example, as well as dairy products. I understand that you cannot control everything, but is the tighter procedure still used in one of 10 food shipments?

Mr. Philippe Morel: The number of inspections depends on the risk associated with the type of food. For higher-risk food, we inspect more than one in 10 shipments. If the risk is lower, we do fewer inspections. I do not know what food you are talking about exactly.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: I was talking about spent hens and chickens, among other things.

Mr. Philippe Morel: All right.

As far as the spent hens are concerned, that is about it.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: All right.

Canadian producers are being asked to meet fairly strict environmental and other standards, and that is fine. However, we should make sure that we enforce those standards.

This brings me to the issue of reciprocity of standards. There may be a lot of work to do on that side. Is this a matter for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the Canada Border Services Agency, or the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food? This is something that should be seriously looked at, because there are still a lot of customs posts between Canada and its southern neighbour.

Dr. Ireland, you mentioned that there is a shortage of veterinarians. Are there other resource shortages? Can we define the problem precisely so that we can find a solution quickly? Indeed, this has a direct impact on Canadian producers.

Mr. Tom Rosser: Mr. Chair, we have an ongoing dialogue with the various sectors where we have concerns, such is the case for spent hens.

In the dairy sector, for example, we are working with the Border Services Agency as well as our colleagues at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. In terms of spent hens, we have been working for several years with the Border Services Agency to do better testing and inspections, and we have seen a significant drop in the volume of imports of spent hens, over the last few years.

Mr. Philippe Morel: As far as reciprocity of standards is concerned, I would add that we demand the same quality for imported food as we do for food produced in Canada. So there is no difference. The same risk models are being used. However, the risk models may vary depending on the country of origin. This is also part of the risk analysis that is done for the import, but the requirements for the final product are the same.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: I agree with you. Certainly, the same requirements apply when food enters the country, but there are probably differences in how it is produced, and perhaps more rigorous work needs to be done about the processes.

As can be seen on their website, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency currently has a plan related to a specific foot-and-mouth disease risk.

Are there any other response plans that you are considering implementing or that are ready to be implemented? What is the status of these plans?

[*English*]

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: Thank you very much for the question.

We do in fact have a hazard-specific plan or a response plan for foot-and-mouth disease should we have an incursion. We are currently working with Animal Health Canada to enhance and consider broader vaccination should we have an incursion of FMD. Working with Animal Health Canada means working with provinces and industry associations to think about how we would use a vaccine if we needed to. That also requires an extensive amount of collaboration with industry. They are an important consideration, and their views are important in that regard.

The FMD vaccine, as I mentioned, would only be used if we had an incursion. How we use it, when we use it and where we use it depends on many factors: Is it a big outbreak? Is it a small outbreak? Where is it? How many animals are involved? These are all decisions around FMD that we will be working with Animal Health Canada on as we move forward.

● (1720)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Ireland and Mr. Lehoux.

Ms. Valdez, you now have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Mrs. Rechie Valdez (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for joining us today.

This question is for all of you.

If disease were to strike any part of our agriculture tomorrow, can you share with us what your respective processes would be?

I'll start with you, Mr. Hoag.

Mr. Shawn Hoag: Thank you for the question.

From a border perspective, the way we respond is that all importers must provide information on the goods prior to their arrival in Canada. They are then risk-assessed, and we may issue targets that interdict shipments at the border to prevent them from coming into the country. I think that follows up to the other member's question about what we do at the border.

It's a layered approach. Our officers then have the authority to examine specific shipments and detain those shipments until the CFIA or Agriculture Canada provide us with direction to release them. Were there to be an outbreak and CFIA advised us to hold goods at the border, we would hold them there until we received further direction to either release them into the economy or to send them for destruction.

Mrs. Rechie Valdez: Thank you.

Dr. Ireland or Mr. Morel, would you comment?

Mr. Philippe Morel: For CFIA, if there's disease or something biosecurity-related, the first thing we will do is make sure the situation is as contained as possible. For example, if it's a disease, we'll send samples to a laboratory to get results

After that, we put in place what needs to be done to make sure in the case of an animal disease or a plant disease, for example, that the food or the animals don't move from a certain zone, that there are movement controls in place and that we restrict to the maximum the risk of spreading any disease that is present. We then also inform our international partners about the risk we have and what mitigation measures we have in place to control and measure it.

Mr. Tom Rosser: Mr. Chair, I'd add quickly, from Agriculture Canada's perspective, that we have an emergency management team and plans, including event-specific plans. In the case of African swine fever, for example, we have engaged in a level of planning and preparation that I think is unprecedented when it comes to previous outbreaks of animal diseases.

As I believe I may have mentioned in my opening testimony, later this week we are going to simulate a response to a detection of African swine fever in Canada, with senior representatives of provincial governments and industry joining us to go through that exercise.

Mrs. Rechie Valdez: Thank you so much.

I'll direct my questions to Mr. Hoag.

What new technologies or initiatives is the CBSA exploring to improve biosecurity, especially with the emergence of all the AI technology?

Mr. Shawn Hoag: We use a range of technologies. We're exploring how to gather data better to make sure that importers are sending us the right data. It's system we use called the single window initiative, which allows us to gather all of the import data so that it can then be reviewed by the CFIA prior to the goods coming into the country.

We have also deployed an increased number of X-ray machines in airports to allow us to review goods, specifically traveller baggage coming into the country. We have deployed an increased number of detector dog teams. In fact, you may have seen them when you move internationally through the airports. They still remain one of our best tools for detecting food, plant and animal goods coming in with either travellers or commercial goods, or through the postal system or the courier system. Thank you.

● (1725)

Mrs. Rechie Valdez: Thank you. I met one of those dogs at one of our recent visits to the CBSA in Toronto.

What are some of the key challenges in balancing biosecurity measures with trade facilitation—for example, with trading to the U.S.?

Mr. Shawn Hoag: A constant top-of-mind challenge for the agency is ensuring our supply chains continue to remain open and flow in a fluid manner while also delivering on our mandate to protect the health, safety and security of Canadians.

We do that through this layered approach by making sure that we get the data for goods that are coming in or goods that require permits to leave the country so that we can review the data and then take action to examine goods when required. It's not possible, nor would it be in the interest of supply chain fluidity, for us to examine everything coming in or going out.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Hoag and Mrs. Valdez.

Now we have Mr. Perron for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

There is a commitment to animal disease prevention, so you seem to have some resources, but are they sufficient? I am not sure. Would you need more money to ensure herd safety?

Mr. Philippe Morel: I can assure you that we are making the best possible use of the resources allocated to us by Parliament.

Mr. Yves Perron: As I understand it, you use the resources you have, but more resources would be really helpful. Fine, that answers my question.

Inversely, my next question is about bovine spongiform encephalopathy, for which Canada has had negligible risk status for over a year, since 2021. Far be it from me to jeopardize the safety of production or to put the public at risk, but is there any consideration of reviewing this status? Cattle producers frequently talk to us about this, because it reduces their profitability. Is there any way to review it?

If we cannot go back to what was done before, is there any way to find a middle-of-the-road solution that would not compromise safety, but would put fewer restrictions on our producers?

[*English*]

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: Thank you very much for that excellent question.

We received negligible risk status in 2021 from the World Organisation for Animal Health for our current BSE program. Our current BSE program was examined and determined to be strict enough and efficient and effective enough to grant us negligible risk status. That's based on our existing program.

We understand from industry that there are concerns, and that the differences between the U.S. and Canada in the handling and the listing of what we call "specified risk material"—those materials that present risk of BSE—are causing concerns for economic interests.

At the agency we are supporting a risk assessment to look at what the risks would be should we harmonize with the U.S.: risk to human health, risk to animal health, risk to our international trade and risk to our negligible risk status. We are working with industry to have this risk assessment completed so that we can determine whether or if changes to the BSE program could be accomplished and what the risks might be.

To say it perhaps more plainly, we are making sure that we do not make changes to the BSE program that cause risk. We need to know what those are, so a study is ongoing and we are collaborating with industry to get that done.

The Chair: Thank you very much to both of you.

Mr. MacGregor, you'll end the second round with two and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Chair.

I would like to get a sense of approximately how many novel pests and pathogens Canada faces each year on average. Is it an overwhelming number? Do you have a ballpark figure?

I'm just curious as to the threat level our scientists have to deal with and the number that are novel, the approximate number that we have to be on the lookout for. If you don't have a number, can you gauge it as a fairly serious threat or a growing threat from worldwide pathogens and pests and their impacts?

● (1730)

Mr. Philippe Morel: Maybe I could start while she's thinking—

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Can I load you up with a second question as well?

Mr. Philippe Morel: Sure.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Also, how is the CFIA using its expertise to help other countries develop best practices? We live in a globalized world, of course, and the best defence might be a good offence in helping other countries beef up their internal programs.

Mr. Philippe Morel: Thank you.

I don't know how many new diseases we face every year. It's a very difficult question.

What I can say for sure is that commerce is increasing and that the risks that come with commerce are also increasing. Every time we refine our detection and our inspection risk, we review the risk grid that we have for every product we import. Our reaction is based on the level of activity that is happening, and we do everything we can to make sure that where the risks are known or potentially known, we are there to respond to it and mitigate them.

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: In addition, you asked about working with other countries to keep animals healthy globally. We do in fact work with other countries, and some of those countries, like the U.S., work with other countries. We are very cognizant of the globalized nature of animals and the movement of animals.

To give you an example, through efforts through the World Organisation for Animal Health, our scientists will work with other countries to help establish diagnostics, capacity and training. We have twinning projects with other countries. We work through WOAH around issues like ASF. At the end of May, I'll go to the general assembly and discuss avian influenza.

The community of CVOs is not that big, and we share our expertise. As I said, we have the best and brightest scientists at CFIA, and they can help countries with capacity building and expertise and are really willing to do that. It enriches their work and their profession as well.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Colleagues, we will do a third panel, but it's not going to be five minutes. It will be about two minutes. It will be two minutes for Mr. Steinley and two minutes for Mr. Louis.

I have one question, and then we'll wrap up and get to our report.

Go ahead, Mr. Steinley.

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to revisit the question around the negligible risk status for our country that we received in May of 2021, two years ago. My understanding is that it was because we have not detected any BSE in this country since 2015.

I am wondering why it would affect our trade status, if the animal health organization felt we had negligible risk, if we changed our regulations within Canada. Did half of the reason that we got that status have to do with our regulations, or was it just because we haven't detected any BSE since 2015 in our country?

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: In order to obtain negligible risk status, Canada provided the World Organisation for Animal Health with a very comprehensive, in-depth package of information and data to show that we have the right controls in place to prevent BSE from occurring again. Those were all the components of our processes, our inspections and our data. That was evaluated by the scientific commission, and it was determined that our program was solid and sufficient and that Canada was deserving of negligible risk status.

The negligible risk status that was given to Canada did not change the program. The program is what that status is based on.

It's not to say the changes can't occur—

Mr. Warren Steinley: I understand that. I'm just wondering if a regulation change will affect our status.

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: If we were to make regulatory changes or policy changes, we would provide our information to the World Organisation for Animal Health, and they would make an assessment about whether those changes were significant. We would do that through a reporting system as—

● (1735)

Mr. Warren Steinley: Does America have the same status that we have right now?

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: The U.S. has a negligible risk status also.

The U.S. has a different history with BSE in terms of cases and types of BSE. They have different infrastructure and different risks, which they have addressed with their own program. We have different risks, which we have addressed with our own program.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Steinley.

We'll go to Mr. Louis.

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses. I appreciate your testimony here. I think it is instilling the confidence of our committee in your ability to react to situations.

I will direct my questions in the limited time I have to Mr. Hoag.

I live in southern Ontario. The spotted lanternfly is an invasive species in North America and can damage plants and trees, including grapes, apples, fruits. This invasive species has not been found in Canada yet, but there is concern that if it were to arrive in Canada, our wine industry and our fruit and vegetable crops would be at risk.

I want to know whether you could expand on the import controls and the response plans. Dr. Ireland mentioned the term “playbook”. What would our playbook be for invasive species like the spotted lanternfly?

Mr. Shawn Hoag: Thank you for the question.

I can't speak to the spotted lanternfly specifically, but I can follow up with the committee on plans regarding that invasive species specifically.

In general, the way we approach invasive species is that once we get information from Environment and Climate Change Canada or Agriculture Canada or the CFIA, we convert that into direction to our frontline officers. That direction to frontline officers takes the form of indicators or things to look for. Those could be things on boats. They could be things in wood packaging or pests that are inside containers—all of those different modes or vectors by which goods and pests could arrive.

Once the officers look at the risk of the goods that are arriving and conduct a progressive exam—they look deeper, depending on what they are seeing—then they detain the goods and seek advice if they don't fully understand what's in front of them. If they do fully understand what they have and it is regarded as an invasive species, then they reject its entry or they move to seize and have it destroyed.

Mr. Philippe Morel: If I may, Mr. Chair, in 10 seconds, we have a very aggressive communication approach on spotted lanternflies to make sure....

With invasive species, rule number one is to detect. As soon as you detect, you can contain, and in some situations you can also eradicate. We have a very aggressive communication package, for example, in southern Ontario and southern Quebec where the risk is higher for these species.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Louis.

I have just a couple of questions.

We mentioned the foot-and-mouth disease vaccine bank specific to Canada, which I think everyone on this committee would have to agree is a smart and prudent investment.

Mr. Rosser, help me understand. Is it going to be in one place in the country? Are these certain vaccines we have dispersed over multiple locations that have some secure elements? Where are these vaccines actually located in the event they are needed? Could you provide this committee what those considerations would be?

Mr. Tom Rosser: Mr. Chair, perhaps my CFIA colleagues may have something to add.

I think I may have mentioned previously that we are in discussions with provinces and territories and industry partners through groups like Animal Health Canada, not only on purchasing vaccines and where they would be stored and how they would be accessed but also on how they would be distributed in the event of an outbreak. There is a collaborative exercise to operationalize and make real this vaccine bank and many of the specifics of it.

There is some precedent of a North American vaccine bank in the past. I'm not sure those details have been specified, but there's a very active dialogue going around to work through them.

The Chair: Okay. That's fine.

There is a second thing, and it's more related to the CFIA. I represent Nova Scotia, and the Annapolis Valley specifically. This is one of the first areas in which avian influenza was detected in a poultry flock.

I'm curious about testing. Obviously, when there could be some suspected AI cases, there are irregularities that farmers are normally the first to notice. Where does one actually test samples to make sure it is AI or that we are able to identify it? I'm curious as to what that regional outlook looks like.

My understanding is that there has been some work with UPEI to upgrade their facility such that the actual distance and the time in order to get the CFIA involved in these types of investigations and support efforts hinge on it being a positive case, which really dictates a different process.

What does it look like across the country? I know Winnipeg has a lab that is quite proficient. Give this committee a sense of the regionality of where those samples are tested.

● (1740)

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: When avian influenza is suspected, a sample is taken and sent to a lab, which can be a provincial lab, as an initial step.

To confirm the disease formally, the sample will be tested at the NCFAD, the National Centre for Foreign Animal Disease in Winnipeg. That is the lab that will confirm and that is what we use for international reporting.

Across Canada there are provincial laboratories that can do initial testing. That will depend on a number of factors, but certainly the CFIA takes action and places quarantines very early. I would say we have advanced since the early days of this in terms of making sure we have labs and in helping labs come up to standard. We really need the labs to make sure that when they say something is negative, it's really negative, and if they suspect it's not negative, that they say that with accuracy because of the nature of the disease.

There are provincial labs across the country that help the CFIA do the testing, but the formal response comes from our WOAH-recognized lab, NCFAD, which does the confirmatory testing.

The Chair: We probably don't have time, and I don't want to push my colleagues, but I would be interested in this, Dr. Ireland, in terms of the different protocol for how the CFIA responds.

I can appreciate that a provincial lab may identify an irregularity or perhaps a certain sample. Does that dictate different procedural elements from the CFIA versus the waiting game until you actually get that officially confirmed, or does the CFIA treat a provincial result the same as a result in Winnipeg?

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: We take early action based on early findings of the provincial labs. We can get you more information on how that rolls out.

With regard to the avian influenza outbreak, given the findings in multiple provinces and the experience that our labs have with sampling, we don't wait, particularly if it's been found already in an area. Rapid response is critical to prevent spread.

The Chair: Absolutely, and I think this committee certainly wants to commend your work in supporting our agriculture sector.

Colleagues, that ends our panel today with our officials. I'd like to thank Mr. Hoag for coming from the CBSA. Dr. Ireland, Philippe Morel and Mr. Rosser, thank you so much for your work, respectively, in our agencies that help support our agriculture sector every day.

Colleagues, with that we're going to take about a five-minute break, so please don't go far. We're going to switch over to in camera to study our report.

Let me also recognize Ms. Khalid, who's joining the agriculture committee, and Ms. Sidhu and Mr. Viersen, who is now gone, as Mr. Steinley is back.

We'll see you in a few seconds, colleagues, and we'll get working on that report. Cheers.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]