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Chair: Mr. Kody Blois



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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 96 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food. I'm going to 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.

Colleagues, as you know, this first panel will be audio only.

Screenshots and taking photos of your screen are not permitted.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, January 31, 2024, and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, February 8, 2024, the committee is resuming its consideration of Bill C-355, an act to prohibit the export by air of horses for slaughter and to make related amendments to certain acts.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses for this first panel. We have Witness 1, and I remind colleagues to refer to this witness as Witness 1 at all times during the proceedings. That person is appearing as an individual. Also appearing as an individual is Dr. Judith Samson-French, a practising veterinarian at Banded Peak Veterinary Hospital, who is joining us by video conference. From J Woods Livestock Services, Jennifer Woods is an animal care and welfare specialist who is joining us here in the room.

Thank you, Ms. Woods, for being here.

Welcome, everyone.

I'm going to provide up to five minutes for opening remarks for each witness, and then we're going to turn it over for questions.

I'd like to start with Witness 1.

I'll turn it over to you. Go ahead, please.

Witness-Témoïn 1 (As an Individual): Good morning.

I live in western Canada with my husband and children. We keep horses and cattle on our farm. My children and I have our Métis status recognized by our provincial Métis nation. I'm here to provide an indigenous perspective on the meat horse industry in Canada.

Regarding remarks made in the February 13 hearing of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food, I can see that there is a staggering amount of ignorance about indigenous culture in regard to the care and respect of indigenous-owned horses.

In the past, indigenous people depended on horses for their survival. We, the Métis, used horses every day for farming, transportation and traplines, and we rode them into battle during the North-West Rebellion.

With colonization, the way indigenous people lived changed drastically. However, there remain a tradition, a culture and a connection with horses. I'm trying to keep Métis tradition, including working with horses, and pass it on to my children.

Just like most Métis, we are not in a position financially to keep horses only for recreational use. Our farm is not sustainable without the meat horse industry. Raising and owning horses involves a lot of hard work, and it's very expensive, but we think it's worth it. Selling draft foals to our exporter allows us to keep and maintain horses for farming, to feed livestock, to handle cattle, to trap, to train and to connect with Métis and first nations communities through horse trading and rallies.

Other indigenous producers are involved in chuckwagon racing, rodeo stock contracting, Indian relay, and training and marketing performance horses. As I'm sure you know, the land for Indian reserves and Métis settlements is not prime real estate or farmland, but raising horses is a way to make our land into something profitable.

The Canadian government is ignoring the impact that banning meat horse exports will have on many Métis and first nations producers. There's been no consultation with indigenous producers and people regarding the plan to ban the export of live horses. The Canadian government has a history of stepping on indigenous farmers, including through the peasant farm policy. The peasant farm policy was how the Canadian government restricted first nations farmers to basic farming tools and practices in order to limit their success, so that white settlers would not have to compete with them. Then, as punishment for the North-West Rebellion, which was started when the Canadian government annexed Métis land, indigenous producers' markets were restricted by the Canadian government, so that crippled their ability to provide for themselves.

If the federal government wanted to again shackle indigenous farmers, banning the export of meat horses would be an extremely effective way of doing that. The ability to export our horses has given our farming practices a much-needed financial boost and enabled our family to continue to embrace our Métis tradition and culture.

We think it is important that Métis and first nations producers retain autonomy in their agricultural practices and that they be able to maintain and cultivate their connection to horses. Our voices are being drowned out and suppressed by people who do not have any evidence or facts to support their claims.

• (1105)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now turn to Ms. Woods, for up to five minutes, please.

Ms. Jennifer Woods (Animal Care and Welfare Specialist, J Woods Livestock Services): I would like to thank the committee for allowing me to share my experience on this topic regarding the export of horses to Japan for consumption.

I have provided a full list of my equine-focused work in my briefing, but I would like to quickly hit on the most relevant ones to this topic.

I currently sit on the task force for sections CR2 and CR3 of the live animal regulations for the International Air Transport Association. Most notably, I am one of eight people from around the world who were invited to participate in the working committee charged with updating the World Organization for Animal Health terrestrial chapter for the transport of animals by land, sea and air.

In 2005, I started working with Canadian horse processing facilities and airports that export horses. This work has included facility design, audits and animal welfare program development. In 2017 I started performing animal welfare audits for the export of horses to Japan, and in 2019 I travelled to Japan to audit the feedlots and processing plants.

As I know this committee is concerned with determining what best upholds Canadian interests and the welfare of exported horses, I wanted to offer my unique perspective from actually having made the trip to Japan to audit conditions there. I want to briefly touch on how the current regulations and high standards allow for the welfare of the animals to be considered and upheld in every step of this carefully coordinated process.

These rigorous regulations have resulted in an exceptionally low mortality rate of just 0.011% over the past 11 years. The information I am sharing with you today, and what I have shared in my brief, is based on science, evidence and years of research into best practices to ensure proper animal welfare for exported horses, by me and other experts who have similarly dedicated their lives to the safe transport of all animals, including horses.

After arriving from the farm, horses are unloaded into crates that exceed the required spacing requirements. These crates allow them to shift, brace and freely move their heads up and down. They are transported as a group with the same horses they have lived with for months, if not for their entire lives. They are not held in stalls,

which helps them to remain calm on the flight. They do not travel unattended, but with highly trained and capable attendants.

As I explain in my brief, pre-COVID, almost all flights to Japan were direct. January just saw the first direct flight since COVID. The shippers and airlines are working on fully reinstating direct flights soon.

The average time horses spend off feed, water and rest is 22.5 hours from Edmonton and 26.5 hours from Winnipeg, which is under the allowable time. As required by existing law, contingency plans, in collaboration with the CFIA, are in place if the trip exceeds this due to extraordinary circumstances, such as extreme weather. Luckily, this is a very rare occurrence.

Once arriving in Japan, the conditions of the horses are assessed, and they're immediately offloaded onto transfer trailers to be taken to the quarantine facilities, which are all within an hour of the airport. Veterinarians are at the airport for the arrival and transfer of horses.

As previously mentioned, injuries and mortalities of horses on these flights are exceptionally rare. The last horse off the flight is back on feed, water and rest within two hours of landing. There is continuous communication between Japan and the exporters and shippers throughout the entire process.

After two weeks of being cared for and monitored by veterinarians in the quarantine facility, the horses are taken to the feedlot. As an expert who has personally audited these feedlots, I can confidently say they are incredibly well maintained, and the horses are very well cared for, reflecting the high regard that Japan holds for horses. These feedlots meet or exceed Canadian standards of care.

• (1110)

Additionally, the slaughter plants also pass the audit based on Canadian standards.

Members of this committee and other Canadians can be confident in the current strict regulations on the export of horses for consumption. Not only is this a legitimate agricultural business that is in full compliance with strict Canadian regulations and international standards, but it upholds what we know to be true about horse welfare from research and experts dedicated to the subject.

I once again want to thank the committee for having me here today, and I am pleased to answer any questions or provide more information.

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

We'll turn to Ms. Samson-French for up to five minutes, please.

Dr. Judith Samson-French (Veterinarian, Banded Peak Veterinary Hospital, As an Individual): Thank you for having me at the committee.

I am a practising veterinarian of 35 years. I've worked with large and small animals. I have included equine veterinary medicine and surgery for over 12 years in my practice. I have worked with import and export of animals as well. I have also worked in a horse slaughterhouse. I am one of very few veterinarians in Canada to have done so. I know some about horses, transport of animals and slaughter.

Obviously, animal welfare is a mandate of veterinarians. It is our mandate to find it unacceptable to abuse animals. That's a no-brainer for us. To put it clearly, as a veterinarian, it is a given that animals should have a life worth living, not worth avoiding, and a peaceful, painless death. Obviously, standing against either part of this statement makes one a monster and certainly goes against our veterinary oath. For this bill, however, Bill C-355, we will concentrate only on the second part, the peaceful, painless death.

The slaughter in Japan is unknown to us, because CFIA has no jurisdiction there. It's problematic not knowing how, not whether. We're not discussing whether slaughter should happen.

The transport issue focuses from feedlot to airport to loading in the belly of an airplane to Japan via one stop or two in Alaska to a quarantine station.

Before going into details of the Canadian horse transport by air, the objection is not about slaughter but about getting to slaughter. For best animal welfare, animals should be slaughtered as close as possible to where they are farmed. This issue is not new. Australia is already raising concerns about sending sheep and cattle to slaughter on gigantic freighter ships for a long journey to be slaughtered in Asia and Africa. The transport is also the issue, not the slaughter. Australia is trying to phase out live transport.

Similarly, in the U.K., the animal welfare bill on livestock export is also looking at phasing out any air transport for slaughter. Going after the air transport of animals for slaughter is not a slippery slope for agriculture. I know some will raise the concern that if we ban live exports, there will be something else the public will put pressure on after that.

My contention is that this is in no way a slippery slope, but the opposite, because live export has raised big concerns and has shed much light on how we treat animals. The message should be clear that the live export of horses should be stopped so it doesn't tarnish the entire agricultural industry. Right now it is a matter of public concern and, really, why is it not the farmer's concern?

Let's jump into the transport issue itself.

By the way, I have gone to the Calgary airport three times. I was alerted that this was happening, and I could not believe that we didn't send horses straight to Bouvry. I'm from Calgary. Obviously we didn't send them straight to Bouvry slaughterhouse.

I have gone to the airport three times to watch the loading of horses into crates. I did it three times because I thought what I saw

the first time was an aberration. I also watched several videos of horses in Japan being unloaded. The staff there is or was clearly untrained. I saw videos of horses being hit in the head with white paddles while they were still in the crate at unloading. They had no escape room, and that's certainly not the way to handle flight animals. What we're showing the world here is that, with the live export of horses, we do not prioritize animal welfare, which is quite the opposite to sending them to slaughter.

The World Organisation for Animal Health, the OIE, mandates specific standards for humane equine transport that include segregation of horses, emergency access and provision of food and water for a journey over six hours. Canada is a member of the OIE, but we do not comply with those regulations. It is clear that our existing transport and cruelty laws are not enough to protect horses exported by air for slaughter. In addition, the weak laws are not even enforced if flights go over time limits and abuse is reported. In Calgary, if we add up all the time, we're very, very close to 28 hours. If we have bad weather, that takes it over the permitted time.

Let's dive into the specific welfare issues of the live export.

Number one is overcrowding. Overcrowding occurs due to the number of animals in the container. The animal cannot maintain its preferred position or adjust its body position in order to protect itself from injuries or avoid being crushed or trampled.

● (1115)

This is a glaring omission of welfare standards in live export, because if a horse is fatigued, hurt or just prefers to lie down, it can't do so. I've observed that in animals such as ostriches.

If, on takeoff, the horse that's in the back lies down, all the other horses are going to trample it. On landing, if a horse goes down at the front, the other horses will trample it. It's very difficult for a horse to get up if it is overcrowded, because it needs forward and backward movement as well as lateral movement.

Number two—

The Chair: Dr. Samson-French, we're about 30 seconds over time for the five minutes. I want to allow you to have a quick moment to finish, but we are at time, so please wrap up in 30 seconds so we can get to questions.

I know people want to dig into your—

Dr. Judith Samson-French: I'm sorry about that. I thought it was five to 10 minutes.

Mainly, these are horses that are kept in feedlots; they are not conditioned or trained for transport, like other horses that are not destined for live export. These horses have received minimal human handling, having been fattened in feedlots. They are easily panicked and frightened at unloading, with the loud clanking noises and humans poking them with flags while they're still in the stock trailers, which I've witnessed.

Can I give a quick conclusion? No, I've passed it.

The Chair: Yes, we're at time. I'm sorry. I know my honourable colleagues will want to engage and ask, so you'll have the chance to expand on your answers.

We are going to get to questions.

Mr. Barlow, I believe you're up first for up to six minutes.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Thanks, Chair, and thanks to the witnesses for being here.

My first question would be for Witness 1.

Thank you very much for your testimony. You mentioned the lack of consultation.

Were you consulted at all about the legislation that is before us today?

Witness-Témoïn 1: No. It's very frustrating.

Even more frustrating is MPs saying that they have consulted indigenous producers, when that has not happened. There are protocols and policies surrounding indigenous consultation, and that process has not been initiated.

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you.

You mentioned in your comment the lack of knowledge of this industry and its impact on first nations and Métis communities specifically.

We had a comment from one of our colleagues, who said, "I would object to referring to the Métis traditions and cultures as though somehow this is consistent with indigenous culture and traditions." One of the members of this committee made that comment when we mentioned the impact this would have on first nations and Métis producers and breeders specifically.

Is that what you were talking about regarding the lack of understanding of the impact on you as a producer and of the Métis culture?

Witness-Témoïn 1: Yes. The knowledge behind horses and indigenous culture and tradition is hard to compound into this small time frame, but those statements were very uneducated and do not represent the Métis culture or tradition.

• (1120)

Mr. John Barlow: I know it's probably difficult to narrow it down, but what would be the impact on your livelihood and your business—financially or morally with your family—if this legislation were to pass?

Witness-Témoïn 1: Our farm is multi-faceted. We have a lot of things to do to keep it running and keep it together.

Raising draft colts is just one piece of our whole farm. All the pieces work together to make the whole farm. Without all of these pieces working together, our farm isn't sustainable.

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you. I know it's not easy to go through that.

My next question is for Ms. Woods.

Thank you very much for bringing your expertise here today.

We've heard a lot of testimony from other groups, but in your estimation, as one of the global experts on this issue, who should we believe when it comes to animal welfare in what is currently being done in Canada with the live horse transport to Japan?

It seems like we are not just meeting but exceeding international standards.

Is that correct?

Ms. Jennifer Woods: Yes, it is.

I think we should listen to the experts and the people who are there, like the government, which oversees enforcement, and people like me, who work in welfare. I'm there. I'm right up front. I'm standing there. I'm not from afar; I'm in there with the animals. I've been to Japan. I've been to the feedlots. I have been to the slaughter plants.

If anybody knows anything about Japanese culture, they'll know they're very finicky. We know that the Japanese, as a country we export to, have very high standards. I do not have concerns about the care of the animals there at all.

I think we need to look more at the research, at the science and at the facts.

It's continually said that the animals are cramped, yet nobody has ever given us a square footage. You're saying they're cramped, but what does cramped even mean?

A regulation or a bill is being based on the comment about being cramped, when our animals actually exceed the required space. With the requirements of IATA, the Health of Animals Act, research done by Dr. Terry Whiting here in Canada, the code of practice for Canada and EC No 1/2005 for adult horses, we give them more room.

You also don't want to give them too much room. The last thing you ever want to have your horse do during transport is lie down. No standard says an animal should have the ability to lie down and rest. Horses actually don't want to lie down.

That's what we need to be listening to. That's the science.

Mr. John Barlow: We've had a lot of claims from some of the witnesses. I'm going to throw these by you, and just give me a quick "true or false" answer so I can get through these as quickly as I can in the time available.

One of the claims is that there is clear, scientific evidence for a ban on the export of live horses for slaughter. Is that true or false?

Ms. Jennifer Woods: It's false.

Mr. John Barlow: There's clear and compelling scientific evidence showing that horses exported from Canada for slaughter overseas experience significant physical and psychological suffering due to the duration and conditions of transport. Is that true or false?

Ms. Jennifer Woods: That's false.

Mr. John Barlow: Canada's animal transportation standards are among the worst in the western world. Is that true or false?

Ms. Jennifer Woods: That's very false.

Mr. John Barlow: Horses transported for slaughter are in conditions far worse than the conditions of other horses, such as those exported for sport or breeding. Is that true or false?

Ms. Jennifer Woods: That's false, and I'm familiar with both.

Mr. John Barlow: You commented on the term "cramped", so I appreciate that.

In my last 30 seconds, I wanted to ask a question to Dr. Samson-French.

In a 2021 interview with CTV, you were asked whether or not there's a humane way to transport live horses to Japan by air, and you said absolutely, it can be done. We just choose not to do it with these horses, to keep costs down.

Why is this bill not focused on the conditions or the regulations around the transport of horses, if it can be done safely?

Dr. Judith Samson-French: We have been trying to push for regulations that would help the horses. Number one, I agree that horses should not be going down, and that's a default: If the horse is injured it's going to be a problem on take-off and landing. Having a partition to withers height would protect the horses from many injuries. That's how it can be done securely, so when we're promoting—

Mr. John Barlow: We can do it safely, then. We just need to change the regulations, not ban it. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Could we go now to Ms. Taylor Roy? That would be wonderful.

• (1125)

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

There is clearly a difference of opinion on whether the welfare of horses is actually endangered in the transport or whether these horses are stressed.

We heard the opinions, which were put forward as facts, but since there are many different opinions on this, I'm wondering

whether perhaps, Dr. Samson-French, you can talk a bit about the effects air transport has on horses when they are shipped in these large containers. I know you weren't finished with your remarks, so perhaps you could finish those and talk a little about the welfare of animals, because we're all concerned about animal welfare. We know our farmers are, as well, so I think the experience you bring, as well, is valuable, and as I said before, there's not one set of facts. There are different opinions on this.

Dr. Judith Samson-French: Thank you. About changing the regulations as opposed to banning it, the problem is we have not been able to have the space to change anything about the regulations beyond withers height, and also I've seen at the airport how many horses, when they hold their head in a natural position, are actually touching, or their ears are exceeding the top of the net.

My contention, certainly, after working with horses, and I've been injured by working with horses for over 12 years, is the unloading of horses.... When the horses arrived at the Calgary airport, for example, I was flabbergasted to see that the horses did not want to come down the ramp from the truck, because they had not been conditioned. They don't know what's happening, because they are raised in feedlots. The handlers have to scream and use thick poles all along the sides of the trailers from both sides to jab them and hurt them to get them going. The sounds are absolutely foreign to these horses. They've never been conditioned to hearing that. They're in panic mode. You can see the whites of their eyes. They're moving forward. They're moving backwards. They're clanking doors to prevent them from getting back into the truck.

I'm not sure how we are able to even ensure that they are compatible, because the horses are coming unloaded. However, they are on the ramp one by one, 40 horses or so in a trailer.

Once they're put into the containers, then we go and I just watch them, all the containers. For hours you hear horses banging and kicking into all the crates in there. Those horses are certainly not at peace. They're certainly not happy to be in there, and if they were compatible while they were in a feedlot under non-stressful conditions, under very stressful conditions they don't sound like they are compatible anymore.

That's why I object that animals.... These are flight animals. They're not conditioned or trained to be able to handle the stress of travel, which is one of the worst stresses in the life of an animal.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: My daughter is an equestrian, and I'm very familiar with horses. I rode as well. They are very sensitive. As well, you pointed out that the centre of gravity is higher for these animals.

How do you reconcile what you have seen and heard with the witness we just heard from, who clearly stated one thing—that horses being transported for show are treated the same as horses being transported for slaughter. I know for a fact that it's untrue, so I'm questioning some of the other testimony she gave.

Can you comment on that as well?

Dr. Judith Samson-French: I've also been involved in that area. No, the ones transported for shows are divided. They have a partition where there's height.

The other witness mentioned, "Who should we believe in all this? I am the expert, and the government is the expert in this." We have made countless requests with FOIP to get access to all the documents, and they come back incredibly redacted. We're not even able to follow what's happening. If the standards are so high, why are we hiding all the information when I am asking to talk to a vet at CFIA or to get the information? Why is it so incredibly redacted that I can't even figure out what's happening in there?

If the standards are high, show it to us. Don't hide it.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Thank you.

I think there have been comments made that the regulations in place.... "We're in accordance with the regulations." I think that's questionable. Even if that's the case, as you said, we're not compliant with the OIE and other standards. If that's the case, I feel it's incumbent upon us to look after the welfare of these animals. I know we don't want the public to look upon farmers and other people as being cruel to animals.

Why do you think it is that we're a member of the OIE and not in compliance with the regulations there?

• (1130)

Dr. Judith Samson-French: We're not in compliance with the OIE. We're not even in compliance with our Health of Animals Act when it comes to animals that should not be touching the top of the crate. We are not in compliance with the IAT either, and we had to make a Canada exception to ship our horses in bulk in wooden crates, because we're not able to meet any of the regulations of the IATA. We had to make an exception for Canada so we can ship them by air. That doesn't make sense.

However, no matter what the IATA says and no matter...the Canadian exception, the horses should be compatible. They should be socialized. They should be able to stand in a natural position without their ears sticking out of the netting. In all cases, the horses should have enough room to maintain balance and rise without assistance if they lie down. There is no way they can lie down in there uninjured with two or three horses around them, or be able to move forward, backward and laterally.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Taylor Roy.

Thank you, Ms. Samson-French.

[*Translation*]

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

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

I want to thank the witnesses for joining us today.

Ms. Samson-French, you said that the standards aren't being met. However, we met with witnesses such as Dr. Ireland from the Cana-

dian Food Inspection Agency, or CFIA, who told us that standards were being met. We aren't sure who to believe.

When you said that the standards weren't being met, were you talking about Canadian transportation standards for livestock, or something else? Can you clarify this for us?

Dr. Judith Samson-French: In terms of the standards, which may or may not be met, we're talking about the Health of Animals Act; the standards of the World Organisation for Animal Health, or WOAH; and the standards of the International Air Transport Association, or IATA. In the three cases, not all the rules are being followed. Some rules are followed, but not all. Yet compliance with all these rules should be the bare minimum.

Mr. Yves Perron: I want to make sure that I understand. The CFIA standards are being met, but the other standards aren't being met. In your opinion, these standards should be met.

Is that what you're saying?

Dr. Judith Samson-French: Even in the case of the CFIA, inspectors should, before each shipment, ensure that the animal is fit to endure the planned journey, that it's in good health and that the transportation is safe.

[*English*]

How do you assess fitness for travel if an animal has a gash between its front legs? The animals are coming out of that truck in a chute so fast. It happens at night. If a horse has any injury under the whole body carriage, there's no way you can pick that up. Even our own CFIA is not able to regulate. We can't assess compatibility at the speed these animals are moving from the trucks onto the loading ramps and into the crates. That happens in seconds.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you.

We must respect the work of CFIA veterinarians. However, I understand your point of view, Ms. Samson-French.

Basically, the 2019 regulatory changes aren't satisfactory. The transportation conditions require significant improvement.

Is that right?

Dr. Judith Samson-French: That's right.

The changes made in 2019 were terrible. I saw horses left outside at the airport for 12 hours in -20 and -30 degrees Celsius. I saw horses over 14 hands in height transported together. The changes weren't sufficient at all.

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you for your comments, Dr. Samson-French.

As parliamentarians, we ask all the witnesses questions, and then assess each point of view.

Ms. Woods, you know the industry well. How do you respond when you hear people questioning things in this manner, when they say that the transportation conditions aren't good?

Do you think that there's still room for improvement?

[English]

Ms. Jennifer Woods: I find it very frustrating. For instance, on the topic of the animals not having enough room and our not meeting the standards, we actually meet the standards. Nobody has provided any information saying that we don't meet the standards set forth by IATA. I have information saying we do.

For horses going to Japan, it's three per crate, per IATA standards. They require 1.73 metres squared. We give them 2.12 metres squared, so we exceed IATA, the Health of Animals Act, Whiting research and codes of practice. We exceed them.

I find it very frustrating when we keep getting told they don't have room, but nobody has ever told us what room they believe they have. It's just that they look cramped. They have plenty of headroom. We are in full compliance with headroom in IATA standards. I sit on the CR2 and CR3 committees that write these standards. They just can't have continual contact with the roof. The ears of horses in stalls touch the roof of the stalls, so we are in compliance.

The information I provide you is based on me actually standing there, right at the trailer, alongside CFIA. CFIA might not know it, but I actually audit CFIA as part of my audit. I audit to our welfare standards. We see the fitness of the horses. I'm at the feedlot when those horses load out. Those horses live their lives together all the time. They don't suddenly become unfamiliar during the trailer ride.

One of the best ways that I try to explain this to people—and it's something that I actually document in my audit—is with the time to load. I time it from the minute the gate opens until the minute the gate closes on that crate. How long does it take to put those three horses in that crate? In Winnipeg, it's 17 seconds. In Calgary, it's about 22.5 seconds, because there's just a little more distance to walk.

You cannot cram three draft-sized horses that are unfamiliar and don't want to get along into a container in that amount of time.

• (1135)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Could the government consider further improving transportation conditions to satisfy people who find the rules insufficient?

People say that competition horses, for example, are transported in better conditions than other animals, and that the care is better organized.

Is that possible?

[English]

Ms. Jennifer Woods: There's always room for improvement everywhere.

My motto for my business is, "We learn better so we do better."

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perron.

[English]

Thank you, Ms. Woods.

[Translation]

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

[English]

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

I'd like to thank all of our witnesses for helping guide this committee through the study of this bill.

Witness 1, I'd like to start with you. Thank you for offering your perspective to this committee.

One of our previous witnesses mentioned that the export of live horses for slaughter is a relatively new industry in Canada. Can you tell the committee how long your family has been involved in this part of the business?

Witness-Témoïn 1: Twenty years.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: In those 20 years, when you divide up the farm income that you have, roughly how much has come from the horses that are destined for export? Give me just a percentage, or a rough ballpark figure.

Witness-Témoïn 1: It's probably 40%, as a rough guess.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I've been on this committee for six years. In all forms of animal husbandry, there has long been a complaint from producers and ranchers that we have seen a whittling away of processing capacity in Canada. The cattle industry especially is dominated by two giant behemoths, JB and Cargill, and a lot of small communities have seen their processing and the economic opportunities from that processing disappear.

I'm wondering if, in indigenous communities, particularly Métis communities, when you look at the fact that the feedlots and the processing are all happening in a foreign jurisdiction, there have ever been conversations in your community about lost economic opportunities here in Canada, about doing processing here. Has that promoting of economic resilience within indigenous communities ever been a topic of conversation?

Witness-Témoïn 1: I've heard that there have been conversations started in the past, but I'm not sure where they're at now or if they've fizzled out. I think that for a lot of indigenous people just the day-to-day survival, never mind looking down the road, seems to be what they're most focused on.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Would you look favourably upon a serious government commitment to trying to develop that processing capacity?

• (1140)

Witness-Témoïn 1: Yes, definitely.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: You would. Okay. Thank you for that.

Ms. Woods, thank you for being here also.

I want to ask a few questions as a layperson. Do you know generally what type of aircraft is used to transport them? I fly planes all the time, but is it generally an aircraft on which they can lift the tail section and load them in? I'm just curious as to how it looks.

Ms. Jennifer Woods: Well, it depends on which cargo. It's actually in my briefing here. It depends on what it is. A 767 is what Air Canada uses. I know it was referenced in past meetings that they haul only 18 horses at a time. That was their maximum. They actually haul only that many horses because they can put only six pallets on those planes. That's why. It's not for welfare reasons or anything.

We can look at the Boeing 747-800s. They carry 90 horses: thirty pallets, three horses each. These are stalled horses also. These are not just our horses. The 747-400s can carry 28 pallets, which is 84 horses. Boeing 777s can accommodate 81 horses on 27 pallets. We can have large loads. It depends. Some of them do have the noses that open, and some don't.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I've watched a lot of aircraft being loaded with cargo as I'm waiting to board. When you're talking about pallets, the horses are in crates that are on a pallet that is moved, brought up by an elevator and then moved into the space.

Ms. Jennifer Woods: Yes. Unfortunately, I didn't bring video, but I have video of all of this process.

Yes, that determines the pallet size. The pallet size for horses in stalls is the same pallet size as the loose hauled horses, but it has to be able to fit on the pallet mover. It takes them out to the airport. They go on the lift or the loader. That lifts them up. It rolls them onto the airplane and then rolls them down into cargo. I'm happy to share pictures and video.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Sure, and those aircraft are not designed specifically for horses. They can take other loads if need be.

Ms. Jennifer Woods: Yes. They are cargo planes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: They are cargo planes.

Ms. Jennifer Woods: The horses that are exported to Japan for meat are transported on the exact same types of airplane as the competition or riding horses are.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: You mentioned that on some of the bigger aircraft you potentially could have in excess of 80 horses. You said that somewhere in the 90s is possible on some of the bigger models.

Ms. Jennifer Woods: Yes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: On a plane that size, carrying that many horses, how many attendants would be required to be on board?

Ms. Jennifer Woods: The way IATA reads for that is that you have to have one for a pallet, and then anything over two pallets or more is up to the airline and the shippers, but the number of attendants on the plane is also dictated by the number of jump seats available. You also have to make sure there are jump seats available for the pilots to rest, so that gets limited too. Some of them have only four or five. Some of them can have 11. It really can—

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: It's anywhere from four to 11 attendants.

Ms. Jennifer Woods: It's not that many attendants, because other people who are on the plane may have to sit in those seats also, like if you have any crew who also rest. It depends on what it is.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: This is a final question.

With the way they're loaded, is there generally space for the people who are there for animal welfare to be able to walk to the back of the plane and be in visual contact with the horses at all times during the flight?

Ms. Jennifer Woods: Yes, you can walk up and down between the pallets. I also have footage and pictures of that.

As a closing fact, so people understand, there was a statement that they don't do more than 18. The largest shipment to date of competition horses was 89. Coming out of Calgary, I believe the largest one that is coming out of Spruce Meadows will have 67 horses, so we do also transport them this way, in large numbers.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor, and thank you, Ms. Woods.

We'll now go to Mr. Steinley, for up to five minutes.

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Thank you very much, and thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Unlike my Liberal colleague, I believe there is only one set of facts. There are not two sets of facts.

Ms. Woods, you have just said there is a constant visual look. You are able to see the horses on the flight. In this committee, people have said those horses are unattended when they're going to Japan.

Is that categorically false?

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Ms. Jennifer Woods: They are attended to, so yes, that is false.

The attendants are experienced horse people. They are the same as the ones who are travelling with the other horses.

● (1145)

Mr. Warren Steinley: When these horses were being loaded, you said you visually saw this, and it was not through a video, so you were actually on the ground watching these horses being loaded. Is that correct? You said it took 17 seconds in Winnipeg and 22 seconds for three in a crate in Calgary.

Ms. Jennifer Woods: Yes.

Mr. Warren Steinley: Did you see any signs of stress when these horses were being loaded?

Ms. Jennifer Woods: No.

Actually, I may see more signs of stress when the attendants are trying to put horses in the stalls. Horses are claustrophobic by nature. They don't like to go into small, enclosed places, so when you put them in the crates with friends, they actually load quite quickly.

I have the video, and I am happy to show you the video I have taken right there when the horses are loaded in the crates, and how they're loaded. Yes, that's our average time to load.

Mr. Warren Steinley: Thank you very much.

I know my Liberal colleague keeps wanting to interrupt me, because she is upset about these actual facts, but can you tell me—

The Chair: Mr. Steinley, I'm going to stop you there. I've stopped the clock. It's at 3:30, and we'll hold on there. There was a bit of back-and-forth on both sides, so let's make sure we keep it between you and the witness. I'll ask my colleagues to keep their comments to themselves or to take it outside.

Go ahead, Mr. Steinley.

Mr. Warren Steinley: I don't think we have to go outside. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I do want to get this on the record as factual information from someone who has been there rather than just seeing videos or hearing hearsay. I want to make sure, because one of the witnesses said we aren't meeting this national standard.

Could you correct that statement, Ms. Woods?

Ms. Jennifer Woods: Yes. We are meeting national standards based on 45 animal welfare audits that incorporate all the regulations internationally and domestically.

Mr. Warren Steinley: In your opinion, what does this bill actually mean to do? Do you believe this is a slippery slope and that we're talking about trying to end animal agriculture?

Ms. Jennifer Woods: I do. I believe this is a precedent that has been intended to be set. One of the big proponents of this bill, responsible for the petition, states on its website, when asked why it advocates for horses only, that it considers horses pivotal in this movement. It says that if society and our lawmakers can agree that we shouldn't slaughter or eat horses, logically, the next step will be to examine the welfare of all animals for food.

When asked the question directly in relation to Bill C-355 on whether the bill wouldn't have been more effective if the statement "by air" had not been part of it, the answer in part is that it has been their experience that if their ask too much from the government, they risk getting none of it. They say small steps are more effective in achieving their goals, because there is less of industry convincing their leaders that the steps being taken are too drastic and unfair.

They go on to say that when Bill C-355 becomes law, the Canadian Horse Defence Coalition and other like-minded organizations will continue to defend horses from slaughter and export for the same purposes by any means of transport.

As the old adage goes, "If they tell you who they are, believe them." It has been directly stated that this is to set a precedent.

Mr. Warren Steinley: Thank you very much.

Witness 1, have you had a conversation with the member who brought this bill forward before today?

Witness-Témoïn 1: I was at a meeting that he had. I was not invited by him. I was invited by some other members who were meeting with him.

Mr. Warren Steinley: Thank you for being here.

I grew up on a farm and love animals. We treated our animals very well.

Could you talk about how your horses are treated? Growing up, we'd go out in calving season or foaling season and be there to make sure everything was okay. Could you talk a bit about the way you treat your animals when they're being born and when you're raising them? They're part of the family.

Witness-Témoïn 1: That's right.

I often ask, during calving and foaling season, where's my advocacy group? Who's going to rescue me?

It's the loss of sleep and time, and it's injury. We spend tens of thousands of dollars on veterinary bills, medicine, equine therapy, chiropractic care and dentistry on our horses, as well as on farriers.

The Chair: We're at time, unfortunately, Mr. Steinley.

Thank you to Witness 1.

We'll now turn to Mr. Louis for up to five minutes.

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Thank you, and I want to thank all the witnesses for being here, both in person and online.

I'd like to direct my questions right now to Dr. Samson-French.

With 35 years as a vet, you certainly have very strong credentials. You said that you've been to the Calgary airport. You've witnessed this first-hand, so it's important to have this testimony.

I did see you taking lots of notes, as if you were able to respond. In this format, it's a bit more controlled. I thought I would give you the chance to address some of the things you heard, and to respond, as you were taking notes there.

● (1150)

Dr. Judith Samson-French: I have some grave reservations about how amazing the regulations and the observance of the regulations are in the case of these horses.

I've observed several times the loading of horses into the crates. First, I've seen crates standing at the Calgary airport for hours and hours at -20°C. I don't know how that fits into animal welfare. When they're loaded into the airplane, which I've seen, it's through the side door. In Japan, they've been unloaded through the front.

We have—I don't know—one or two attendants, and yes, they can walk up and down the aisle. I've accompanied lots of loads of other animals in transport, notably ostriches, which were not easy. All these crates are wrapped in ropes. How could anyone safely access any animals in distress in there?

We're also talking about show horses being transported in there. They're usually plied with food and water, especially at landing or takeoff, to distract them so that they don't really realize what's going on with the change in air pressure. They usually have their legs wrapped, which is my main concern with these other horses. During takeoffs and landings they are trying to keep their balance and all trampling on one another. At the very least, I can't even imagine that horses are transported without their legs being wrapped.

Again, if the standards are so high.... When I ask questions and I forward the information about all of these things, everything is redacted. To measure mortality as our animal welfare basis—the mortality is really low—is setting the bar extremely low, not accounting for dehydration, exhaustion or injuries. If we're saying for animals—and 50% of them are insured—that we have zero per cent mortality, well, that's setting the bar very low for animal welfare. Those are the reports that are not getting to us.

Mr. Tim Louis: I thank you for that.

We've heard it said today that there's no difference between the export of live horses by air for slaughter and the transportation of horses for sport, competition, recreation or show.

Is there any validity to that? Could it be mistaken that this condition is even remotely close?

Dr. Judith Samson-French: It's not even remotely close.

Those horses from Spruce Meadows are worth a fortune. There is no way they're loading three to four horses into a crate, saying, "Good luck, we'll see you on landing," and wrapping the crates with ropes so no one can get into them. To me, the wrapping with the ropes allows an attendant only to kill a horse in the case of a horse trying to kick through a crate at that point. We're not talking about the same welfare for shipping horses for show compared with shipping horses for meat at this point—absolutely not.

To me, dehydration is big. We know from science that if an animal doesn't get water for 24 hours, we're going to see clinical signs of dehydration. Well, when we look at the loading of these horses from the feedlot in Alberta all the way to Japan, we're just at the limit of 28 hours. Are we assuming that all these horses took copious amounts of water and feed the minute before they were loaded? It can be four to six hours, and some prefer not to give them food and water, in order to prevent too much manure and urination from happening.

No, we're not talking about the same thing at all.

Mr. Tim Louis: Thank you for that. I believe that's my time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Louis.

[Translation]

Mr. Perron, you now have the floor for two and a half minutes.

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

I would like to thank Witness 1 for joining us. I want to ask the witness a question.

In the first round of questions, I asked many questions about standards.

Is it possible to improve transportation standards? Do you think that it would be economically viable to invest more resources in this area?

[English]

Witness-Témoïn 1: I'm not so involved with transportation standards. We do transport a lot of horses by trailer, and if the transport standards are being met and exceeded, I don't see why we need to throw more money at them.

• (1155)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you.

Do you think that this bill could set a precedent?

If passed, do you think that it could lead to an increase in local horse meat consumption?

Is ground transportation a possibility, for example? Right now, the ban applies only to air transportation.

[English]

Witness-Témoïn 1: The meat market, nationally, is very small. If horses are unable to be exported by air, the market will be flooded with meat horses, and there will be no market. That's a concern. How do we dispose of these horses?

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you.

Ms. Woods, we often hear about the redaction of transportation documents. Are you aware of this? Can you tell us about it?

Obviously, as parliamentarians, we're all in favour of transparency.

[English]

Ms. Jennifer Woods: I am not with the CFIA, and I am not with the government, but I just know—I believe—that you have to redact people's names and some specific things. It's a law. It's not because anyone is trying to hide anything. It's actually the law that says these are the specifics that have to be redacted. That's my understanding.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you.

Do you think that the passage of this bill could end horse meat consumption? When you spoke earlier about a type of escalation, is that what you meant?

Please keep your answer brief.

[English]

Ms. Jennifer Woods: I don't believe it will end the consumption of horse meat, because around three billion people around the world consume horse meat, but they're definitely going to go there next. That is the end goal. If they can shut this down, they're going after our domestic slaughter also. That's very clear.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Woods, and thank you, Mr. Perron.

Next is Mr. MacGregor, and then I have one question from where I sit.

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

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Witness 1, you mentioned that you have been doing this for approximately 20 years. What was it that your family was doing before, and what were the conditions that made this a possibility, a business to get into?

Witness-Témoïn 1: It's just that we were doing it on a smaller scale, and the price wasn't what it is now. Now the price of the meat market has gone up, so we've increased our herd numbers.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

Dr. Samson-French, I've been out on the tarmac before, when I've had to exit the terminal to get onto a plane, and suffice it to say, the noise level at an airport is quite high. We're all very familiar with the decibel levels when a plane is accelerating down the runway, and with the sudden shift in position.

I'm just wondering this: In your experience, how have horses reacted to such high noise levels? Do you have anything to add to that particular question?

Dr. Judith Samson-French: For me, from just standing to watch the animals that are in the crates that are taken to the airplane and then loaded in.... I mean, even on the tarmac, there are other airplanes departing right beside them while they're sitting on the tarmac, and it's incredibly loud.

When we say that this happens to sport horses, we need to understand that sport horses have been handled; they have been trained. As a veterinarian, I know that when a horse comes to my clinic, a horse needs to be able to load and unload from a trailer. It's not my job to help the client load his horse. We assume that's all done.

These horses are not trained at all for the transport conditions. The noise level for us is incredibly loud. To me, the only way I can assess that from a distance with binoculars is by actually hearing the horses. For horses that are calm, you shouldn't hear anything in the crates. In this case, you hear kicking non-stop from one crate to the next crate to the next crate, and I feel sorry for the one horse that is sitting in there that's getting the kick as well. The incredible kicking that goes on in the crates tells me that these horses are not at peace and are not happy being there.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

Just quickly, Ms. Woods, we potentially might have the Embassy of Japan come to provide testimony. You mentioned that you were in Japan. There have been suggestions made that we process horses here in Canada and ship meat to Japan.

Do you know what the difference is between horse that might be frozen but is ultimately consumed in Japan and those that are slaughtered in Japan? Obviously, it's for a fresher product.

Can you speak to that at all? Do you have any expertise in terms of why they're shipped to Japan in the first place to be processed? Is it just about the freshness or the way it's served?

• (1200)

Ms. Jennifer Woods: Yes, it is the freshness of the meat.

The carcasses leave the plant the day of slaughter. They go right out, what we would call "hot on the hook", so they're warm going out because they're used for sushi as the number one use of them, and the meat has to be very, very fresh.

If you've ever had frozen meat on sushi, you would understand, but that is why they want the meat fresh.

The horses also have to live there. They have to spend, I believe, three months in Japan to be able to go on to be processed. There's a whole set of regulations there of how long they need to be in Japan for that.

The Chair: Ms. Samson-French talked about the fact that, although the regulations may be the same between meat horses that are going to Japan versus what we'll call show horses for Spruce Meadows and things of that nature, the actual conditions in the plane can be vastly different because of their element.

Can you explain a bit, because as I understand it from testimony before this committee, the regulations are the same, but the conditions put in place by the individuals who may be shipping the horses may be different on the basis of their end outcome. How different is it? I want to give you the opportunity to explain. You said that you've been on the planes and you've talked to attendants.

Ms. Samson-French talked about the fact that there's different stationing between the horses.

Is there something we could do to be able to move the standards towards better animal health care, notwithstanding that we're not talking about million-dollar show horses either?

Ms. Jennifer Woods: I believe there's always room for improvement anywhere, but even with stalled horses, the horses are hauled loose and the crates have more room. My briefing shows you that the square footage available in a stall is less than the square footage available to these horses.

In a stall, yes, they have the partitions, but those cause problems, because when a horse goes to brace, a horse has to go out. The stalls restrict the ability to brace.

One of the reasons they wear the boots on their feet is injuries they can obtain in stalls. I've referenced actual research based on that in my briefing on those injuries. Horses are more likely to get injured in a stall than they are when they are loose hauled. The standards say to loose haul them, so is there room for improvement? Always. We can always look at it. It's what I dedicate my life to.

The Chair: Thank you.

Lastly, because I don't want to push my time here as the chair, but to Witness 1, you mentioned the variety of different elements of how the operation works for raising colts and that it's tied into other elements on the farm.

Can you just briefly describe the other elements? If you're raising mares, what could they be used for?

I take your point that you're raising the colts for some other reason and you're shipping them to Japan, but what are those other reasons that are important? What I'm hearing from you in your testimony is that, if you don't send these colts for the purpose that they're being sent for now, they may not have a whole lot of useful purpose, yet they're connected to the other elements of your farm.

Witness-Témoign 1: Yes, all of our broodmares are also broken to drive, so if a mare comes up open, that broodmare gets to go to work in the winter. She hauls bales for cattle and helps us train other younger horses.

After the foals are weaned, we have people who call us and say, "Do you have these foals available?" "Yes, come on in. Come and look." We market foals that way as well.

Whatever's left over, whatever didn't make the cut, goes to our exporter.

The Chair: Thank you very much, and thank you, colleagues.

We're going to end our first panel and turn it over to the second, so don't go far.

The meeting is suspended for two or three minutes.

• (1200) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1210)

The Chair: Colleagues, we're back at it. Thank you, everyone, for the quick transition.

I welcome you to the second panel. Today we have, appearing as an individual, Dr. Jonas Watson, a veterinarian who is joining us by video conference.

It's great to have you with us.

From Overseas Horse Services Ltd., we have Kenneth Serrien, managing director, coming in from Calgary, as I heard during the remarks.

From the Canadian Equine Exporters Association, here in the room, we have William Shore and Kevin Wilson.

It's great to have you here. Thank you for being here in person.

We're going to turn right over to opening remarks for up to five minutes. Then we'll go to questions.

I'm going to start with Dr. Watson, please, for up to five minutes.

Dr. Jonas Watson (Veterinarian, As an Individual): Good day, and thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee.

I'm here today as a veterinarian, as a horse owner and as one of the great majority of Canadians who oppose the live horse export industry.

Canadian horses shipped for slaughter to Japan are deprived of food for the full duration of their transport, which can last up to 28 hours and sometimes exceeds that. We can presume that the prevalence of prolonged hunger in these animals is high and increases in severity the longer they travel. After only 12 hours of transport without food, horses are at increased risk of developing painful gastrointestinal disorders such as stomach ulceration.

These horses are also deprived of water for the entire duration of their travel. Physiological biomarkers of dehydration have been detected in horses after as little as one hour of water deprivation. Prolonged thirst leads to dehydration, discomfort and suffering.

How does the experience of 28 hours of food and water being withheld feel to a horse? It's probably very similar to how you might feel after sitting on an airplane all day with nary a pretzel nor a ginger ale.

In 2022, the European Food Safety Authority's panel on animal health and welfare recommended that during transport, horses should be provided with constant access to food and water, or should at least be offered these at regular intervals of no more than four hours, for a period of 30 minutes.

Post-transport colic is a phenomenon that can appear within a few hours following travel. Post-transport colic emergencies require the prompt attention of a veterinarian. If colic develops during overseas transport, there is little to nothing that can be done. We have no way of knowing how many of Canada's exported horses go on to suffer this fate as a consequence of transport or how, and if, they are even treated.

The respiratory tract is one of the physiological systems most susceptible to infections in horses after long-distance transport. Clinical respiratory disorders, such as pleuropneumonia or shipping fever, have been detected in horses after journeys as short as 10 hours.

A 2016 study published in *The Veterinary Journal* showed that horses transported by air had a prevalence of shipping fever of 11%. Journey duration was confirmed as a risk factor that is difficult to control in the face of flight delays and quarantine requirements.

One of the most important preventive measures to ensure horse welfare during travel is habituation and self-loading training, which helps minimize transport stress and reduces the incidence of problem behaviours and injuries. This sort of training is undertaken by valuable horses used in sports such as show jumping and other competitive events.

The horses we send to Japan, on the other hand, have not been desensitized to transport of any kind, having spent the entirety of their short lives on a feedlot. Their stress begins even before the animals have left Canadian soil, as evidenced by their experiences disembarking from the trucks.

Videos filmed in my hometown of Winnipeg have documented handlers at the airport attempting to unload horses using long sticks to aggressively prod the animals through holes in the trailer walls. This repeated jabbing and poking represents a total disregard for the animals' well-being, and this despite the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's assertion that everything that happens to these horses prior to departure takes place under strict CFIA supervision.

The CFIA has also been questioned before this committee about the compatibility of horses when housed together in transport. CFIA personnel indicated to you all that determination of compatibility of cohorts is based solely on uniformity in size. That means that if four same-sized but temperamentally incompatible horses are boxed together for the journey, it's left to them to not fight with, kick or bite each other.

I would note that each of these hazards—horse temperament, separation from other horses and regrouping with unfamiliar horses—is among the many identified by the EFSA as having negative welfare consequences during transport.

Finally, let us not forget where these horses end up. They end up in Japan, a country with an abysmal track record when it comes to animal welfare.

Some examples of Japan's poor treatment of animals include its ongoing support of commercial whaling, its farming of bears for the illegal gall bladder market, and its annual dolphin hunt, in which wild dolphins are either butchered alive for meat or caught and shipped around the world to spend their lives in captivity, swimming with tourists.

Closer to home, I have far more faith in this country's commitment to animal welfare. I have great respect for Canada's farmers and the essential workers who feed our country and the world. However, the live horse export industry does not feed Canadians. It caters to a foreign market of super-elites, whose gustatory special needs have been prioritized over the health, safety and well-being of Canada's horses.

The oath I took as a veterinarian requires me to promote animal welfare and prevent animal suffering. The live horse export industry is cruel to animals and inconsistent with the values held by most Canadians. As such, I support Bill C-355 and hope you will all listen to your constituents and ensure its passage.

Thank you.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Watson.

We'll now turn to Mr. Serrien.

Mr. Kenneth Serrien (Managing Director, Overseas Horse Services Ltd.): Chair and committee members of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, my name is Kenneth Serrien, and I'm the managing director of Overseas Horse Services Ltd.

Overseas Horse Services Ltd. is a transportation company that organizes flights for sport and companion horses in Canada. We've been flying horses all over the world, to and from Canada, since 2008. Our company arranges everything to facilitate the import and

export of these horses, such as quarantine, stabling, blood testing, health papers and general logistics.

Sport—racing, dressage or show jumping—and companion horses and the business surrounding that, which includes horse sales plus ground and air transportation, generates an estimated \$150 million per year in Canada. The majority is generated by major competitions such as Spruce Meadows, Thunderbird Showpark, the Royal Winter Fair, Wesley Clover Parks, major-league show jumping and the Woodbine racetrack, all of which are highly dependent on the ability to import and export horses by air. Currently, around 1,000 horses are being exported from and imported into Canada by air every year, and many are shipped to attend these competitions.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak in front of this committee and share my and my colleagues' opinions concerning Bill C-355, as this bill can have serious consequences for the air transportation of sport and companion horses.

Please note that there is a significant difference between handling sport or companion horses and handling horses for fattening and slaughter. All of the horses we transport have been trained to be handled and are halter-broken. They are used to regularly being transported by road or air. As a result, we can load these horses in a safe manner in divided standing stalls on the plane, where a maximum of three horses are loaded per stall in their own segregated compartment. Horses for slaughter, however, are not used to regular handling and lack basic behaviour training. Therefore, they require a different loading protocol.

Here are some of my comments regarding the bill itself.

First of all, I have a comment about the declaration that is proposed. Pilots and CBSA have no expertise in horse behaviour. They don't know if an animal is in distress or not. They would not recognize the difference between a companion or sport horse and a horse for fattening and slaughter. Therefore, relying on them to make decisions regarding the welfare of horses during transportation could be impractical and potentially risky. Prior to every export, we already submit an export declaration via the Canadian export reporting system, or CERS, which is part of CBSA and Statistics Canada. We're already doing export declarations and providing all the information to CBSA and Statistics Canada. Per my above comments, I am concerned about the implementation of this process, especially as cargo planes have very irregular and often changing operating hours.

The second point I'd like to talk about is detention. The bill asks that the chief of customs at every airport detain a horse until they have a copy of the declaration. Again, I'm concerned about this implementation. How and where will these horses be detained at airports? Most airports lack the proper facilities to detain horses. In Calgary, we have a specialized animal facility that has the potential to detain 12 horses at a time. Toronto Pearson airport has the potential to detain only three horses, but other airports that regularly handle horses for export, such as the airports in Vancouver, Montreal, Ottawa, Hamilton, etc., don't have these facilities. You cannot detain a horse without having proper holding facilities, as it jeopardizes the health of the horse greatly and would also be considered inhumane and unsafe for staff.

Additionally, because the horses are under quarantine status, you cannot bring them back to their point of origin in Canada. There are a lot of steps involved in transporting horses by air from Canada—for example, quarantine protocols, testing, health papers and trucking—so detaining the horses could have grave consequences for the movement itself and for the CFIA staff who are supervising these movements.

The last thing I'd like to talk about is the “false or misleading information” part of the bill. I'm very uncertain how this can be enforced and evaluated. The transportation companies and airlines are wholly dependent on the information provided by the client or the horse owner regarding the purpose of export. Additionally, how do we know where the horse eventually ends up overseas? There is no traceability in Canada, the EU or anywhere in the world.

• (1220)

These are some of my concerns after having read this bill. It's my opinion that the implementation of this bill would greatly hinder the process of exporting horses from Canada for show and companion-horse purposes.

I greatly appreciate the opportunity you have provided to speak on this matter.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We'll now turn it over to the Canadian Equine Exporters Association.

You have the floor for up to five minutes.

Mr. Kevin Wilson (Treasurer, Canadian Equine Exporters Association): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the invitation to speak to this committee today. I'm here on behalf of the Canadian Equine Exporters Association.

First and foremost, we want to bring to your attention our industry's belief that we have not had enough meaningful consultation with industry stakeholders on this bill, including exporters, producers, multiple first nations communities and airline pilots, prior to its being introduced in Parliament.

While some members of this committee did agree to take meetings with us, 45 minutes is not nearly enough to gain true insight into the economic impact this bill would have on Canadian farm families or to understand its immense implications on animal welfare.

Proof of this is the complete and utter misconception that these horses are only 18 months of age when they are exported. We have no idea where the government heard this, but it is not accurate at all. Export contracts today state that horses must be between the ages of 24 and 36 months old prior to arriving in Japan.

The removal of the revenue from these specific, purpose-bred draft horses would be detrimental to the Canadian economy and to these families.

Mr. Chair, this would cause a huge animal welfare issue for the nearly 13,000 purpose-bred draft horses that are involved in this market.

What are these breeders supposed to do with these mares, stallions and foals that they have invested in to feed their families? Nowhere in this bill have we seen any mention of compensation for these farmers. As of last week, buyers of domestic slaughter horses were offering to buy these animals at less than 8% of the current fair-market value of the foals that we bring to our customers.

No one at this committee wants to talk about the colts that are produced as a result of pregnant mares' urine production in western Canada. For those who do not know, the PMU industry is a source of pharmaceutical ingredients that are highly sought-after in today's modern medicine.

My next point, Mr. Chair, is about the well-funded animal activist campaigns that have sought celebrity endorsements to promote their cause to the public based on falsehoods and inaccurate depictions of the facts. This agenda pulls at the heartstrings of many Canadians, but it does not represent the actual facts.

For example, it has been said in Parliament that the United States has banned this practice. That is 100% false. Today, export charts to Japan from the U.S.A. can still be issued by the USDA.

This is not an animal transportation issue; this is an animal end-use issue. We have heard from independent professionals at the CFIA, and from animal welfare expert Jennifer Woods, who has witnessed this first-hand right before and while we were loading these animals on the farm. They have witnesses and have both come to the conclusion that we are exceeding the current standard set out in the Health of Animals Act and the health of animals regulations. These are the facts, Mr. Chair, and facts don't care about your feelings.

• (1225)

Has anybody at this committee taken the time to visit the manufacturer of these boxes that we load these animals into? Has anybody at this committee taken the time to witness, in live action, these horses being loaded onto the airplanes?

All we keep hearing about is the cramped conditions that exist. However, the facts are that CFIA, animal welfare experts and industry professionals all agree 100% that this is not the case. Why are we still hearing this point again and again?

Is it because the people of this committee have chosen to turn a blind eye to the science and the evidence and to believe a celebrity endorsement campaign?

Their ultimate goal is to stop animal agriculture altogether. If you don't believe me, listen to this quote from the Canadian Horse Defence Coalition, which is one of the major stakeholders in this debate and a central player in the petitions and emails that we are hearing so much about.

On their website, under the frequently asked questions section, they state, "If society and our lawmakers can agree that we shouldn't [export,] slaughter and eat horses, then logically the next step will be to examine the welfare of all animals used for food."

There you have it, Mr. Chair. Make no mistake: This is the tip of the iceberg. Animal agriculture is a Titanic, and if this legislation passes, we all know what the result will be.

If we want to talk about public policy, public signatures and public outcry, before this committee is a letter signed by over 20 internationally recognized Canadian farm organizations, like the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the Canadian Cattle Association and the Canadian Meat Council, just to name a few. These farm organizations represent almost 200,000 farm businesses and farm families that oppose this bill. Letting an animal's end use and extreme animal activism dictate agricultural policy in this country is a mistake.

We, as Canadians and as industry, ask the government to follow the science and facts presented by the animal welfare experts and CFIA, who have audited this process first-hand.

We can discuss and debate opinions, but we can not dispute the facts.

Thank you for your time. My colleague, Mr. Shore, and I will welcome any questions the committee may have for us.

The Chair: We're going to get to that right now, Mr. Wilson.

We'll turn it over to my Conservative bench here, with Mr. Barlow, for up to six minutes.

Colleagues, we are going to try to do two full rounds, even if it just puts us slightly beyond. I might have to limit time in the second, but I'll do my best.

Go ahead.

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thanks to the witnesses who are with us here today.

Mr. Wilson, you were pretty clear that you weren't consulted. I found it interesting that one of the main issues that we brought up was from first nations and Métis communities, who were also not consulted at all. We had a Métis witness here today, and none of them asked her any questions.

What did you feel was the level of consultation before this bill was tabled in the House of Commons, before it came to this committee? Was there any consultation before this was tabled, and what has been the consultation afterwards?

Mr. Kevin Wilson: Our experience has been that from the get-go, in the set-out of this bill, the opposition never addressed the indigenous component, because they didn't believe that it existed.

Bill and I represent many exporters at this table. We deal with Mohawk, Ojibwa and the Métis Nation of Alberta. Prior to this coming to Parliament, I don't think they realized what they were doing, because they claimed it was a small business that only four people were involved in.

• (1230)

Mr. John Barlow: Have you been consulted in the meantime or before by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada?

Mr. Kevin Wilson: Yes, we were.

We had one Zoom meeting that lasted 45 minutes. Prior to the conclusion of that meeting, many members of the AAFC logged off the Zoom call.

I extended an invite to come to our facility in eastern Canada to witness how these horses are raised, how they are transported from the breeders to the feedlots and so on, from here to the airports. They did accept my invitation. However, when it came time to schedule it, everybody's schedules conflicted on their end.

We offered them footage of these horses in flight, to which they responded that they were not able to look at it.

We left that meeting very disheartened. We did not feel that they understood the whole scope of our industry. As I said in our opening statement, 45 minutes is not enough to talk about the impact on the veterinarians, the feed companies, the transportation companies and the staff who work at these facilities.

Mr. John Barlow: If I'm getting you, no one from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada has taken you up on the invitation to participate in a flight and come and watch the loading and unloading. That has never happened.

Mr. Kevin Wilson: No, it has not.

Mr. John Barlow: We heard some testimony prior to this, in the previous hour, that there's this cloak of secrecy over what goes on and the redacting of all this information.

It sounds to me like your association is quite open and transparent in inviting important officials who should have a working knowledge of how this works. You've been open to allowing them to see first-hand what's going on; they just haven't taken you up on that invitation.

Is that fair?

Mr. Kevin Wilson: We have offered to take them to the breeders of these horses out in western Canada, to visit the pastures where these foals are grown and raised on the mares.

We have offered to take them to the airplane to watch the loading of these horses. We have offered to take them to multiple feedlots where these horses are raised. The answer was always that they'll get back to us.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Serrien, thank you very much.

I would like to ask you a similar question. What was the level of consultation for your organization from the government, prior to this bill's being tabled in the House?

Mr. Kenneth Serrien: There was none.

Mr. John Barlow: The Animal Transportation Association mentioned this in their submission. I want to quote this very quickly. They state:

Logistically, Bill C-355 will pose significant challenges for equine transporters and airlines operating in Canada. The requirement stipulating that every horse departing Canada via air transportation must be verified to not be intended for meat processing before export is unprecedented and introduces complexities not seen in other countries. This requirement imposes an additional burden on equine transporters and airlines, necessitating thorough verification processes to ensure compliance.

As an operator whose business is focused on this transportation, not only here but internationally, would you agree with this statement? Would you like to expand on the impact that this will have on the transportation industry, for example, on CBSA or airline pilots?

Mr. Kenneth Serrien: Yes, I agree with this statement.

In my personal opinion and in my colleagues' opinions, I think giving the declaration into the hands of CBSA over airline pilots—as I stated—is wrong. The only government agency that should be looking at this and making these decisions is the CFIA. They're the only ones that are responsible for this in their mandate and have the experience to check animal welfare and the fitness of these horses being flown. That's our opinion. The job of pilots is to fly the plane, honestly, and the CBSA are customs officers. They don't have the experience to make decisions concerning animal welfare if these horses are going for slaughter, if they're support horses or companion horses, or if they're unfit to travel. That's in my opinion.

Mr. John Barlow: Yes, to have that \$250,000 fine on pilots, I would think, would make it quite onerous for pilots to take on that responsibility.

Mr. Kenneth Serrien: That's correct, yes.

Mr. John Barlow: I have 20 seconds or so.

Lastly, one of the experts allegedly said that one of the welfare issues for horses is that they do not have the ability to lie down and rest during transportation. In your experience, is that something that horses are wanting to do during transportation—to lie down? What is your opinion on that?

• (1235)

Mr. Kenneth Serrien: No, we do not want the horses to lie down. If that's happening, then the horse is in distress. We always want the horses to be standing up in their stalls to make sure that we can properly feed and water them. In our opinion, if they go down for a second time, then we have a conversation with the pilot, with the airline operation centre. We have to make an emergency landing in order to safely offload the horse and make sure there is no indication of distress. We do not want to have the horses lie down.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Serrien. That's very clear.

Go ahead, Mr. Carr, for six minutes.

Mr. Ben Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Dr. Watson, you are the past president of the Manitoba veterinary association, vice-chair of the Winnipeg Humane Society, and owner of one of Manitoba's largest and most successful veterinary clinics.

You dedicate a substantial amount of your time to pro bono work alongside indigenous communities in northern Manitoba, for which you are frequently recognized.

Also, you are the recipient of the Global Animal Welfare Award, one of six people in the entire world on an annual basis who receive that award. I would challenge anybody here to question your credibility as an animal welfare expert in light of those credentials.

Very quickly, Dr. Watson, do you support this bill as an animal welfare expert, because you believe the current practice is contrary to the welfare of horses?

Dr. Jonas Watson: Yes, I support this bill for those reasons. I'm not here representing anyone else but myself as a veterinarian and someone who cares about animal welfare.

Mr. Ben Carr: Thank you, Dr. Watson.

The Conservative witness, Mr. Wilson, who a moment ago said that 100% of animal welfare experts agree that this bill is wrong, may need to adjust the percentage that he used in the categorization of that.

Dr. Watson, can you expand, please, on how the anatomy of horses makes them more susceptible to imbalance and stress during air travel compared to other animals?

Dr. Jonas Watson: The draft horses that we're talking about in question here are tall animals with a high centre of gravity. Over as long a flight as we're talking about, they can become fatigued during that travel and would be inclined to rest in one of two ways. One would be standing on three legs, a tripod, which can be hard to do while maintaining balance in a moving airplane. The other would be lying down, which we may not want them to do. However, that would require the horse's inclination to lie down. Of course, horses prefer to not lie down in an unfamiliar environment, with noisy stimulation. We end up with two options, neither of which is great, and that leads to horses that don't properly rest on a plane in transport. Consequently we end up with horses that are exhausted, potentially injured and potentially lame at the end of that travel.

Mr. Ben Carr: I know there have been lots of conversations throughout the course of this conversation this morning about facts, and science is based on the premise that facts can be presented and interpreted differently. Clearly, there are different interpretations of facts that have been put before us. I completely reject the premise that a fact only must be interpreted in one way. Clearly, as an animal welfare expert, you have expressed a difference of opinion from some of those we've heard from.

Can you share with us, Dr. Watson, in conversations that you've had with your colleagues in Manitoba, across the country, and internationally, the opinions they may have had on this particular piece of legislation? If they are in support of the legislation, how it is that they have come to that conclusion based on the scientific veterinary medical expertise that you have provided here this afternoon?

Dr. Jonas Watson: I have heard some people involved in this process talk about “the” set of facts, or some people have said that there seems to be no clear science on some of these issues. The literature is filled with lots of studies, many publications, including very recent research on horses and the transport of them by air and other means. There is a lot of information out there. I have certainly consulted with colleagues of mine from the equine world and also government vets, many of whom are opposed to this practice of transporting animals such long distances. In this capacity, most of them think there are many shortcomings to the way we are doing it.

If anyone is looking for even just one example of a very robust summary of horse export, the European Food Safety Authority put together a panel on animal health and welfare in 2022, I think, and published a document called “Welfare of equidae during transport”. It references many published studies on horse transport, and the document produces many recommendations on how to handle horses in transport by air and other means.

• (1240)

Mr. Ben Carr: Dr. Watson, I have about a minute left.

We've heard a lot of talk about the mortality rate being low, and that being used as the justification or the basis through which we should be analyzing the current practice. Do you, as a veterinary professional and as a world-recognized animal welfare expert, think that it is fair or responsible that the mortality rate of an animal should be the only consideration we have when talking about the overall health, safety and well-being of that animal?

Dr. Jonas Watson: If the barometer for animal welfare is how many horses are dead at the end—that is the measure we look at—that is shameful. I would be embarrassed to cite that publicly, because that suggests a total disconnect from an understanding of animal welfare. Of course, there are many other parameters to animal welfare beyond whether a horse or other animal lives or dies. I would be embarrassed to cite low mortality rates as some sort of justification for any kind of conduct related to export or anything else.

Mr. Ben Carr: Dr. Watson, I want to thank you and recognize as well that you were the Canadian nominee that year for the World Veterinary Association's award, and throughout all the countries in the world, you were chosen as one of the six recipients as an animal welfare expert. We thank you very much for your contributions. I'm proud to have you as a Canadian veterinary representative here and around the world.

Dr. Jonas Watson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Carr.

[*Translation*]

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

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

I want to thank the witnesses for joining us today.

Mr. Serrien, you said there was a major difference between your way of transporting animals and transporting animals for slaughter. You spoke of training in particular.

Could you shed some light on the issue, first by telling us what training means, and then by explaining the major differences?

In your opinion, shouldn't the transportation of animals for slaughter be adapted or at least improved?

[*English*]

Mr. Kenneth Serrien: I'm going to answer in English, because unfortunately my French is not up to standard.

A lot of the show and companion horses that are being transported are handled and have been trained and halter broken for these purposes.

When we have, for example, yearlings, which are horses less than 720 days old, their training and their handling are minimal. In those cases, it's easier to fly them in a group and load them in a group into an air stall so they feel comfortable and safe. It's also a lot better for them, in terms of bringing stress and anxiety down. That's why we ship really, really young horses.

Slaughter horses or horses for fattening are, in our opinion, a different breed. They are a different kind of animal. Their training is also minimal, zero. It's very hard for them to be halter broken because of their posture and their structure. Maybe it would be easier to talk to the people who have the feedlots, but in our opinion it's very, very hard to start training these horses and to start getting them handled and handling them the way we do with companion and sport horses.

That's the difference. I hope that answers your question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you for these clarifications, Mr. Serrien.

Mr. Wilson, we often hear about transportation conditions. This argument is often used to advocate for the ban on transporting horses for slaughter.

Witnesses repeatedly referred to significant differences between transporting companion or competition animals and transporting an animal for slaughter.

What do you think of these statements?

Are the transportation conditions that different, and wouldn't this be a way to address the issue rather than simply banning air transportation completely?

• (1245)

Mr. Kevin Wilson: Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

Currently the international standards we abide by are what define transporting horses. Whether they are competition horses or horses going for end use to be fattened in Japan, we pride ourselves on exceeding these standards. You can argue that stress levels are higher or lower among competition horses or fattening horses, but I don't believe there's any metric by which anyone can adequately measure that with a pair of binoculars.

The other point I would like to make is that there have been some claims that these horses are cramped. One witness testified today that there are 40 of these horses loaded on a trailer. Current transport regulations require that we transport horses only on single-deck trailers. No trailer can put 40 of our export horses on it. They don't make one.

Information has been presented that these horses are bandaged because they are safer having bandages on. One of the reasons these horses have bandages on is that they have steel horseshoes on, so it's to protect them from hitting each other.

Currently I don't believe there's a large difference in it. Can we improve and do better? Yes, we always can. We as an industry are continually looking to improve.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you, Mr. Wilson.

In your statement, you referred to pregnant mares' urine production. You're the first witness to talk about this.

Could you explain what this is all about? Could this be a side effect of the bill that hasn't been analyzed?

Mr. Kevin Wilson: Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

The PMU industry is a vital industry in western Canada. It used to be a vital industry in eastern Canada. In fact, my family had over 400 pregnant mares tied up in the barn.

During a mare's gestation, when she is pregnant, she excretes lot of estrogen in her urine. That urine is then collected and transported through different pharmaceutical companies, and it goes into making hormone replacement therapy for women suffering the debilitating side effects of menopause. It is also an estrogen source for birth control pills, and it is used in a lot of other pharmaceutical products.

The mare has to be pregnant in order to collect this hormone. Canada has some of the best standards of animal care within the PMU industry. We pride ourselves on that. We have other companies looking to come to Canada to secure sources of pregnant mares' urine to refine this hormone. If we lose this market for these foals, the reality is these foals are still going to be bred. They are still going to be raised on these farms for this industry. These growers are under contract.

That is why I think this bill.... We and our members market several of these horses annually.

Bill, do you have anything you would like to add?

The Chair: Unfortunately, we're out of time, but, Bill, give a very quick comment if you have one.

Mr. William Shore (President, The Canadian Equine Exporters Association): Yes, I do. I would like talk about the breeders' situation when this bill is in place.

The 2023-born foals are still at the breeders. The contracts with the Japanese state that they will be shipped between April 2025 and March 2026. These mares are going to foal again in April, May and June of this year. The contracts for them to go to Japan are from

April 2026 to March 2027. There has been no talk about a transition period for these breeders. Their livelihood and their farms are dependent on this industry, and currently there is no other market for these foals, mares or—

• (1250)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Shore.

I apologize. We're at time, and I have to be able to move on to Mr. MacGregor. Certainly there has been talk, not in the bill but in conversation, about what compensation could look like.

I'll go to Mr. MacGregor. He might have questions on that.

Mr. MacGregor, it's over to you for six minutes.

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

It's not particularly on that, but I do have a question for Mr. Wilson.

I know that Japan is our primary market for live horse exports. Are there any other countries that accept them as well?

Mr. William Shore: There has been one shipment to Korea as well.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Just one, okay.

Japan is absolutely 99%.

Mr. William Shore: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: It's my understanding that they prefer live horses because they are served as a delicacy that is served raw. It's a fairly high-end dish. Am I correct in that?

Mr. William Shore: It is a high-end dish, as are wagyu steak and other high-end products.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Do they prefer live horses because of the freshness factor?

Mr. William Shore: They prefer them live. The freshness of the meat is the major factor.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Canada does have processing capacity for horses, doesn't it? I think we have roughly two plants. Am I correct?

Mr. William Shore: There are two currently that are federally licensed. There's one in Alberta, and I've talked to ownership there. That's in the process of being sold so it will not be eliminated.

Ever since Bill C-355 has been discussed, we have tried to contact many, many smaller plants throughout Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan to discuss with them the possibility of processing these horses for overseas export, and 100% of the time we have been turned down, so there is no—

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I have a question very much related to that. Do we export horse meat, like horse carcasses, as well, and what, roughly, is the comparison of live horses versus horse meat? Do you have a rough breakdown on the percentages?

Mr. William Shore: It's nowhere near as much through the carcass.

I don't have those figures in front of me, but I would suggest possibly somewhere in the neighbourhood of 300 horses would be processed to go via meat.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Okay, so that market does exist beyond Canada's borders.

Mr. William Shore: It's very limited, but yes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you for that.

I do want, in my limited time, to turn to Overseas Horse Services. I want to go through the points that you made, Mr. Serrien, on the bill's contents.

I heard three specific concerns during your opening statement.

You made reference to the fact that pilots don't have any experience with horses, and I agree. Their main expertise is to fly the plane. I think you had concern with the fact that pilots have to have the declaration delivered to them.

You mentioned also that the CBSA and airport facilities don't really have the facilities to detain horses appropriately, with the standard level of care that they deserve.

I think, also, there were just concerns over the documentation.

If we, as a committee, were to address those specific concerns that you have in the bill with amendments, would that then make the bill more palatable to you and your organization in terms of support? I just want to know your overall comfort level if we were to address those specific concerns.

Mr. Kenneth Serrien: Yes, it would be.

With the pilots and CBSA, I think they're just the wrong people to give the declaration to. I think it needs to be under CFIA.

Number two is that if there are proper facilities at these airports to detain horses.... I'm just talking about companion horses and sport horses: It could be a charter; it could be 30 polo ponies, for example, or it could be 30 show jumpers. If they have those facilities to detain them and to feed and water them, then yes, that is part of what we would like to see.

The problem is that a lot of these airports don't have the finances or the land to build these facilities. The only two in Canada that have facilities are Calgary airport and Toronto airport, but in Montreal, Ottawa and Halifax, none of the airports have these facilities, so that's our problem with the detention.

The other problem that we see is traceability. There is no traceability whatsoever. We depend solely on the information from the owner of the horse.

• (1255)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you. I have just 30 seconds left, and I wanted to get a quick question to Dr. Watson.

Dr. Watson, I've been on the tarmac of an airport when I've had to exit the building and get onto an aircraft. We're all very familiar with the high noise levels at airports and inside an aircraft when it's accelerating down the runway.

Can you talk a bit about what those noise levels are like for an animal like a horse?

Dr. Jonas Watson: They're loud. Other planes are landing and taking off while these horses are being unloaded from the truck and then waiting to be flown.

Horses have a keen sense of hearing, like many species of animals, so they would be disturbing, the same way they're disturbing to us, but they are especially disturbing to horses, who have never been exposed to any of these sounds. That's what is so stressful about transport for horses—it's exposure to stimuli they've not encountered before, and that's what is important.

The other witnesses commented about habituation and conditioning to various stimuli that they're going to encounter during transport. These feedlot animals are not accustomed to any of that, and that's what makes it particularly stressful, especially when compared to other groups that have had that kind of conditioning.

The Chair: I apologize. I gave an extra 30 seconds, but, colleagues, try to not ask questions in the last 30 seconds, because there's generally not time for an accurate response.

I'm usually pretty flexible, but we're at time.

How we're going to do this will be four minutes to the Conservatives, four minutes to the Liberals, two minutes and two minutes, I hope, to my NDP and Bloc colleagues, so we can be fair and get ourselves out of here shortly after.

Mr. Leslie, you have four minutes.

Mr. Branden Leslie (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): I'm sorry to hear that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada officials, as well as, I assume, any other folks you tried to meet with on this issue, have been non-responsive to the invitation for a tour. Not everybody in government is like that, though, because Pat, in my riding, who breeds horses for this exact purpose, reached out to me when he heard of this legislation. He asked if I could come for a tour, and I did. I went and saw the care that he takes of his animals. It was very clear to him that this Liberal legislation, with the help of the radical animal-rights activist groups, is trying to put him and 300-plus other families in this industry out of business with absolutely no regard for their financial future and the future of their entire sector. You mentioned celebrities, and yes, they have effectively used celebrities—albeit D-list celebrities—to try to gain support for issues with the ulterior agenda of actually giving animals rights, not worrying about animal welfare.

In those conversations with AAFC that you or other MPs have had, has there been a lot of interest in understanding what the financial consequences would be to the members you represent? Do you have any kind of statistic on what the anticipated cost would be for your members?

Mr. Kevin Wilson: At this point, no, there has not been any interest in understanding the economics of the devaluation of this commodity, of these animals, of these people's livestock, of their ability to feed their families. We, as an industry, find that extremely concerning. We want to be up front and have people realize that we do care for our animals. We pride ourselves on upholding and surpassing standards. We want to be active in addressing this legislation and feel that it needs to be more comprehensive.

A lot of these families have put their entire lives into breeding a specific bloodline of these horses. To lose that when we are exceeding the standards is extremely disheartening to us.

Mr. Shore, do you have something you would like to add?

Mr. William Shore: Yes, again, as I have explained already, these foals, mares and studs have been devalued or will be devalued to under 10% of their present worth when this ban is in effect. There will be approximately 13,000 horses—foals, mares and studs—that have no other market.

What is going to happen to these horses?

• (1300)

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you.

Mr. Wilson, you mentioned the care that your members or producers provide. They obviously care deeply about these animals. Is there any evidence that there has been maltreatment or mistreatment by any producers of animals destined for export, and is there any evidence that the CFIA has not done an adequate job of inspecting the transportation of these animals?

Mr. Kevin Wilson: Absolutely not. We uphold our standards. We surpass our standards. We have had audits from the SPCA at my feedlot. We have had the report that is published on the freedom of information act, and the notes of the officers are that we need to bring more people to these facilities to see how these animals are handled.

The Chair: Thank you, colleagues.

Mr. Drouin, you have no more than four minutes, please.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Dr. Watson, I just want to ask you a few questions.

Do you do animal agriculture at all?

Dr. Jonas Watson: I practice with a multitude of animal species. I'm primarily a companion-animal veterinarian. However, yes, veterinary medicine is one of extrapolation from species to species in terms of drug use and other things, so when called upon, although it's not frequently, I do care for horses.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Large animals are not part of your day-to-day operation.

Dr. Jonas Watson: Cows are not part of my day-to-day operation. Small ruminants are not part of my day-to-day operation.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Wilson, thank you for appearing before committee.

I will be up front with everyone. Mr. Wilson is my constituent.

I want to thank your family for contributing to our local economy. I have known the Wilson family for a long time. I appreciate the contributions that you have made, not only to Vankleek Hill but also to the entire region in our community.

As is, the bill calls for an 18-month coming into force. We will be coming to amendments in the next few weeks for the bill. I'm not going to chastise anyone in this place for supporting or not supporting this particular bill. Everyone has a right to stand up for what they truly believe.

However, should this bill move forward and should it be adopted by Parliament, the coming into force and the impact on the farm, from raising colts or... From the time a colt comes onto your farm to when it leaves your farm, what is that time frame?

Mr. Kevin Wilson: I've forgotten the gentleman's name. I voted Liberal, and I have supported the Liberal Party over the last several years. I just want that on the record.

Mr. Francis Drouin: You'll get crucified for that back home, by the way.

Mr. Kevin Wilson: Yes.

This, again, brings up our point on the lack of consultation that we want to be transparent about.

As a dairy farmer would argue when they're trying to buy their quota, and I hear this through my businesses: "Kevin, we can't shut the tap off." The lack of understanding is paramount. These mares in foal are going to foal in 2024. The reality is they're going to be bred in 2024 to foal again in 2025. You can't shut that off.

They don't come to my facility until they're between six and 12 months of age. We take the utmost care of these horses. Some of these horses that we take from some people aren't in the best of shape. They haven't been wormed; they haven't been cared for, and they haven't had their feet trimmed. We provide that for them.

It takes us almost 24 months to get these horses into market condition, and then we transport them across Canada. I have some of the best people working for me, who do this on a monthly basis. I have invested over \$150,000 in each trailer I use, and I have invested in layover spots along the route, where these horses are fed electrolytes; they're rested and they're ready to go and perform on the next stage.

This is not something whereby we simply cram them into a box, shut the doors, close our noses and close our eyes. This doesn't work that way. We care for these animals from the day they arrive to the day they leave.

If there were an amendment, I believe we'd need between 36 and 48 months of time post coming into force. That gives us the opportunity to address just the foals.

Currently, we do not have the domestic slaughter capacity to transform these horses. We do not. There's one family in Quebec that has a licence. The last I checked with them, they were processing horses only once every four weeks.

Where are we going to go with these horses? Are we going to go to the south or to the north?

We have tried to look at other avenues to get domestic capacity, and every single slaughterhouse and processing plant that we have gone to has stood and looked at us, and said, "Kevin, why would we invest that kind of money, so that we can have activists at the gate when we're trying to provide a service to our fellow business people? We do not want to bring that on our families and in our community." That's why they will not invest in a slaughterhouse. Multiple people have said, "Kevin, if you buy it and build it, we will run it for you, but we don't want to have a cent invested in it."

On the economic impact to our region, we pay \$1.8 million in salaries at my business. If this goes away, I will have to lay off five of my full-time staff.

• (1305)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Perron, you have the floor for about two minutes.

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

Mr. Watson, I gather that you aren't necessarily against the slaughter of horses. However, you're criticizing the transportation conditions.

What do you think about the transportation conditions being reviewed and improved?

[*English*]

Dr. Jonas Watson: I'm not sure whether the transportation conditions could be satisfactorily improved so that it would continue to be a financially viable business for the people who partake in it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: Mr. Serrien explained earlier that certain modes of transportation may be more comfortable. They do exist, and it's possible. However, you think that this wouldn't be profitable.

Is that right?

[*English*]

Dr. Jonas Watson: That would be my comment. It would probably not be profitable. The conditions that some of these \$250,000 to \$500,000 horses travel in are obviously dramatically different from the conditions in which feedlot horses travel.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you, Mr. Watson.

Mr. Wilson and Mr. Shore, I asked you this question earlier. Do you think that anything can be done, in the meantime, to improve transportation conditions?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Wilson: Currently, we believe that as an industry, we can do a better job of educating fellow constituents and the industry on how we do it. There is no difference in the standard for flying a \$500,000 horse or a \$10,000 horse. A horse never knows what you paid for it, despite what a lot of people claim.

Can we do something better? We believe we are providing the best way to transport these horses that have been raised, in the setting they've been raised in.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perron.

Thank you, Mr. Wilson.

[*English*]

Mr. MacGregor has informed me that he is not going to take his final slot.

I would like to thank the witnesses, Dr. Watson, Mr. Serrien, Mr. Shore and Mr. Wilson, for being here today. I appreciate it.

We'll be back in two weeks' time.

Monsieur Perron, do you have one quick thing to say? I know people have to get to question period. Be very quick.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for giving me a few minutes.

I spoke to colleagues before today's meeting. I think that you'll find unanimous consent for us to pass a motion to finish our study of a possible code of conduct for the grocery sector. I'll read you the motion, which is probably the best way to proceed.

Given the lack of any response from Loblaw's and Walmart since we last communicated, and given that the negotiated adoption of the code of conduct seems seriously compromised, it is agreed that the committee will summon the members of the interim board of directors of the code of conduct, and the members of the steering committee for the negotiations on the code of conduct, to testify before the committee on the status of the situation, with a view to providing accurate information on the situation and better guiding the committee's potential recommendations to the government.

Mr. Chair, this motion arises from the fact that the time to act is now. We all know that the adoption of this code is compromised, and that legislating on the issue would take time. This would be a final effort to obtain real information. I don't think that the committee has all the information that may be helpful.

Thank you.

• (1310)

[*English*]

The Chair: The way this works is we need unanimous consent if we want to debate it.

I know, Mr. Barlow, that you want to at least make a comment.

I want to be mindful of time, and I think we can all agree that this is important. We can have a subcommittee meeting in the two-week interim if we have to.

Go ahead quickly, Mr. Barlow.

Mr. John Barlow: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I think you'll have support from us on Mr. Perron's proposal.

I also want to move a motion very quickly, colleagues.

I move:

Given that:

- a) Seven provincial premiers and 70% of Canadians oppose the government's 23% carbon tax hike on April Fools' Day;
- b) The premiers of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick have issued public letters calling on the government to provide a carbon tax carve-out for farmers and pass Bill C-234 in its original form;
- c) The carbon tax currently costs greenhouse operators in Canada \$22 million a year and will pay between \$82 million and \$100 million by 2030 when the carbon tax quadruples;
- d) 44% of fresh fruit and vegetables growers are already selling at a loss and 77% can't offset production cost increase;
- e) The Parliamentary Budget Officer has stated the carbon tax will cost farmers nearly \$1 billion by 2030;
- f) The 2023 Food Price Report estimates that the carbon tax will cost a typical 5,000-acre farm \$150,000 by 2030; and
- g) The "Food Professor" recommends pausing the carbon tax for the entire food supply chain.

The committee call on the government to restore affordability and spike the carbon tax hike on April 1.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'm seeing from Mr. Perron that there were issues with translation.

We are at our time.

Be very quick, Mr. Perron. Obviously, I want to be fair, but—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: I want to thank Mr. Barlow for supporting the motion. The interpreters didn't translate the motion because it was read out quickly and it wasn't provided in advance. We can hear and study it when we return. That said, in our limited time, I would like each political party to confirm its unanimous agreement with the motion.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: We're at our time now. I've opened the door as the chair, and this isn't committee business.

Mr. Barlow has said they will support it. We still have to schedule it.

Here's what I'll do, because people have to get off to question period. Short of anyone wanting to jump in right now, there might be some different elements. We can deal with this, if we like, by calling the subcommittee.

We could always do something virtually over the break and get our schedule in order. You know we already have a number of scheduling items that we discussed at the last meeting in terms of how we want to move.

Short of having Mr. MacGregor or anyone else jump in and move this, what I would suggest, Monsieur Perron—this is important—is that you let us deal with this in a format over the next two weeks, so that we can be in a position to decide when we come back in April. I don't think we're necessarily going to get this decided today. I'm not seeing that around the table.

This includes Mr. Barlow. I know you've moved a motion as well. That can be something we discuss when we come back in April, or if you want to call meetings, because this is our last scheduled day before we break, that's something that, procedurally, would be required to be a 106(4) meeting. If you have that in hand, we can discuss that, but I don't think that's necessarily the case right now.

I'll see Monsieur Perron, but then I want to move, because we're vastly over time and we have to watch the resources that we have here.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: Mr. Chair, with all due respect, I consulted everyone before today's meeting. I already know that everyone agrees with the motion. Explaining that we won't be passing it today takes longer than giving all colleagues the floor to voice their agreement. The message that we'll be sending out today is crucial. For this reason, I would like it if both sides could simply say yes or no.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: What we'll do is.... There actually has to be unanimous consent. I have members who have had to leave. There are other commitments.

Yves, I'm very happy to work with this. We're very accessible throughout the break, so let's talk about this, because I'm not seeing consent, and, Mr. Barlow, I'm not seeing an ability to move forward. If you do want to move procedurally as you're entitled to, we can do that.

We're vastly over the time. We're 15 minutes over.

Mr. John Barlow: I realize that, Mr. Chair. I would just call my motion to a vote. The date is April 1, when the tax goes up. We're not going to be back until after that. I would ask the committee to vote on my motion right now, before we leave. I know it will be quick.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. We're over the time, and there will be a vote tonight.

I mean, you guys are presenting motions left and right, so I would say that both motions are technically out of order, because we're over the time.

Mr. John Barlow: This one's right up the middle, not left or right.

The Chair: Mr. Barlow, I try to be flexible. I tried to be flexible with Mr. Perron. I certainly let you read it in. Mr. Drouin is right. Let's not abuse the process here. We're happy to be able to discuss this over the break, and we have plenty of opportunity.

I'll adjourn the meeting to let people get to question period.

Thank you.

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