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

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**EVIDENCE**

**Monday, May 4, 2009**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Larry Miller**

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Monday, May 4, 2009

• (1600)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC)):** We'll call this meeting to order.

In our first segment of the afternoon and evening, we have the Dairy Farmers of Canada, and Mr. Doyle and Mr. Bouchard. We also have Mr. de Valk.

Thank you very much for coming here.

Just so we can get right into it, if you could keep your presentation to 10 minutes or less, we'd appreciate it, and we'll then open it up for questions after that.

So thanks again.

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I just have a question on procedure first, and it relates to Wednesday's meeting.

Remember we had a meeting the other day there, and I think all of us felt that the Agriculture Union should have two specific hours on its own, not mixed in with others, because they're the counter to the evidence.

Are we going to have that two hours with them? It just won't work if they're one witness amongst six. We need that cleared up.

**The Chair:** I don't have it in front of me here, but could we move on with the meeting and answer that before the meeting is over?

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Okay. Can you have a look at it? If that's not the procedure, Mr. Chair, I'm going to put a motion to make it such.

**The Chair:** Okay, very good.

Mr. Doyle, are you going ahead? Okay, thank you.

[Translation]

**Mr. Richard Doyle (Executive Director, Dairy Farmers of Canada):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will begin my presentation in French.

First of all, Mr. Chairman, I would like to introduce my colleague, Dr. Réjean Bouchard, Assistant Director of the Dairy Farmers of Canada. He is the person in charge of most issues having to do with food safety.

You have received a copy of my presentation and a PowerPoint presentation on the Canadian Quality Milk (CQM) Program.

Since we have so little time, I will focus mainly on the CQM Program. I will be making my presentation in English, but I will be pleased to answer questions in both official languages.

[English]

Mr. Chairman, the presentation in your hands also deals with other activities that Dairy Farmers of Canada is currently involved in related to food safety. These include traceability; the development of a biosecurity program for dairy farms; and in collaboration with other animal commodities, the elaboration of a national farmed animal health strategy, the publication of a code of practices for the care and handling of dairy animals, ensuring the absence of residues in milk, and assessing new metrics for the application of food safety measures through the whole food chain.

There are some words on those activities in my presentation, but as I said before, I will focus primarily on the Canadian quality milk program, which is the on-farm food safety program. Nonetheless, all of these activities are closely linked to food safety and demonstrate dairy producers' commitment to excellence in producing milk for Canadian consumers.

Over the last 10 years—or a little bit more than 10 years—DFC has collaborated with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency in the development of the Canadian quality milk program to provide producers with the necessary tools to address food safety and to demonstrate due diligence as an important element of food production.

CQM is an on-farm food safety program designed to help producers prevent, monitor, and reduce food safety risks on their farms. The program is based on the internationally accepted principles of HACCP—I'm sure you're familiar with the term—the hazard analysis critical control point, a science-based and proactive approach to food safety that focuses on preventing and minimizing the risk of food safety hazards. The CQM program identifies areas of critical risk and best management practices to help address those risks.

Producers in the CQM program strive to improve milk and meat safety on their farms by keeping permanent records to monitor critical control points and to address microbiological and chemical contamination, by following best management practices related to milk and meat safety, by developing standard operating procedures to identify tasks and responsibilities for each participant in producing and harvesting milk, and by developing corrective action plans to ensure that family and staff know what to do if something goes wrong.

Dairy producers in the CQM program closely monitor the following key areas of milk and meat safety: the milking of animals treated with veterinary drugs, dealing therefore with the prevention of residues in milk; effective cooling and storage of milk, thereby controlling microbiological growth; the shipping of animals, for the prevention of residues and physical hazards in meat; the use of livestock medicines and chemicals, again to prevent residues in milk; the rigorous sanitation of milking equipment, again for microbiological hygiene; and the assessment of wash water for microbiological parameters.

Producers also implement best management practices in other areas, such as manure management, feeding, animal identification, medicine and chemical storage, milking, as well as staff training.

The CQM program offers registration to producers who have implemented the program on their farms. Producers undergo an on-farm audit. Once they are registered, they are subject to regular audits to ensure they continue to meet requirements.

Led by Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the federal, provincial, and territorial governments have developed, through industry consultation, a recognition process: the on-farm food safety recognition program. The recognition program provides technical review of producer materials, technical review of management systems, implementation assessment, and ongoing monitoring. The CQM program achieved technical recognition of both its producer materials and its management system in 2006. It has also maintained its recognition status through ongoing monitoring by CFIA.

•(1605)

Dairy producers have recognized the value and strength offered by the CQM program to the industry as a whole and have set a national target of December 31, 2010, for all Canadian dairy producers to be registered with the program. Provinces are working toward the target, and the number of registered producers is growing quickly. Right now, 96% of all our dairy producers in this country have been trained in the program. Nationally, 10% of all producers have been registered or finalized in the process. In some provinces this number is over 90%. That would be in the smaller provinces, I'll admit. In other provinces this number is closer to zero because of the different steps required, particularly in Ontario and Quebec, which have introduced what we call TTR, a time temperature recording, on every single farm, and have gone through these steps. When they now start registering and validating producers and going through the whole process, you'll see these numbers going up fairly quickly.

Once this is achieved, Canada will be in a unique situation in the world by having all producers registered under a certified on-farm food safety program. Many of the countries around the world have it on a company basis, but using our collective system in Canada, I

think it's going to be fairly unique to have mandatory on-farm food safety, with validation and audits and certification for all producers.

Due to its HACCP-base, the CQM program has the ability to respond to new science and new food safety demands. The program also has the flexibility to be integrated with programs developed by other food chain partners, such as truckers, processors, and retailers, to ensure that food safety is adequately addressed all along the food chain.

We have worked with the Dairy Processors Association of Canada. We recently organized a conference called "A New Approach to Food Safety", which focused on the new metric systems of quantifying hazards for the whole food chain. The system is an extension of HACCP-based programs and addresses the entire dairy food chain.

This is where we are in terms of our industry in trying to merge all of the different food safety programs into one single program.

I will stop there, Mr. Chairman. I think my time is up, so I will be happy to answer any questions.

**The Chair:** Okay. You actually have about two and a half minutes left, but we appreciate your finishing early. We'll open it up for questions.

I should have done this at the start. I was thinking we were on a different meeting time. But we have, from the Canadian Association of Regulated Importers, Mr. de Valk, for 10 minutes, please. Thank you.

•(1610)

**Mr. Robert de Valk (Executive Secretary, Canadian Association of Regulated Importers):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for the opportunity to provide the perspective of some importers on the subject of food safety.

Our trade association, the Canadian Association of Regulated Importers, or CARI, to use our acronym, is a specialized trade organization representing members who import food commodities for which import quotas have been established. Currently, the main ones are for chicken, shell and hatching eggs, turkey, and of course my friends here, dairy, with cheese. These quotas are in place to protect the respective supply management programs.

CARI is exclusively focused on representing the interests and rights of such importers. Imports of other food products and goods are not covered by CARI, so if you have questions relating to those, you'll have to ask someone else. As importers of poultry products primarily—also of eggs, and turkey is of course considered poultry, and fowl is also considered poultry—our members operate within the regulatory environment maintained primarily by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

Based on our experience, the CFIA enhances the food safety of poultry and processed poultry product imports by maintaining two key policies. The first is restricting poultry and processed poultry product imports to only those countries and plants that have demonstrated equivalency with Canada's inspection system based on HACCP principles. That equivalency in an inspection system is a key platform in maintaining food safety here in Canada, because our inspection system is a food safety-based inspection system.

The second element of the policy is the restricting of processed poultry product imports to only those products for which a label has been registered and a number issued by the CFIA under its prior approval service. No processed poultry product can enter Canada without a label registration number, which is checked at the border by either CFIA officials or CBSA officials and—and this is very important and critical—by foreign government officials prior to authorizing the export for Canada.

Normally, a copy of the registered label, approved and registered by the CFIA, is sent to the inspector in charge at the foreign plant. So that inspector has something to look at when he's signing the export certificate for Canada. Currently only the United States, Brazil, Thailand, and certain plants in Israel, Hungary, and France are eligible to export poultry products to Canada. In the case of Thailand, only processed poultry products can be exported. You can see that the universe is quite limited.

The combination of the two regulations provides a very effective and efficient means of enhancing food safety, as it allows importers to carry out their responsibility to import safe poultry and processed poultry products from HACCP facilities. We cannot, for example, import from non-HACCP facilities. That's not allowed under the Canadian regulations.

Last week in Washington, D.C., at a conference I attended, we learned that the United States is considering adding egg products and catfish to USDA coverage, which means only imports from countries with equivalent inspection systems to the United States' system will be allowed. For your information, Canada is the only one that has an equivalent inspection system in the case of egg products, for example. Canada would be the only country that can export egg products to the United States.

So you can see what's happening here. A similar bill is being considered in the Congress that would expand the use of HACCP to cover FDA products, and those are all the products that the USDA doesn't cover. The U.S. government, therefore, is increasing the use of inspection equivalency and prior label approval as a means of improving food safety, because as you know, in Washington they're holding lots of hearings on food safety, just as you are here.

● (1615)

Some have suggested that inspection system equivalency is being used by countries as an import barrier, but so long as the same rules are applied to the domestic industry, the approach is on solid ground. Food safety equivalency based on internationally accepted HACCP principles is one of the best ways to consistently improve the food safety profile of both domestic and imported food products and has the additional benefit of ensuring a level playing field in the marketplace.

The pivotal role played by prior label registration as an efficient and effective means of keeping out imports that do not meet Canadian requirements appears to be underestimated by the current government. As you know, a decision has been made by the government to unilaterally eliminate this requirement. None of Canada's key trading partners are demanding this be done, nor are they contemplating doing this. Although some will argue that labelling is not a food safety issue, keeping out food products that do not meet Canadian requirements is a critical component of maintaining food safety. It is no use removing those products once they've been consumed in Canada. We need to keep them out before they're consumed.

If these hearings by the subcommittee can cause the government to revisit and amend its decision to eliminate the prior label approval service, Canadians and food safety will be well served. Indeed, based on our experience with processed poultry products, we do not understand why the registration of all food labels, both domestic and imported, is not required. Over half of all food product recalls are related to allergens that were not identified on the label of the imported food product. If all labels had to be registered prior to their use in the marketplace, firms would be much more careful to ensure Canadian requirements were met. This would ensure food safety and reduce recalls.

Today's electronic world makes it possible to register all labels quickly and cost-effectively. The CFIA has developed electronic label registration, but for some reason it is not willing to fully utilize it. That's unfortunate.

One other effective way to improve food safety and promote harmonized food safety systems is for the federal government and other levels of government to provide seed funding to encourage the adaptation of HACCP principles. Under the CARD program, CARI requested to develop a generic HACCP plan for food distributors. We were the first application under that program, and it was accepted.

The generic model is now being used by many distributors across Canada, but since there are over 400—maybe as many as 500—food distributors across Canada, funding to encourage adaptation of HACCP by small and medium-sized distributors would improve the food safety profile of food consumed by Canadians. Similar seed funds were provided to encourage federal plants to adopt HACCP, and it was one of the most successful seed funding programs the federal government has ever put together.

Those are my comments, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. de Valk.

Mr. Easter is next, for seven minutes.

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

Mr. de Valk, you mentioned labelling, and I have labelling questions for Mr. Doyle as well. Are you saying there are different requirements for labelling by domestic producers in the Canadian market compared to labelling requirements for exporters from other countries into the Canadian market?

**Mr. Robert de Valk:** No, I'm saying those are exactly the same requirements. But if we have a plant in the United States that wants to export to Canada, the way our inspection equivalency works is that the USDA inspector at that foreign plant in the United States in effect becomes a CFIA inspector. He has to interpret the Canadian regulations and ensure that the export that is being prepared there meets Canadian import requirements. One of the most effective ways he can assure himself that the particular export meets Canadian requirements is to have a label that is registered by the CFIA. Then he knows that someone in Canada has already looked at it and said this meets Canadian requirements.

• (1620)

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I'm still not clear, and I don't think I'm the only one. What was it you pointed out that the government eliminated? Explain specifically the requirement the government eliminated. I am a bit lost here.

**Mr. Robert de Valk:** It isn't eliminated yet, but it's scheduled for elimination.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** What specifically?

**Mr. Robert de Valk:** Prior label approval. Right now, if you want to export to Canada, you must submit your label to the CFIA for registration.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I've got you now. I'm on the same planet.

**Mr. Robert de Valk:** That same requirement is in place domestically. Before you can sell your processed poultry product on the Canadian market, you must get your label registered with the CFIA.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** That's scheduled to be eliminated on what date?

**Mr. Robert de Valk:** The rumours say it'll be gazetted in June or July and eliminated by September.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Richard, I think you're saying that the dairy industry's food safety conditions, which you detailed for us, and the programs that dairy farmers are involved in with Agri-Food Canada, like the milk board, are working well. Most of the industry is now on that program. But there is another side of the coin that came up when we were looking at Bill C-27, and that is the labelling issue. Are consumers getting the product they assume they're getting? Is cheese cheese? Is milk milk? Is ice-cream ice-cream? What have you got to say? When we're dealing with this issue, if there are problems, then we should be addressing them. It's not a food safety issue per se, but it definitely is a consumer's right to know issue.

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** It is an issue of protecting the consumers from being misled. This is important.

To build on what Robert was talking about, we haven't quite addressed the prior approval issue. Every week we find products improperly labelled and in the marketplace. This occurs for all kinds of reasons: lack of bilingualism, lack of information on nutrition, misinformation with regard to the product quality, and misuse of dairy terminology. We're checking this a lot. My favourite case is the butter tart. Many of the butter tarts are made with absolutely no butter. Why they're called butter tarts remains a mystery to me, since butter is a regulated food. You would think that if you enforced your regulation you would also protect the name. That's the purpose of having these things. We're progressing in discussions with CFIA on some of these issues. A lot of work has been done with regard to guidelines on the use or misuse of terminology on the label. There have been huge improvements since the bill you referred to. There's still some concern that we're not as far ahead as we would like to be.

Prior approval may be useful, but we still note a lot of imported products that have not received a prior approval, or that just come in somehow with labels that do not meet the Canadian regulations. This remains a concern for the Dairy Farmers of Canada.

• (1625)

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** They get on grocery store shelves?

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** Yes, indeed. The problem is, the way the mechanism works, you have to make a complaint. You have to find them and then report them to CFIA. That's all you hear about it, so you never know what follow-up has taken place. You have to keep trying to see if those products are still coming in.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. de Valk, you named six or seven countries that send poultry products to Canada. What percentage of the market is coming in from those countries?

**Mr. Robert de Valk:** It's about 8% of the market.

Remember, we have a quota system that regulates to 7.5—

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I'm well aware.

My point is that we are a fairly open market here, even with the quota system. We're a heck of a lot more open than the United States and a lot of others are when it comes down to the short strokes.

**Mr. Robert de Valk:** Just to correct you on the United States, there's no import control in the United States. We can ship as much poultry there as we want.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** In terms of poultry, we can. Other products, we can't.

**The Chair:** Thank you. Your time is up, Mr. Easter.

Go ahead, Mr. Bellavance, for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ):** Thank you.

Are you a veterinarian or a biologist, Dr. Bouchard?

**Mr. Réjean Bouchard (Assistant Director, Policy and Dairy Production, Dairy Farmers of Canada):** He is a biologist and I am a nutritionist. I have a doctorate in animal nutrition.

**Mr. André Bellavance:** So if I ask you some questions about the type of bacteria that can be found in food, you will be able to answer them.

**Mr. Réjean Bouchard:** Yes.

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I had an opportunity to visit the Lactantia plant, which is located in my riding, just a few steps away from where I live in Victoriaville. I was very impressed by everything that is done to ensure the absolute safety of the milk and cheeses consumers buy. They were very strict about safety procedures both during the plant visit and throughout all of their operations.

What type of harmful bacteria could be found in milk? Could Listeria be in milk?

**Mr. Réjean Bouchard:** Milk could contain Listeria and pathogenic bacteria. Throughout the production process, efforts are made to keep these contaminants at a low level by maintaining the temperature of the milk below 5°. At that temperature, the bacteria do not grow. Once the milk is delivered to the plant, pasteurization occurs at various stages to destroy all the pathogenic bacteria. These bacteria are destroyed by pasteurization, and this is why it is done.

A process equivalent to pasteurization occurs in the case of cheese made from raw milk during the aging process: the acidity changes, the water content is low and the bacteria do not have enough water to survive. So the effect is equivalent to the pasteurization process.

**Mr. André Bellavance:** If a type of bacteria were to be found in a shipment of milk that arrived at the plant that made it unfit for human consumption, would it be rejected?

**Mr. Réjean Bouchard:** Yes, the bacteria would be eliminated through pasteurization, heat treatment, and so on.

**Mr. André Bellavance:** So there are very stringent inspection procedures on the plant floor. Nothing can slip through.

**Mr. Réjean Bouchard:** No. In addition, these plants are approved by the HACCP, the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points Program. We are constantly taking the temperature of the milk and noting how long it is in the pasteurizer. All this information is recorded. When the product leaves the plant, it is safe and contains no pathogenic bacteria.

• (1630)

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Are there inspectors from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency in the plants?

**Mr. Réjean Bouchard:** There are inspectors in plants that export their product. There are also plants that are inspected by the provincial inspectors.

**Mr. André Bellavance:** So government inspectors are present at all times.

**Mr. Réjean Bouchard:** One way or another, yes.

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Mr. Doyle, people started doubting the safety of our food when the cases of listeriosis unfortunately occurred at the Maple Leaf plant. We had heard that the government was planning to reduce the number of inspectors and to let the company do its own inspections.

We are not saying that companies should not be responsible for inspecting their food. However, in the interest of public confidence, and even for you, as representatives of the thousands of agricultural and dairy producers, isn't it preferable that our tax dollars be used to pay inspectors who work in plants, and not in offices pushing paper? If people knew there were experts working to ensure that the food products on their grocery shelves were safe for them to buy and eat, would they not have more confidence in the food production system?

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** I would just like to correct one point. To my knowledge, there are no inspectors in plants all the time. There are provincial and federal inspection procedures. However, the inspectors do not work in the same way as those in slaughterhouses; the situation is somewhat different.

Milk is tested at the farm, it is tested again when the truck arrives at the plant, there are tests to detect the presence of somatic cells, bacteria, residues and so on. Milk is the farm product that undergoes the most microbiological and other testing to ensure it is safe. It is tested at plants, there are laboratories there. Even though all producers include a tested sample with a shipment on the truck, the product will be tested again. There is a whole procedure to be followed. If any residues or anything else is found, the truck will be put to one side and the producer, in many cases, will be responsible, and will have to pay all the costs relating to the truck. This would amount to a loss of several tens of thousands of dollars. The system relies heavily on self-discipline, both at the plant and on the farm.

Let me come back to your point. In spite of everything, I do agree with you to some extent. In today's society, it is important to ensure we have a good system, in light of all the potential risks with food, despite all the safeguards we've put in place. There are regulations. To come back to what Mr. Wayne was saying earlier, whether we are talking about labelling or food safety, we have to ensure people have absolute confidence in the food production system. Beyond the self-discipline of food producers, we have to ensure procedures are in place both for imported products and for our own products.

If I may, I would like to add two points. All the studies that have been done of Canadians have shown one of the major issues had to do with our inspection procedures and our regulations. There is a perception on the part of consumers. Our products are subject to much more stringent regulations than those in effect in other countries.

I will not take a stand, I will not try to say whether or not the perception is accurate, but I do think it is important to mention. Our producers have to comply with standards that are becoming increasingly stringent in all regards, particularly safety. They are asking that the same standards apply to imported products, and this is not always the case. In Quebec, there were provincial inspections. So people were wondering about the way the standards were being applied to imported products. Were they just as stringent? The standards are not always as stringent, and that is unfortunate.

[English]

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

Mr. Allen, seven minutes.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you all for being here.

Maybe I could start with Mr. Doyle.

You've outlined in your presentation about CQM the pieces you brought together through HACCP as well as practices, no doubt, that have developed over a lengthy period of time with dairy farmers, to try to bring them in a cohesive fashion. If I'm wrong, correct me, but it seems that's what I'm seeing here as part of this report.

It does beg the question—and Mr. Bellavance touched on it in a sense, not from the producer's perspective but from the processor's—about whether we...because obviously we're not going to have an inspector on every farm on a regular basis. I think we all understand that.

I think on page 3 or so you talk about trying to get a national target and getting things set up, and a monitoring program. Now, when you talk about a monitoring program, are you talking about a direct or indirect monitoring type of program when it involves the CFIA? Would it be, perhaps, that someone may come out and actually look from time to time, or would it be simply a paper checklist that some folks would check, or would it be a combination, something in between?

• (1635)

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** We're talking about auditors, basically. We'll go on the farms, visit the farms, and make sure that all the practices that are part of the program have been followed by the producers. So they will re-inspect. These are not CFIA inspectors. These are people

who are on the program, they're employees under the program, who have been trained under a program that CFIA has approved. The whole process and mechanism is certified and approved by CFIA, and these people go out to farms.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** So they wouldn't be CFIA inspectors; they would be auditors who have been trained and certified by CFIA, if you will, or at least under the program.

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** They'd be certified under the CFIA program, yes.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Okay, so an arm off, if you will. Perhaps it's not as clear-cut as that, but we'll take it at that.

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** We're paying for it. That's the difference.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Can you help me understand why there seems to be, in the management program in the dairy program, a culture that has safety at its forefront? One of the things I've been asked about by producers is what are my constituents' perception of the dairy products and their safety aspects. One of the few things that came to mind for me is one of the validators, if you will, of how safe the product is. And it's primarily milk I'm talking about now, because I do agree with what you said earlier about the potential to mislabel things like yogurt, when they may indeed not necessarily be made exactly the way most of us think they're made.

Mr. Easter mentioned ice cream, and not unless you go down to an old ice cream factory is it going to be ice cream necessarily. There's this whole sense that the folks who validate the milk system are actually mothers who actually go out and buy it for their young children, and there's never ever a thought about second-guessing that decision. Can you help me understand why that seems to be the case from the perspective of safety? Clearly, I don't think there's any more stringent inspector of what you put on the table than moms who go out and buy products for their kids. Why is it, do you think, that there's no question there?

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** Maybe history. Milk has been safe for a long time and continues to be safe. As I said before, it's still the most tested product. Pasteurization has a lot to do with it, because you're talking about liquid milk. In this country, we pasteurize all the milk that is sold to consumers, and in my view, that is very key as well. As much as you have a high-quality milk, when you drink it raw there is a risk element, irrelevant to what some people who are well known say. I think the science is proving that and we've seen enough cases in other countries. We don't have these things here, not with regard to what we sell at the retail level.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Would you call it a culture of safety through the production system from farmers, in a sense? That's my general view. I'm not sure if that's what you see from a management perspective, in the sense that your numbers suggest that the uptake for dairy producers is quite large. Did you see a reluctance?

Maybe I should ask the question in the other sense, rather than being praiseworthy of the group. Was there any reluctance from any perspective like, "You know what, we don't need to do that", or "We're doing well as it is", or "I don't think I need to do that"?



**Mr. Richard Doyle:** Actually, yes. To be frank, absolutely. But it's not necessarily an indication that the farmers do not put a lot of emphasis on how safe the product is. It's because the farmers themselves feel how safe the product is, because they consume it. They produce the milk and they consume it on the farm, and therefore they're convinced of how good a job they do.

When you get into on-farm food safety programs, it's a question of recording everything and it's the details. Most of the farmers who have come into this program in the end have said, "Look, that's what I was doing. But I had to fill in all these forms and I had to document it, and I had to record it, and I had to report it, and so on and so on." So the farmer's reluctance is not necessarily on the food safety aspect, if you want; it's on the process, and you'll understand that.

But with today's traceability and food problems and so on, you now need to do those things, and it's a question of time before we complete it. And it's picking up. So I'm very optimistic that we'll meet our targets within a very short lapse.

• (1640)

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Mr. de Valk, I want to get back to this labelling piece that I think you made quite an impassioned plea about and talk some more about the sense of traceability. I agree with you from an electronic perspective.

The folks you're talking with and to about importing food stuffs, are they seeing this as an impediment to doing the job that they want to do in importing food, or are they hearing from folks they're buying it from that this is an impediment to them, or is traceability and this electronic labelling an enhancement for them?

**Mr. Robert de Valk:** There are two aspects to it. Both sides you've mentioned are expressed in the industry. Some people look at this prior approval process as a regulatory burden that they have to meet, and they would like to do away with it. But on the other hand, those same people often say that one of the benefits of that system is that everybody has to meet the same rules. You don't get products on the shelf that all of a sudden, as Richard was indicating, don't meet Canadian requirements and then you have to go and complain and try to get that product off the shelf, which seems to be kind of a backwards way of doing it if there's a better way of doing it in order to prevent that product from getting there in the first place.

So while they lament the lack of regulatory freedom, at the same time they recognize the benefits that these regulations can bring in levelling the playing field among competitors.

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

Mr. Shipley, you have seven minutes.

**Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for coming out.

I'm going to focus just a little bit with you, Mr. Doyle. Obviously this was driven by the listeria issue, but I'm glad to hear it recognized by all of our presenters, quite honestly, that this is about food safety, so that we can prevent not just an outbreak of listeria but other issues that might come up in terms of contamination of food.

You mentioned that milk is the most tested product of all commodities. Why is that? You talk about the Canadian quality milk program that you're going to implement by December 2010. I think I heard you say you were actually on target of having all of the producers. Is it going to be mandatory?

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** Yes.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** It will be mandatory. How many producers will you have on it?

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** Slightly over 13,000. I think we're at 13,400 right now.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** How many are signed up for it already? You say that it's—

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** There are different steps. It's a fairly elaborate program where you need to have people go on the farm and check everything. You have to fill in all the forms, and then you have a validator who goes in. Before you're totally registered, it's a fairly....

Right now 10% have been registered, but 96% of all producers, of that 13,400, have been trained on the program and have done at least the first steps.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** What is the attitude of producers about having such a stringent program forced on them?

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** I think it varies. As I said, the hardest part in selling a program like that.... The farmers generally have supported this; otherwise it wouldn't be there. We're run by farmers, so obviously there was a will and a willingness to do it.

When you go into the field and try to sell it, as I think I was explaining to Mr. Allen, some of the farmers are more reluctant. They say, "I've always produced high-quality milk. I know. I have my tests every month. I know it's high quality. I have no bacteria. I have fairly low somatic cell count. Why am I going through this very complicated process of documenting everything I'm doing?"

And that's fair enough. That's human nature. You go into any business and tell them how to run the business when they've been doing it for years, and doing it very well, and you're going to have a bit of reluctance, and that's what we're finding out. But if I look at the dairy farming community, there is a strong willingness to get these programs in place, and everybody in the whole leadership is behind implementing this program.

• (1645)

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** You talked in terms of the Dairy Farmers of Canada supporting the development of a national farm animal health strategy. I wonder if you can help me a little bit with that.

Its goals are to avoid and respond faster to animal health threats to improve market access—and I think we all understand what that is in terms of supply management—and to enhance our ability to protect public health, industry viability, and actually even down to farm animal care. And you want to emphasize the need for all major stakeholders to work together.

Is this a strategy that is to meet the standards of other countries, or is this a strategy that will be unique and advanced for Canadians?

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** Oh, it's more designed to do the job here in Canada for us.

Part of the issue on the national farm animal health strategy is that we have all the elements. We have traceability, we have all the tests, and we have all the things we need. But because of the nature of this country, where we have some jurisdictions that are provincial, some regional, three systems of traceability, of identification of animals, what this strategy is designed to do—and we're in the process of discussing it with all the other cattle industries and livestock industries—is to try to get coordination of all this, because everybody goes their own way. We have an association for traceability. We have another organization to do something else. We just need to basically put all the links between all of these, so that if you have any other problems, we will act the same way all through.

I'm not saying in any way, shape, or form that we are at risk of any disease. We've seen it in BSE and we've been able to act very quickly and trace the animals back and so on. But we all think we can do a better job just by getting a little bit better coordination.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** How long have you been working on that?

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** A general animal health strategy was designed by CFIA, and the farm animal health side of the business has been dealing with this, I would say, for a couple of years. The assistant deputy ministers—federal, provincial, territorial—have decided to pick it up and try to work with the industry to come up with better coordination faster. I think they played a key role in pushing for it. We have a draft of a national policy that is now being debated. I expect that within weeks we will have the final version of that strategy. Having a strategy is one thing, and implementing the strategy is going to be another thing, but we have to start somewhere.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Can you tell me just a little bit about who the stakeholders are, so we have that understanding when we're talking about...?

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** In the farm animal health strategy we use the Animal Health Coalition, which groups most of the farm livestock industry. So we have the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, the Dairy Farmers of Canada, the Canadian Pork Council, the poultry sectors, the smaller industries like the goat, sheep, and equine that also participate—pretty much all the farm animal commodities.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Mr. Bouchard, did you have a comment?

**Mr. Réjean Bouchard:** I was adding to Richard's. The chief medical officer of each province is involved in developing the strategy.

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** It's not just the industry.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Okay.

We're talking about the standards out there. Can you talk to me a little bit about food health, and also, as I mentioned, the absence of antibiotics and residue? As a former dairy producer, I know the consequences if you don't. I was fortunate never to have to drop. But are these standards now similar from province to province? Is a national standard set, and can provinces have standards that supersede it?

**Mr. Réjean Bouchard:** The process is the same; everything is tested. The only place it varies is where they may use a test that is different from one province to another, but they are equivalent tests: they have the same outcome. There is more than one test to detect the presence of residues, and different provinces have adopted different tests, but they are all the same in the end.

● (1650)

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** So the actual standard is the same.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** I guess my time is up.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll move to Mr. Easter, for five minutes.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Thanks.

I'll go back to Mr. de Valk.

In your importation of products, it seems the product you import meets quite similar rules to what our producers have to meet. In your knowledge of the other industries, be it beef, fruit and vegetables, whatever it may be, is that the case, and if not, why not?

One of the largest complaints we hear from producers is that products coming into the country are not required to meet the same standards as Canadian products. If it's lettuce coming from Mexico, for instance, you can use certain herbicides or fungicides in Mexico that we're not allowed to use here. Sometimes it's for the workers' health and safety, and sometimes it's our regulatory regime, yet that head of lettuce still gets on the consumer's shelf, undermining the price of our producers in this country who have what I say is a higher-quality product.

What's your experience in that area, or do you have any?

**Mr. Robert de Valk:** Yes, I think I can help you with a bit of an answer.

When it comes to this prior approval situation, that applies only to poultry products, pork products, beef products, and also processed vegetables. It does not apply to any other commodities or food products. So prior label registration is a very limited tool that is basically used in the meat industry. But it has been very successful, because we can keep out a lot of products that do not meet Canadian requirements.

Richard was saying that he notices a lot of dairy products on the shelf that do not meet Canadian requirements, but his industry is not subject to prior label approval. My suggestion, very late in the presentation, was that maybe Canada should be looking at requiring registration of all food products, imported and domestic, and then we have a label, we have traceability, we have lots of information, and in this electronic age we can make that happen pretty quickly. I think the time has come to consider that, and it may address the problem you're raising as well.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Thank you, Mr. de Valk.

Richard, you mentioned identification and traceability. I'll just use the small beef plant in P.E.I. It was geared to slaughter 700 animals a week, but it's not anywhere near that. That system was set up with traceability at substantial cost, but it's not in fact being utilized at the moment. I don't disagree with traceability, but why should farmers have to pick up all that cost? If it's traceable and a food safety issue to trace back if there's a problem down the line, who should pay for it? Where is that system at the moment in terms of coordination right across the industry, and with federal and provincial governments? What's the cost, and who is picking up the cost?

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** I'll let Réjean respond to that one.

**Mr. Réjean Bouchard:** As you're aware, animals need to be identified on the farm. Possibly in dairy every cow is identified. There is a national system, called national livestock identification, that has been in force, and animals need to be identified; it's a regulation. The tag in the animal's ear is the primary identification to identify where they are, and it is used to trace them if there is occurrence of disease. Animal identification is a basic tool for genetic improvement. You have to know which animal is bred with which animal. It's essential for milk recording too, because you need to be able to read data that you're collecting.

I don't know if I'm answering your question.

• (1655)

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** You're answering it, Réjean, but the problem is—and I don't know whether we can recommend anything through this committee or not—that all of these costs in the system, and they all cost money, back down to the primary producer. Primary producers' incomes are very low in this country as compared to the United States. The debt load is high. Why should the primary producer have to be paying for food safety issues? Why isn't it the Canadian taxpayer, as a lot of it is done in the United States?

**Mr. Réjean Bouchard:** Specifically regarding traceability, we understand the new government program is coming. It's going to be in major part a government responsibility, where they pick up the cost of traceability. Whether or not this will happen is another question, but that's what we are told. They do recognize that there is a public good requirement there and that government needs to pick up part of their costs.

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** Can I add to this very briefly?

Mr. Easter will appreciate that in the case of a supply-managed industry, where the system allows the producer to recover their costs from the marketplace, you can recover these costs if you charge it to the farmers. If the ability of the farmers to recover their costs from the market had to stop, then just like the United States, you would have to have the government picking up and covering some of these

costs. In industries that do not have the ability, because they don't have supply management, to go to the marketplace and transfer these costs, that's where you have to look at the government intervening.

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

Mr. Anderson, five minutes.

**Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a couple of questions about government agencies working together, and about how they work together in your system.

In terms of listeria, we've heard a fair amount about the fact that the provinces had to deal with it first. Then it came to the federal government, with a couple of different departments dealing with it. There has been some talk about their communication and that kind of thing.

How do the provincial and federal governments work together in the CQM? Are you dealing with one department, primarily CFIA? How do the provincial departments play into that? And if you have issues or problems, who resolves them?

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** The CQM itself is really a national system. It primarily involves Agriculture Canada and CFIA for that particular program. There is on-farm inspection at the provincial level in most provinces, and that continues. There is federal inspection as well, with regard to feed and other issues. The plants, whether you're registered or not registered, will have different inspection systems. So it's kind of a dual jurisdiction.

In your reference to listeria, that's not relevant to CQM; more so is the situation that has occurred with the cheese situation in Quebec. You had provincial interaction with the distributors and the manufacturers in particular. About a month and a half ago, with regard to imported raw milk cheese, which is under federal jurisdiction at that level because it's imported, they found on the market a number of imported cheese products with listeria. That became a bit of a media event—i.e., are the inspectors at CFIA more rigorous than the provincial government in Quebec has been in that particular case?

If you're asking my view on this, I'll be quite honest: you cannot inspect every single load. As much as I can support that we need more inspectors and we need to ensure that we have sufficient resources to carry the workload and the regulations that we have, it would not be realistic to think that every lot and every import of every product is tested, whether it's produced domestically or whether it's produced internationally. You have to do it through good random sampling, intelligent sampling. Obviously you're going to test more the problem cases that you've had in the past, and so on.

That's what I understand the agency is doing on imports. They test far more raw milk cheese than they would test maybe an old cheddar or an old cheese, for the reasons Réjean was talking about. The biological process would have pretty much taken care of most microbiological pathogens in any case.

Resources are scarce everywhere. It's scarce in the industry, it's scarce in the government. We all understand that. It's a question of being able to do the right job with what we have.

• (1700)

**Mr. David Anderson:** Mr. McCain did make the point that he didn't believe this was a failure of inspection, that there were some issues in the system. I think you're backing that up.

Do you have any suggestions on how your system can be improved in terms of the interrelationship of the two governments? Or do you see them working together fairly well? You talked about the federal government doing one set of inspections and the provinces doing another. Do you see that they have good working relationships, or are there some suggestions you can make?

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** Right now we have a national committee where we bring together the provincial regulators and the federal regulators. We try to work on standards, so that we have more uniformity and we apply the same standards on quality. We've been working at this for quite a number of years.

I can tell you that I've been in this industry long enough to know that we've taken huge giant steps in terms of harmonization of quality standards across the country. I'm talking about quality from a microbiological point of view.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Just on that issue, then, we've had a discussion here a couple of times about meat standards across Canada, about whether we should have a national meat standard that all provincial abattoirs have to reach as well, and about whether it's good that we support the smaller abattoirs with a different standard and allow them, because they're dealing with a smaller market, to have a provincial standard.

You seem to think that in your industry it would be better to have a national standard, where everybody is pretty much on the same page. Is that correct? Or do you have an allowance for those smaller ones?

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** In our industry, we have worked very hard at developing our national dairy code, which established national standards asking the provinces that are signatories to that code to basically try to make sure that their provincial regulations are actually met.

There are differences still, but you have to understand that in our case, when the milk is collected, it goes in the truck. It's not each

producer who decides where his milk goes. In a collective system like we have, it's more difficult. We do have some niche markets for the special feeding of certain animals that we'll be producing, or organic milk and so on, but the cost savings....

You will realize that with 13,400 producers of milk around the country, the costs of transportation alone would be absolutely exorbitant if you basically had each producer decide where their milk was going.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Can you tell us a little bit more about your traceability system, right from beginning to end? I guess I'm thinking both in terms of your products, such as milk, and also on the meat side, the animal management side. Could you take two or three minutes, or whatever?

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** All right. I'll have a go first, and Réjean will correct me.

Again, there's a bit of a slight difference. Agri-Traçabilité in Quebec is probably one of the best-renowned traceability systems in Canada. Fortunately, we have other good systems. They differ a little bit, but basically they're doing the same thing. In Quebec it's different because they use an electronic chip and an ear tag, and they do it at birth. When a calf is born, it's automatically identified and will continue to be identified all through its life cycle.

When the milk is produced from the farm, on each farm we now have identification by GPS of every location, of every housing of dairy animals, so you know exactly where each of the animals is located and you know it by terms of premises. When the milk is delivered, each of the farms is also identified. Samples are being kept, and they're tested by provincial laboratories, in most instances, once they're received at the plant. The plants also do their own tests on receipt of the milk with regard to residue in order to decide whether they should discard the whole truck or not. Then it goes into the silo.

You know where the milk is coming from, so you have a product in the end where you know the date of production, of the process of that product, and you will know exactly the lot of the milk it came from. You can trace the farms that have been delivering to that particular silo, and you will be able to identify back to the animals.

I don't know how much more of a traceability system you could have.

• (1705)

**The Chair:** You're well over time, so thank you very much, Mr. Doyle.

Ms. Bennett, for five minutes.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.):** Thanks very much.

As you can imagine, we as committee members are receiving lots of things all the time from people who are trying to help, but people who obviously have a particular point of view.

I guess my question would be for Mr. de Valk, particularly in terms of what has been highlighted to us as to the difference between a product being imported into Canada or into the States. I don't know if you yourself have any of this. But someone highlighted that the United States inspects all imported meat shipments, but over 90% of meat shipments entering Canada are not inspected.

**Mr. Robert de Valk:** I think you're quoting there something that says 100% of U.S. meat imports are inspected but in Canada only 10% are. I don't know who gave you that information. But again, Canada and the United States have essentially the same system. That's why we have equivalencies. We're the two countries that have better equivalency in meat imports and exports than any other two countries in the world. Basically, what both countries do is randomly test at the border meat imports and exports. That's the kind of testing that happens to all other imports as well. But we randomly test them for all kinds of things, including pathogens, but also pesticides and so on.

On top of that, the two points I mentioned in my presentation, the fact that you have system equivalency and you have prior label approval, both those things are practised by both countries. If we want to export to the United States, we have to get prior label approval from the USDA for that product to go into the United States. Similarly, for an export from the United States, they would have to get prior label approval from the CFIA.

In effect, the inspectors in both countries act for each other to ensure that the regulations are being met, and they take those responsibilities very seriously. Often, loads are held up in the United States that are not being exported to Canada because an inspector has decided to take issue with the interpretation of a Canadian regulation. We have to get a Canadian inspector to intervene and correct the interpretation they're making and let them know that's not quite the way it is.

But they're very careful. In Canada we do exactly the same thing. Nothing can be exported to the United States that doesn't meet U.S. requirements.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I think in your presentation, when you talked about the prior label approval, you said that so far it's just beef, pork, poultry, and processed vegetables, yet a lot of the things we've had trouble with here in Canada didn't fit into those categories. Whether it's raspberries from Guatemala or...there are things I can think of that were not in those categories. A prior label approval would then, as a best practice, be applied to everything because of this issue of traceability.

I want to find out where the rest of this stuff is. If you end up with a problem, would that be a safer and a more even approach? Is that it?

**Mr. Robert de Valk:** Obviously it's not going to solve all your problems, so keep that in mind. We do have problems in meat from time to time as well, even though we have these two very safe food safety enhancement procedures and policies in place. It does give you a lot more information. It gives you an extra check in the system, and it allows you to certainly get involved in that traceability element, which now is not in place for a lot of goods.

We don't know anything about the goods until they get to Canada on our supermarket shelves and an inspector starts to look at them.

• (1710)

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Are you aware of whether the CFIA inspectors are sampling ready-to-eat meat products for things like E. coli and salmonella and listeria?

**Mr. Robert de Valk:** Yes, they are.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Okay. Again, we're hearing that they're not.

Obviously in any audit system or any random sample system, more is better. When there are backlogs, and they're short of staff and all of those things—I think people have also been concerned about not having enough inspectors—then sometimes a lot of stuff gets through that was slated to be tested. Is that not true?

**Mr. Robert de Valk:** That's not true at the border. You can almost count on your fingers when your load's going to be inspected, because about every 12th to 15th load gets inspected randomly. They just pick it out of the system, and it gets inspected. There's always an inspector around to do that. You may not get the inspector as quickly as you would like, but once that load has been chosen under that system, it has to be inspected.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Do you know which load is going to be inspected? Do you get advance notice?

**Mr. Robert de Valk:** No, it's done randomly.

**The Chair:** Ms. Bennett, your time is up. Thank you.

Mr. Bellavance, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I would like to come back to the issue of public confidence.

Like the vast majority of people, I have confidence in the quality of our food, fortunately. I do not know what people would do if they lost this confidence. However, with what happened last summer, we see that it does not take much to shake this confidence.

It is also a question of perception. We can accept that unfortunately accidents do happen, in the hope that no one dies as a result. Fortunately, that is not something that happens here very often. But we do see that it can happen here. We often hear that imported products are dangerous, and can cause disease and death. But it turned out that this was not true, that bad things can happen here as well.

Fortunately, people retained their confidence in our food, and of course I am very pleased about that. However, as I was saying, it does not take much to shake our confidence in our food products.

People talk about imported food all the time, not just since the establishment of this committee, but since I have been on the Agriculture Committee, since 2005. You just talked about it. Mr. de Valk said that inspections were carried out at the borders, and so on. That is true. You said, Mr. Doyle, that we could not inspect everything that comes into the country. That is true also.

However, I would say that both for our domestic products, and for our imported products, there is room for improvement. I hope you would agree with me on that, but you are entitled to disagree.

Mr. Doyle, I'm thinking particularly of a producer who told me that chocolate milk or a chocolate drink from China was being sold by Walmart. What is this product? Is it milk, and if so, is it of the same quality as the milk we have in Canada? It may be a different type of product. We saw what happened in China, where melamine was added to the milk, and so there are grounds for concern.

There are safety standards in China at the moment. The problem lies with the way they are enforced. It is possible that it may be more difficult to enforce these rules in some regions, and we have also seen that there are problems. Nonetheless, why is it that these products are ending up on our grocery store shelves? Tests were probably done and validated, but would it be possible to get a better idea of what this product is and to ensure it meets proper standards, because that is supposed to be what happens.

The fact is that I still have a great deal of concern about products of this type. I'm talking about China, but maybe questionable products from other places as well. They may even come from the United States, our neighbours, who also have rules, but who did manufacture food for animals that poisoned pets. I know pets are not human beings, but we are talking about food, and this was not a pleasant situation either.

I think there is room for improvement, and we have to determine what should be done. When an agency employee tells us he heard in the media that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's budget would be cut by \$24 million over three years, and that increasingly, inspections would be done by the industry itself, I think about people's confidence, which I was talking about earlier. It is dangerous to shake people's confidence.

The cost of hiring more inspectors and ensuring that the work is done right and that there are more inspections carried out, particularly at the border, is not that high compared to the economic cost that would be paid by our producers and processors if there were a loss of public confidence in our food system.

That was a long preamble, but I would like to hear everyone's views on this.

• (1715)

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** I will try to be more succinct than I was last time.

First of all, I agree with you. I think there is room for improvement in any system, and we are working on that. When we look at consumers' priorities, and their concerns about food, food safety is always at the top of the list.

You were talking about chocolate milk from China. With the trade liberalization that has happened as a result of globalization, it is obvious that we will face more and more risks, often from developing countries. On the other hand, we cannot test everything either. We cannot necessarily do tests to detect melamine, for example. Tests are done on a random basis, but that is no easy matter either. We cannot do tests for 2,000, 3,000 or 4,000 chemicals or other substances. That would not be possible.

Let's talk about ways of improving the system. There is one thing I find deplorable. Let's take your story about chocolate milk. We noticed the problem, and we asked the agency to follow up, to

inspect the product, etc. I can only assume that it did so, but I really have no idea whether this was done. It might be good if there were greater transparency in following up on complaints or concerns in an industry. We do that to try to protect consumers. I understand that there are some trade considerations, but it would be nice to know whether anyone saw this as a problem, whether the agency followed up and settled the matter. Otherwise, we can only wait until the product is no longer on the shelves, which would be an indication that someone had followed up on the complaint. There might be room for improvement in this regard.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Allen.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** That was an interesting comment, that last piece about the report back. Yes, there's proprietary information, and we all understand that. I don't have to explain it; you could explain it better to me.

Other products we see on store shelves are labelled but are assumed to be milk products. Yogurt may not be mislabelled, but there's a misperception about what it is. Not everyone can read the fine print on some of these things, especially some of us who are wearing glasses that are thicker than we'd like, or who are a little older than we want to be. Could this lead to products that are misleading or even misrepresented?

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** Absolutely. Take ice cream. A year ago, we saw another product coming in called frozen dessert. It was on the same shelves and had the same look. It's called frozen dessert, in light blue over dark blue. As you pack the ice cream cartons on top of each other, the cap of the one below hides the name. These are all marketing practices. Manufacturers can claim that they are respecting the legislation and designating the product properly. But it's misleading to consumers. It's not just the terminology. These products are made with palm oil and other ingredients. But the consumer has absolutely no idea. We tested markets. Consumers bought the product and said they didn't know it wasn't ice cream. It was the same cost, in the same place, with the same look. The agency is not intervening, because the product meets the regulations.

Is the product misleading? To prove that, I would have to go to court and sue the company. There should be no debate about whether it's misleading. Is a butter tart with no butter in it misleading? Some 84% of the consumers in the survey done by CFIA said that if they see a name of a product on the label they assume that the main ingredient is present. That's not me, that's consumers. It's not even my survey. My survey shows 76% of consumers believe that the name and the main ingredient match. CFIA shows 84%. But we shouldn't debate whether it's misleading or not—we should just make sure that we prevent these practices.

•(1720)

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** To bring it back to food safety, I actually think it has an impact on food safety when consumers, who are quite often in a hurry, because of the lifestyle they lead in the sense of their time constraints, are often buying products off the shelf that they assume to be...and I think ice cream is a perfect example, when indeed it may be some other ingredient. They don't necessarily have a traumatic allergy, but they may suffer minor complaints from allergy-type symptoms. They are buying products that they believe are one thing and they are absolutely something else altogether. Some of the statistics we read about on the number of food-borne illnesses around this country go into the millions, depending on the reports you want to read.

My sense is that if folks can't get a clear label that's basically staring them in the face, saying that this isn't really ice cream or this isn't really a butter tart, then we're really not informing the consumer. I don't believe we're doing them a service when it comes to food safety if indeed we're not showing them what it is and how it could affect them, based on the ingredients.

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** I would add to this, because I agree with you.

The key issue is this, and our consumer survey is exactly showing this, and it's going back to what Mr. Bellavance was saying. If you lose the confidence of the consumers, whether it's on the label, whether it's on the inspection system, whether it's on anything, if you lose that confidence that the product they buy is safe, that it is exactly what it says it is, then they can decide whether they want to pay for it or not. At least they're not being fooled, and we're going to continue to have a good system in this country.

We did a test with processed cheese with consumer groups two or three years ago, and basically we have a regulation that says what processed cheese is supposed to be, and it describes it very well. Processors who are not meeting the regulation just add the word "product", so they called it "processed cheese product", and that prevents them from having to meet any regulation whatsoever. So we put it to consumer groups and we went shopping with them. We basically explained the difference and the distinction of how they were being fooled by this type of marketing technique. You have no idea how outraged they were. They were outraged because they don't want to be told that they're being fooled and they sure as hell don't want to know that they're being fooled. And once they do know, they lose confidence in the company.

Food safety is an issue. To go back to what we were talking about, it's not just one company, it's the whole agricultural system. If there is one cheese, for example, that is affected, it's the whole cheese consumption of all kinds of cheese. It's the whole confidence of the consumer not in one single cheese, but in eating cheese that is affected. We've seen that in this particular case of listeria: it affected the whole cheese consumption, not just a specific cheese that was more affected than others. But it's the confidence of the consumer that affects the market, and that's what we have to prevent ourselves doing.

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

Mr. Shipley, for five minutes.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** I only have a couple of quick ones.

I do want to clarify one or two things for the record in terms of the comment made by Mr. Bellavance in terms of the cutting of the inspectors. I think the record has shown this before, but I'll just say, for the record, that we've in fact invested \$113 million towards food safety and put 200 more inspectors on the floors. We brought back... to replace the environmental testing for listeria that was cancelled in 2005, so actually what we've done is try to move forward on food safety. This is particularly around listeria, but for food safety. So we want the record to be clear about what our government actually has done to help improve that.

Mr. Doyle, I wanted to finish off just one part of my previous question, and that had to do with the antibiotics. This is an issue out there. I commend you for the steps your industry has taken to prevent anything with any antibiotics from getting into the system. In terms of the development of that program and in terms of the development of the testing, is that similar to the same testing process that is used in the detection of antibiotics and meat so that we're sure, in terms of the human safety of antibiotics, that they have that protection?

•(1725)

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** Well, I'm not as familiar with the meat antibiotic detection, but I know that in milk you test every truck before it's unloaded. You will have a test, and if you've found any positive tests on any source—so there are no false positives or negatives—it's going to be retested and confirmed, and then each of the samples of the farmers will be retested, and not only will the truck be destroyed but the farmers will be charged with the destruction of that milk. You're talking about some trucks at \$70,000 a shot. There is no incentive for farmers, knowing that it's all going to be tested, to do it. Unfortunately it does happen on a rare occasion, and it's often a new employee who didn't tag the animal properly and milked them all.

So it happens, you know. To go back to some of the comments made before, these things will happen, but the system has to pick them up. Errors will continue to happen, but you need to be able to pick them up. Consumer safety, in the end, is really what you're aiming for.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** And I think that's clearly what this is all about. You know, we're humans and we aren't perfect, obviously, and whether it's in the dairy products or whether it's in other commodities such as pork livestock, the important thing is to make sure it doesn't get to the consumer. That's really what it's about, and from my understanding of what we want to create and have created to the greatest extent, it's not a process; it's a number of processes that are put together for the protection of the consumer by different organizations, starting with the primary producer and taking it right to the counter, to the person who actually puts it on the counter in some cases.

Let me take you back to this, and then I'm done, Mr. Chair. You talked about the biosecurity, that to address the biosecurity of Canadian dairy farms, you've worked closely with the beef industry. You didn't mention the pork industry, which I would think actually has a more stringent biosecurity program not unlike the feather industry. They have a very strict biosecurity program in place before entry into barns because those livestock.... The beef industry tends to have more open facilities in raising its beef compared to the pork industry.

So I'm wondering why you're focusing on the beef industry rather than the pork industry.

**Mr. Richard Doyle:** I guess it's similarity of the animals more than anything else. You know, biosecurity exists on dairy farms, and most dairy farmers.... I was listening to Monsieur Bellavance speak about dressing properly and protecting yourself. Most dairy farms now, if they have visitors, are going to take the proper measures before allowing visitors to the farm. You can't just stop by and go through the whole facility anymore.

The Canadian Cattlemen's Association had worked with CFIA in trying to look at developing a biosecurity national standard program. We felt this was a good idea and that there might be sufficient similarities between the dairy cattle and the beef cattle. So that's why we basically say maybe we can save ourselves a lot of duplication in the work. Mind you, clearly, biosecurity on a dairy farm will be different from that on a beef farm, just as it will be different on a pig farm. Altogether, there might be some similarities in certain aspects in terms of the development of the standard.

● (1730)

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

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

Thank you very much, gentlemen, for coming here today. I think we've certainly had some good questions and some great answers. So thanks again.

The meeting will suspend for a maximum of 10 minutes, and I would like to have everybody back to the table by then. Thank you.

● (1730)

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

● (1740)

**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order.

On a point of order, Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Mr. Chair, on a point of order, I would actually like to read something into the record here. I think we might be interested in having a bit of discussion about this.

I have it posted at 5:02 p.m., an article on CanWest, that reads, "New independent food inspection agency needed: Expert", by reporter Sarah Schmidt, Ottawa:

The federal government should establish an independent food safety agency reporting directly to Parliament because the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is failing consumers, a leading food-safety expert on Monday told parliamentarians probing the listeriosis outbreak.

Sylvain Charlebois, co-author of the 2008 Food Safety Performance World Ranking and business professor at the University of Regina, blasted the CFIA's "dual mandate" of protecting the public and assessing risk within the agri-food industry.

"The CFIA is inherently hardwired to assess risks and contain threats," Charlebois told the special hearings, saying a reconfigured CFIA should stick to working with industry to promote international trade.

But Charlebois also cautioned the lawmakers sitting on the special panel investigating the state of food safety in Canada, convened after last summer's deadly listeriosis outbreak traced to contaminated meat, about the "overregulation syndrome" that has "overtaken our food safety agenda."

The "epidemics and their tragic outcomes can be minimized only by policies that address the complex, interlinked natures of our food economies. The 'let's inspect more' mantra is much too simple," Charlebois testified.

"I can honestly say that it is now less challenging to build a hospital than it is to start a slaughtering plant in Canada. Regulations, both provincial and federal, are unbearable. Canada doesn't need more regulation, although it needs a different approach to food safety."

Currently, Health Canada develops guidelines related to food policy, while the CFIA, for which the minister of agriculture is responsible, is tasked with inspection and enforcement.

An independent food safety agency that "focuses solely on consumer concerns" and reports directly to Parliament would not be stuck between the "two silos" of Health Canada and the agriculture ministry.

The CFIA has faced criticism of its double mandate ever since the former Liberal government under Jean Chrétien created it in 1997, but concerns over the practicality of ensuring the safety of the food supply while charged with facilitating exports for the agri-food industry have grown louder in recent months.

Ronald Doering, who served as the CFIA's president from 1997 to 2002 and is now a partner at the law firm Gowling Lafleur Henderson, on Monday characterized as "silly" Charlebois's proposal to "hive off food safety" to a body reporting to Parliament instead of to a minister.

"The principle consensus all around was if you're going to reorganize how you're going to do food safety, animal health and plant protection, you've got to make sure you've got accountability right. All parties agreed that we needed to have the agency report directly to a minister in the traditional way, and there could be no doubt that the minister the agency reported to would be accountable for its work," Doering said of the negotiations to create the CFIA.

Doering also said it's "simplistic" to argue the CFIA's dual mandate presents a problem for consumers. Rather, he said Canadians are well-served by putting "the whole food chain in a single enforcement agency, so the CFIA is responsible for seeds, feed, fertilizer, all plant health, all animal health, all food, all commodities because they are all connected."

● (1745)

**The Chair:** Just hold on, there's a point of order.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** On a point of order, could David explain what his point of order is, really? I think I know, and I partly agree with him, I think. What's his point of order?

**The Chair:** I think his point of order, from what I have so far, is that this is a press release or article or something that basically speaks to testimony Mr. Charlebois hasn't even given before the committee. I'd like to hear the rest of it, and probably at the end of it I'm going to ask Mr. Anderson if he could maybe give it to the committee so that we could all see it.

Please continue.



**Mr. David Anderson:** Okay, it's nearly done, Mr. Chair.

Besides, added Doering, the system isn't broken.

"The Canadian food, animal health and plant regulatory system is admired around the world. The idea we can export to 100 countries food, animal, or plants without inspection has to say something about the credibility of the regulatory agency."

That's the end of the article.

You are right, Mr. Chair, I don't know if it's a point of privilege or a point of order, but I'm concerned by the fact that prior to the committee's even having heard the witness, we already have an article in the public talking about the testimony that we apparently heard. It sounds like it's in the past tense. I have a question about the journalistic integrity involved here as well, but that's not the issue for this committee, I don't think. It is a question of a balanced presentation.

I'm just wondering if this a publicity stunt or something else. I think it shows tremendous disrespect for the committee, for having gone out ahead of the presentation of the testimony and then having released that publicly. The committee does not have it yet, and I think we should have been the ones to hear it first.

The headline doesn't even seem to be borne out by the article's contents. But I'm wondering if anybody else here is concerned, and I'm actually wondering if there's any reason for us to go through with the meeting or if we should be adjourning ahead of this all.

**The Chair:** I'll get to you, André.

Mr. Charlebois, I don't know whether you have any comments on that, but as Mr. Anderson pointed out, it does appear that you've either given something to somebody about your proposed testimony, which you haven't given, or they've made this up themselves. I don't know whether you have any comments. Before I go to Mr. Bellavance, I'm going to give you that opportunity, if you so wish.

• (1750)

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois (Associate Professor, University of Regina, As an Individual):** I can allow Mr. Bellavance a response, and then I'll produce my comments.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bellavance.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Well, you will be surprised to see that I am going to take Mr. Charlebois's side. There are many issues on which we do not agree at all. However, this is hardly the first time that one of our witnesses has expressed views on certain topics, and that includes the one under discussion here today. Since the beginning of the listeriosis crisis, Mr. Charlebois was one of the people who wrote the most about the subject. I think it can be extremely useful to benefit from his expertise. I fail to see why the fact that he expressed another one of his opinions on this subject in an article published today causes any problem. Whether we agree with him or not is of no importance.

And I would also like to remind the committee that the government itself can do this type of thing. We were in the process of studying the "Product of Canada" issue at the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, when, right in the middle of our proceedings, Prime Minister Harper and the Minister of Agriculture went out and made some announcements on this. We had not even

finished our work. That is what I call a lack of respect for the committee.

For his part, Mr. Charlebois did what he usually does. He regularly expresses his opinions on many topics having to do with the agri-food sector. I really do not see why the text that has just been read would cause any particular problem at this point.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** The only thing I would point out, Mr. Bellavance, is that the difference is that it's not a matter of opinion that's in question. It was a comment about what he gave as testimony, and here we are at quarter to six or whatever it is, and we still haven't heard that testimony. That's what's in dispute, I would say.

Mr. Charlebois.

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Out of respect for this committee, I think I owe an explanation of what happened. I think I know what happened.

Last night I was preparing my notes for this evening's presentation, and the reporter in question called me at home. She knew that I was going to be here tonight and she asked me for my notes. I said this meeting wasn't going to end before 7 o'clock tonight, so I basically issued an embargo on the story until 7 o'clock tonight Eastern Time.

Needless to say, Mr. Chair, I'm disappointed. That's all I have to say.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Does that answer your question, Mr. Anderson?

**Mr. David Anderson:** It may answer the question. It doesn't make me any happier that we're having to deal with a situation where testimony has been put on the wire ahead of our hearing it, and I guess I'm disappointed that Mr. Bellavance doesn't see that as an issue for the committee. But if it's not, and we're going to set that standard here, then that's fine.

**The Chair:** Mr. Charlebois.

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** With all due respect, with the story, there is a filter. A reporter wrote the article. The reporter didn't use my words. She interviewed other people that I wasn't aware of, so it is a story on a website. It is not my testimony. I have other things to say, and I intend to say them.

**The Chair:** Just to be clear, Mr. Charlebois, you're saying that what she referred to in there as your testimony did not come from you? Is that what you're saying?

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** No. That's not what I'm saying. I haven't seen the article, obviously. I've just been told that it's been reported on the website.

**The Chair:** I haven't seen it either.

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** There's nothing really new about what was read there. These opinions have been public knowledge for many months.

I see this committee as being constructive, looking at the listeria outbreak and looking at possibilities to make our systems better. Nothing I've heard intended that effect....

**The Chair:** Mr. Easter.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Chair, I don't think it's good when something is reported as having been put before the committee when it hasn't been put before the committee. Having been before many committees in a former life, I can see how things can happen. You might give somebody an advance brief; you might do an interview with them. I think it's wrong to have reported it as if it had been tabled with the committee prior to it being done. I guess it's part of the dilemma of modern news when it can get out in the 24-hour cycle so fast.

Having said that, I hope it doesn't happen with other witnesses or with government, or even ourselves, for that matter. I do believe we have to hear from Mr. Charlebois as a witness in terms of his full presentation, and then we can compare notes with what's in the press. That's where I'm at on it.

• (1755)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Hearing no further comment, Mr. Charlebois—I hope I'm pronouncing that correctly—you have 10 minutes or less, please.

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** I'm originally from Quebec and I live in Saskatchewan. My name has been destroyed many, many times.

**The Chair:** Well, it isn't deliberate, anyway.

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** I do have to take some part of the responsibility for what has happened with the news wire, unfortunately. It's a bit embarrassing. A trust has been breached, unfortunately, between me and the reporter, so I do apologize for that.

Mr. Chairman and honourable members of the committee, I think you just got a copy of my basic notes. I'm sorry for the handwriting. I was called by the clerk, I believe, on Tuesday or Wednesday of last week, and for me as the associate dean of graduate studies for my faculty, it's a very, very busy time of the year. So I tried my best to bring my thoughts together for this important meeting.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to address you today on such an important subject matter. As you may know, the University of Regina has published many studies on risk communication over the last few years: mad cow disease, the spinach recall with E. coli, the tomato recall with salmonella, and now Maple Leaf food products contaminated with listeria.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, Mr. Charlebois said we had the notes. Is it just this one page?

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** No, there are five pages.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I don't think it was translated, so we wouldn't have it.

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** Don't you have it?

**The Chair:** I don't have anything in front of me, so I'll have to ask the clerk.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Well, that's what he said. It would have been good to have had that.

**The Chair:** Just so we're clear, we don't have a copy of it.

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** I'll slow down.

**The Chair:** Okay, thank you.

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** At the University of Regina we also published the first world ranking on food safety performances last year, in 2008. We are proud of this particular initiative as it garnered worldwide attention. In our report, Canada positioned well amongst industrialized countries, but more needs to be done.

The outcome of the listeria outbreak is evidence that we need to improve our food safety systems. Since food safety is such a multi-faceted issue, I have decided to address three specific topics for this evening. One is the over-regulation syndrome; second is the architecture of food safety systems in Canada; and three, I'll be addressing the urban-rural divide, which I consider to be one of the greatest challenges when it comes to food safety. In other words, I want to provide to this committee the big picture about food safety.

Risks related to food, like food-borne pathogens, have decreased dramatically over the past decade, but recalls have not, because the system works. Risk can only be minimized and not eliminated. When public expectations on risk are raised too high, unrealistic results are demanded and governments scramble to fulfill public expectations. When measured against a demand for perfection, or no risk, all human actions will come up short.

Calls for greater regulation are most understandable in the area of food safety, but I'm afraid the over-regulation syndrome has overtaken our food safety agenda. Food processing is just one of many examples. As you know, food processing is currently facing significant challenges, and food safety is just one of them. I have personally been involved with start-ups and well-established enterprises. It could be argued now that it is less challenging to start and establish a hospital than it is to start a slaughtering plant. I've seen that in Saskatchewan. Most recently, we just lost our only federally licensed slaughtering plant in Moose Jaw, XL Beef. Both provincial and federal regulations are unbearable at this point in time. Canada doesn't need more regulation, although it needs a different approach to food safety.

Today food is more inexpensive, healthier, and safer than at any time in history. We are asking agrifood companies to spend more on food traceability systems, conduct more inspections, and apply rigorous protocols. In the end, all these initiatives cost money. It is increasingly challenging for the food industry to focus on new food safety initiatives when it does not have access to more wealth.

For years we have seen companies such as Maple Leaf change their cost structure and develop centralized operations in order to offer cheap calories to consumers. In addition, global trade and imported food products are making our food distribution systems highly complex. If consumers want the safety of our foodstuffs to be safeguarded, they should expect to pay more. However, the latest polls from the University of Regina on this subject suggest that consumers are still not willing to pay more for food safety. That will need to change before Canada gets hit by a major food safety catastrophe. The cheap calorie factor is putting a lot of pressure on food industry stakeholders. The current economic downturn is adding fuel to the proverbial fire. Today Canadian and American consumers spend only 10% to 12% of their disposable income on food purchased from the store. Less than a generation ago, that number was at around 25%.

The food industry is now highly fragmented, which tends to encourage fierce competition, especially in terms of price. The food industry has to negotiate within a highly competitive environment in order to succeed. Price is often the first marketing variable that is prioritized. Consequently, we are all to some extent responsible for what happens, since the food industry is providing us with what we are asking for.

• (1800)

Epidemics are a disastrous but unavoidable consequence that we can only hope to limit. Food manufacturers actually go beyond government standards and, as you heard from witnesses before me, standards such as HACCP and ISO certifications to ensure that their food products exceed compliance with health and safety requirements. The problem is more multifaceted than it appears; therefore, solutions require cooperative action across food industries and across national borders, in addition to punitive measures for individual transgressors.

No food companies are deliberately trying to harm consumers; let's make that clear. But irresponsible corporate misbehaviour should be reprimanded. Shared accountability across supply chains should be at the forefront of any new food safety policies. Occurrences like the listeria outbreak at Maple Leaf make our nation fundamentally food-insecure, and this has profound implications for Canadian consumers. But we as modern consumers need to understand that these epidemics and their tragic outcomes can be minimized only by policies that address the complex, interlinked natures of our food economies. Basically, the "let's inspect more" mantra is much too simple.

My next point is on system architecture. It is chilling to read forecasts published in the last decade by food safety experts. Some analysts suggest that the next 9/11 will occur through our food supplies. Such a menace is particularly imaginable because our food safety architecture is inadequate.

It took seven months to find the source of contamination in the 2006 American spinach recall. Even worse, we found out that tomatoes were not the culprit of the salmonella outbreak that hospitalized thousands in 2008; peppers were responsible for the outbreak. It was the same story with mad cow disease: it took months to find the origins of the first declared native case of BSE, which happened on May 20, 2003.

• (1805)

**Mr. David Anderson:** I have a point on order. It sounded as though you indicated that he's almost running of time. I'm wondering whether we can hear the whole presentation, rather than—

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** We're agreeable with that.

**The Chair:** It's not an issue with me.

Continue, Mr. Charlebois.

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** The food industry is a loose collective organization whose primary goal is to provide safe food to Canadian consumers, but its effort are currently failing. Studies suggest that less than 5% of everything we eat in Canada is audited by competent public authorities. Consider imports, restaurants, caterers, hot dog stands on city sidewalks, chocolate bars and chips bought in drug stores, or food purchased at events. The majority of foods we eat are not screened at all. Most consumers don't know that.

For the food industry to be capable of meeting its mandate, the private sector needs to play a proactive role with public agencies in food safety practices. Food safety authorities in this country need to build reliable partnerships to counter potential threats from the food supply, human-induced or not. The "us versus them" culture is too prominent in the food business.

The problem lies in the architecture of the system itself. With our current resources, we can handle two significant changes. The CFIA needs to alter its dual mandate of protecting the public and assessing risk within the industry. In other words, the CFIA should not deal directly with the general public. The CFIA is inherently hardwired to assess risk and contain threats. The CFIA is not designed to communicate risks properly.

The listeriosis outbreak is proof that it is incapable of communicating risk effectively. The CFIA should work solely with industry and on international trade. As such, the CFIA could better work with Health Canada to set up a better food-borne illness surveillance system that we dearly need, similar to what we see in other countries around the world. The CFIA should also play a key role in developing transverse traceability systems that work from farm to fork, a significant challenge here.

Right now, the relationships between governmental agencies and the functions of the supply chain in the food industry are completely dysfunctional. To protect the public, Canada could establish an independent food safety agency that focuses on consumer concerns alone. Such an agency should report directly to Parliament and not be stuck between two silos, Health Canada's and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's. We also need to see our food chain in its continental context and develop an approach to food safety that does not increase obstacles to international trade.

Europe, Australia, and New Zealand have adopted similar approaches with great success. It is high time to design a continentally based food safety scheme for North America. We will face challenges, since harmonization of standards is anything but simple, but it can be done. Since our economy is highly integrated with that of the United States, we owe it to our consumers to engage in a serious dialogue with the U.S. authorities on food safety systems. Food safety is about consumer confidence, not just risks. Regulators and legislators are currently concerned only with safety and risk, not with perception. Rather than forcing governmental authorities to play the role of industry enforcer, we must protect the rapport between Canadian consumers and the food industry before it is too late.

How about rewarding good behaviours rather than just punishing bad ones? How about creating synergies to allow for knowledge sharing among stakeholders, thus creating collective memory for the industry to cope with future crises? A sound partnership between government and industry would allow that to occur.

• (1810)

[Translation]

My last point has to do with the split between people living in rural and urban areas. I think there is a huge gap between these two groups. Let's call a spade a spade: most people who live in urban communities know nothing about agriculture. This gap between people living in urban and rural communities exists throughout the western world. Less than 25 years ago, 30% of the people of Canada depended on farming for their livelihood. Nowadays, here as elsewhere, most people who live in urban centres have trouble understanding the agricultural community around them.

This lack of understanding has led to a sort of divorce between rural food production and the consumption, particularly of basic food products, by urban dwellers. That is why most of the people who live in cities have a poor understanding of the risks involved. As a result, our policies on food safety suffer. We need to give serious consideration to educating people about farming, distribution channels, issues in the agrifood industry, and so on. For example, there are six different types of Listeria bacteria. Only one of them, Listeria monocytogenes, can make people ill. The others are generally innocuous to human beings. Moreover, the Listeria bacteria is everywhere, we eat it every day. That must be said. We have to make sure that consumers know this. Most urban dwellers know absolutely nothing about a number of aspects of farming.

People think that we need more food inspection, and that is because people who live in major urban centres have trouble understanding the fundamentals of the agrifood industry. If people were better educated, it might be possible to better control some of

the myths that underlie people's fears. So we have to educate the public, not just during crises, but at other times as well, and we must do so proactively. That is why we need to set up an independent agency to better serve consumers. In the case of the H1N1 flu, we are seeing a great deal of fear and uncertainty throughout the world at the moment. As a result, embargoes and restrictions on imports are being announced. I think education is a key component of food safety.

[English]

In conclusion, never before has food been as safe, healthful, and inexpensive as we now enjoy it being. By the same token, never before have we faced so many challenges when it comes to maintaining food safety. The scope of every recall is increasing, but more regulation is not the answer. More domestic regulation will only mask the real problems. We need to build a better partnership between industry and public regulators and establish an agency to serve the public that reports to Parliament. The worst is yet to come, and we need to get ready for it.

[Translation]

There is a lot we know, but few consumers take the trouble to analyze anything. Moreover, few of them take the trouble to understand the changes in food that are happening around us. The dangers exist, they are real, but they are poorly understood. We can do better in this regard.

Thank you.

[English]

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

Ms. Bennett, you have seven minutes.

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

I think a lot of people have been concerned about the dual and perhaps conflicting responsibilities of CFIA. I am interested in your architecture and machinery change. Having set up the Public Health Agency of Canada, we made a very distinct decision that we couldn't do that, because in terms of ministerial accountability, who would make sure that the remedies that came forward would be put in place?

I believe food safety is a health responsibility. If there was going to be a health protection agency or something that looked after all the regulatory functions, I guess I would like your feedback on how you would do that reporting through the Minister of Health to Parliament, as we do with the Public Health Agency. As in England, Public Health would do the prevention, promotion, and all those things, but our regulatory activity would be in a health protection agency that was responsible for regulation. Then CFIA, if you wanted it, would be the supportive, coaching, best practices, quality assurance kind of helpful organization. It's very hard to be the coach and the referee. I've played hockey that way, and it's not a lot of fun. They tend to call everything on the other side.

I was just wondering about your thinking on this. I'm not sure what Parliament would do. Would it be this committee? How would Parliament make the changes that would be required?

When you get a report card, if you get an F, you get a detention or you have to go to summer school. You can't give report cards unless there's a remedy, right? You actually want to know who will do the remedy. Our experience around this place, right now, is that we can write beautiful reports, and the report the government sends back to us is pretty well their opening testimony. They don't deal with any of our recommendations. You want to table them again, because they don't seem to have even read the report, because it's actually page and verse what their opening statement was.

I'm not sure how you would get a better system, unless there is a minister responsible who could be fired if this stuff didn't happen.

• (1815)

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** It's a fair question.

When I talk about creating this independent agency, the target I have in mind is the public. It's not necessarily Parliament.

The model I have in mind is the EFSA in Europe. As you may already know, the Europeans long ago came to the conclusion that a dual mandate just doesn't serve the public well. They've created this independent agency. This is not a novel idea; Europe came forward with it in the aftermath of mad cow in 1997. They felt that they needed to do something. They felt that they needed to adopt a continental approach, which I think is key for us as well in Canada. Then the Japanese followed suit, and the Australians and New Zealanders followed suit as well. They all have these independent agencies that are there to educate the public.

We do surveys every year at the University of Regina, and right now the public is increasingly confused.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I agree. But I've been there, and I know that if you have professional help who know the content, you need somebody there who knows how to go downtown and get the money. They are two different jobs. I'm not sure parliamentarians know how to go and get the money out of PCO or Treasury Board or how to get it put into the budget. In our parliamentary system, without a link to the boys with the money, it's very hard to do your job. You watch a budget just shrink and shrink and shrink, and there's nobody to stick up for it in Parliament.

I think these agencies should have professional leadership, and they should be run by scientists. But you need a sidekick who knows how to go and get the scientists the money and a minister whose job it is to sit at the cabinet table and ask for the money.

• (1820)

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** I went for a visit at the CFIA last year, and I met with many people over there. There are over 5,000 people who work at the CFIA right now. There's a tremendous amount of resources being invested in the CFIA currently. I believe there are already some resources there that we can take to create this agency.

The problem I see is that the CFIA is just not designed to deal with the public. I don't mean from a scientific standpoint. We're dealing with managing perceptions and fear, and this is the key component of what we're talking about here. It has nothing to do

with science. The science-based approach is in the CFIA's mission statement right now, so they have it down pat, but what we need to do is create some sort of an agency that can actually deal with the perceptions and fears of the public. There are a lot of irrational decisions being made right now. We're losing control.

We went out and measured perception in 2006 when the spinach recall came out, when there was the outbreak of E. coli. We asked questions to about 1,000 respondents, and we got some answers. In 2006 roughly about 90% of the population were still concerned about the safety of spinach. Now moving forward to—

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** We got into trouble with this—

**The Chair:** Your time has expired. Please let him finish, Ms. Bennett.

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** If you don't mind, I just want to compare both.

Three years after...with Maple Leaf, we asked 1,000 consumers whether they had consumed Maple Leaf products since the recall. Six months after the recall, 40% of consumers said they had not since the recall.

There are two problems there. First, 40% is a big number. Second, we asked if, knowingly, they had eaten Maple Leaf products. Most consumers don't even know that they're eating Maple Leaf products. Part of the point is that we need to educate the public on food channels, distribution channels, on how things work in the food industry. Most consumers don't understand how agriculture and agri-food works.

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

Mr. Bellavance, you have seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

You say that the twofold mandate of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is a problem. There are many people here who agree with you. You also say that in your opinion, an independent agency should be created. Now I am not sure that I understood everything in the article because Mr. Anderson read it very quickly, but I won't ask you the question right away. You can answer when I have finished asking all of my questions.

Would the creation of an independent agency mean the outright elimination of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency? You may answer with a yes or a no.

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** No.

**Mr. André Bellavance:** So the agency would have a role to play?

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** Absolutely.

**Mr. André Bellavance:** So this independent agency would carry out part of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's current mandate? Which part of this mandate should be assumed by an independent agency?

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** I am always surprised when people tell me that I am a naysayer and that I am absolutely against everything the CFIA does. On the contrary, I support the agency. I think it is staffed by extremely competent people who know how to manage risk. However, that is something we needed 12 years ago, when the agency was created, in 1997. Things have changed since then: we now have a global economy, and there are many more imports.

Earlier, I heard you refer to melamine in milk. That is part of the problem. We have to do something to mitigate risk and inform the public properly in that regard. What exactly is going on out there in the real world?

I think that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency should essentially look after developing a partnership with the industry. I often visit processors, farmers, and different agri-food firms, even in Quebec. I was there last year and I visited certain businesses in the Lanaudière and Laurentians regions. People are ill at ease with the agency. It's as if there is an atmosphere of confrontation; the relationship is strained. In the best interests of the Canadian public, this relationship should be constructive. The agency should be supporting the industry.

Currently, people apprehend the inspections. They ensure that everything is in order, but they don't do it for us, for the business or for its customers. They do it for the agency. Let's not fool ourselves, Maple Leaf is a very well-managed company, in my opinion. Of course, the listeriosis outbreak completely changed it. I referred earlier to the six types of *Listeria*. Only one represents a threat for humans, for consumers, but Maple Leaf is currently applying a protocol to monitor all six types.

I don't agree with people who say that the industry is less rigorous than what is provided for under the legislation. On the contrary, I feel that the industry is always ahead of the government, and that is why the agency must be structured so as to support the industry, which takes initiatives to adapt rapidly, practically, in real time, when there is a crisis, like listeriosis.

• (1825)

**Mr. André Bellavance:** We need a more detailed description of what you mean by an independent agency. I heard you discussing privatization. I am convinced that that was pleasing to our colleagues opposite, and to the government. I am worried about food safety and population health. To myself as well as many other people whom I meet either in Quebec or elsewhere, this is not just another ordinary business.

Earlier I heard you say that according to your polls, people were not ready to pay more for more inspections. I do not know what kind of questions were put to them in these polls, but I always felt that this was a top priority for people, not only for themselves but also for their children and their families. We must preserve public confidence in our system of food protection and food safety. Otherwise, we will lose much money, and this is your hobby-horse. I think that it is worth paying the cost.

You said that we do not need more inspections. However, you wrote an article in September 2008 in which you said that in Canada, there is a lack of ability to trace the ingredients that go into the composition of imported products. I see that this contradicts the fact that you tell us that we do not need more inspections, because you

have written that we are not really able to find out what goes into the composition of those products. If we do not do more inspections, how can we find that out? This is my question.

I note a further contradiction. In your presentation, you said that the agency must not intervene directly with the public. This is my free translation of what you said in English. I am giving you an opportunity to explain this. In an article that was published in the daily newspaper *La Presse* on March 29, 2009, I found the following passage, which I quote:

In normal times, the CFIA must be seen as a public educator. Thus, when there is a crisis, people go to the agency to get their information. However, only 5% of those who answered our poll went to the CFIA website to get information about the recalls.

I see that this contradicts what you said earlier, when you said that it is not up to the agency to intervene directly with the public. At the same time, you are saying that the agency should be more proactive in intervening with the public.

I would like to hear your comments.

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** Yes, certainly. I think that we are not quite comfortable with discussing food safety and the cost of food safety. In my view, there is a taboo about discussing food safety: no matter what the cost, it must be paid to make sure that everything is running properly. However, people are really spending less and less money for food. This is currently bringing great pressure to bear upon the industry.

The Maple Leaf case is typical. There is a plant in North York, Ontario, and this is a mega-installation. More than 200 products are produced in that plant. Why is this? Because the cost structure was created on the basis of demand. People are not ready to pay much more. However, you are right, we are beginning to see a new trend. Perceptions are beginning to change and people are beginning to see that it might be time to invest more money in our food. Nevertheless, in my opinion, we have not yet reached that stage. This subject is beginning to come to the forefront, but there is some uneasiness. For consumers, cost is a factor, especially for poor families, less fortunate families. What are we going to do for those people? If we ask the industry to invest more in food safety, we must recognize the fact that this will eventually mean higher prices for consumers.

The other point I would like to raise is about food distribution. Currently, we are not aware of the large number of conflicts that arise along the distribution channels. For instance, producers are what we call price takers. They are at the mercy of market conditions: they take the price that they can get. Processors, however, are much more powerful. There is a bottleneck between producers and processors. There are fewer players, there are oligopolies, and they do not have the same interests. With regard to food traceability and labelling, who actually has the means to fund or to subsidize a traceability system? The processors have the means. Food safety and hygiene gives rise to conflicts along the supply chain because of divergent interests. In my opinion, this is the basic problem. We cannot come to a consensus for all the distribution chains.

Earlier, Mr. Easter said that food traceability was not working in his part of Canada. The reason why it is not working is this: there's no consensus about who will be accountable and who will pay. We will have to reach an agreement about that.

•(1830)

**Mr. André Bellavance:** It can work; it is working in Quebec.

[English]

**The Chair:** You're well over time, but you had some good comments.

Mr. Charlebois, you talked about the consumer having the biggest ability to pay. That thought is certainly out there at the producer end of it. It has been around there for years. I may follow up on that.

Mr. Allen, you have seven minutes.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Charlebois.

I've heard my colleagues ask who we report to, and I believe I heard you say that we need to separate the two. An expert report was done for the government quite some time ago, back in 1990. It talked about this dual mandate and how it set up a conflict of interest within the CFIA between the inspection role, if you will, being the overseer of what they needed to do, and being the promoter of the industry itself as a whole. I'm not going to take the time to quote it back to you. Negating the mechanics of who we actually report to—because I hear you saying Parliament, but that may well be simply a term you've used in the sense of not necessarily meaning all 308 members, perhaps, but in some other form, Parliament being this institution here on this Hill—I'll allow you to explain that to me.

When I questioned the minister on this when he was before us, that was the question I put before him, about a dual mandate, and he seemed to be very comfortable with that; the dual mandate the CFIA started out with and still has today was fine. He believed—and I'm paraphrasing his words—they were comfortable and they didn't see the inherent conflict. They were comfortable within the structure of CFIA being able to delineate the two pieces, so in their minds there wasn't a conflict.

Do you see any inherent discrepancies with that?

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** With all due respect for the CFIA, I'm not sure if they're the ones who should answer that question. I think Parliament should be answering that question.

From the inside—

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Just so you're clear about what I said, I didn't say Ms. Swan said that; I said that the minister said that. Ms. Swan also said the same thing, but clearly the minister was here with Ms. Swan at the same time. So clearly the government is saying that they're quite comfortable with a dual mandate, and not just CFIA.

I understand what you're saying. It's difficult to ask a question of yourself: "Are you okay? Sure I am. Thanks very much for asking." But it's a totally different thing when you're asking the government, which is responsible for the CFIA, particularly the minister in question, the Minister of Agriculture, whether he is comfortable with the fact that the CFIA has a dual mandate. And this report that was commissioned says that it is in conflict, and he was okay.

•(1835)

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** I beg to differ. I think there is a conflict.

I look at the future, and things will get worse, not better. Things will get more complicated: trade will increase, threats will increase,

the scope of every single recall will increase. Maple Leaf has Tim Hortons and McDonald's as clients. The listeriosis reached 10 provinces in days. When you look at spinach or tomatoes, you can reach many states and provinces in hours now. So things are getting more intricate and more complicated. I'm just not convinced right now that our food system, agriculture, can actually cope with the future threats.

Looking at Europe, for example, or Japan or Australia, where they've actually set up these agencies, right now as an external academic, every month I get a bulletin from the FSA out of England telling me what's going on, what has happened with the food recalls, how many food recalls have occurred over the last month or so, what the investigations are. Right now, basically consumers are clueless about what to do with their products. We did ask people in our surveys what they did with the spinach, what they did with the Maple Leaf products. You'd be surprised that over 20% of consumers weren't clear what they had to do with the products if they had them in the fridge. To me that's a huge concern because it's a threat to families and consumers.

I get a bulletin free of charge from England telling me what's happening in England on food recalls, follow-ups over a year... because right now we're talking about Maple Leaf, which occurred in September 2008. But if the media doesn't cover the story, how will you get the information? That's my point.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** And that leads us to this whole sense about the transparency of regulation, in the sense of understanding as consumers. You mentioned earlier confidence in the system, and clearly we're consumers by necessity; we don't have choices here. We have choices of product, but we don't have a choice about eating. This is something that sustains us and we need to do. So consequently there's a bit of a push here to actually consume.

So when you talk about confidence and you balance it against risk, it concerns me in the sense that one starts to think about risk aversion, placing it in the context of what is an acceptable risk to take. I'm not so sure that's the type of mindset one needs to have when we talk about food, because we all have risk. You get up in the morning, and there's a risk if you get out of bed and a risk if you stay in it, to be honest. I understand that in life there is that risk. But quite often when you place it in the context of industrial settings—because that's what food processors are these days, they're industrial plants—and when you start to talk about that risk, it reminds one of the Ford Pinto with the fuel tailpipe in the rear-end crashes. The risk they decided to take was that to save a certain amount of money meant you could take so many crashes.

Does this mean that the food system should have the same type of risk analysis based on it that says  $x$  number of folks will get ill and unfortunately  $x$  number may die, but that's an acceptable risk? Is that the type of system you want to develop? Or do we want to develop a system that's better than that? I heard you talk about how the CFIA sets this floor and a lot of food producers are at the first floor above it. So why isn't the CFIA at the second floor, with the producers coming up? Why is the CFIA behind? Is that a risk we're taking as a regulatory body, or is that something we just can't keep up? I'm not sure.

• (1840)

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** The CFIA are the first to acknowledge that there's no such thing as zero risk, and I think everybody knows that. But we owe it to our consumers to allow them to understand the sources of risks and the rationale behind our risk assessment programs. We have excellent programs in Canada, and you've heard about some of them from the witnesses who were here before.

The reason Canada did well in the world ranking on food safety performances was that our programs are pretty darn good compared with those of other industrialized countries. We compared Canada with 16 other industrialized countries, and we fared well. We were weak in risk communication. The public doesn't have much knowledge about our systems, our programs. We're having this commission because most people don't know what we have to offer. They don't know what's happening in plants. They should know, I think.

During the listeriosis outbreak, the Maple Leaf website tried its best to educate the public on where to call and what to do. But there were no pictures. They did not show exactly how inspections are made, what the slicing machines actually look like. Maple Leaf said that one of the likely sources for the outbreak was the slicing machines. I'm not sure if you remember it; I do. It was on September 8. Two days later, the Ohio manufacturer of these slicing machines sent a press release saying it was impossible that the slicing machines were the culprit, because they'd sold over 300 of them and this was the first time this had ever happened. The media didn't cover that at all. I didn't see it in the Canadian media; I saw it in the American media. Should consumers know about this? Of course they should, and I think they should understand how slicing machines work.

**The Chair:** Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** I want to change direction a bit. You talked about the urban-rural divide, and some of us have brought that up a number of times. Do you have any suggestions on how to maintain the smaller processors, suppliers, and retailers in a world where bureaucracies are pushing everything towards one standard, one method of producing and distributing? I'm interested in your thoughts on this.

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** When you understand supply chains, then you understand how complicated they are. You have processors, wholesalers, retailers, agents, and brokers. You have hot dog stands. You have convenience stores. Every function of the supply chains deals with different market dynamics. Regardless of the policy that we implement, we need to appreciate these differences or else we're going to have to monitor everybody, every day.

For instance, the city of Montreal has 18,000 retail outlets on the island. They have 40 inspectors. That's what the city of Montreal has. Is that enough? Some people would believe that it is not nearly enough and some people may believe it's enough. So 18,000 for 40—you're looking at one outlet per day per inspector. That's the ratio. Is that acceptable? I don't know. For me, it may be; for others, it may not. But what would be an acceptable ratio?

**Mr. David Anderson:** How do you ensure that smaller retailers, producers, and processors are able to continue if you think you need to have 1,000 inspectors? Clearly, there's a cost there. You mentioned that consumers don't seem to be willing to pay a lot more for their food. They seem to be happy with the fact that 99% of it seems to be safe. How can we make recommendations that will ensure that smaller operators are able to continue?

• (1845)

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** That's why the sharing of knowledge is important, I think. Maple Leaf, unfortunately, had an outbreak last fall. There was a loss of 21 lives. Most importantly, there are lessons to be learned here. What is the industry learning from what has happened in North York? Are they learning anything? I know for a fact that Maple Leaf, Mr. McCain and his staff, are out there at trade conferences telling the Maple Leaf story. Some aspects of the story are quite eloquent.

But what is the industry learning from the Maple Leaf outbreak? Right now, I don't see the evidence. These small outfits can certainly learn from what has happened in North York over the fall. If you have a CFIA that is mainly and only concerned about the learning process, about sharing knowledge among stakeholders, then I expect to see fewer conflicts between stakeholders. There will always be some.

**Mr. David Anderson:** But one of the things we seem to have heard that the industry has learned, or that we've seen as lessons learned, is that we don't need more bureaucracy. One of the issues that we've heard is whether there was an ability to communicate and to share data, and for the bureaucracies that already have partial responsibility to work together. Now you're suggesting another one. I don't think we've heard from anybody else that we need to put another bureaucracy in place. I'm surprised that your suggestion isn't that the CFIA do a lot more communication and promotion, if that's what the issue is, rather than setting up another bureaucracy with some part of that system under their control, and then the other agencies that are there now still having their part in it as well.

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** The bureaucracy that you see currently within the food industry exists to create evidence for accountability. That's all there is. Accountability is important in food safety. But how accountable do you want the industry to be? What kind of evidence do you need to make an industry accountable? Right now, is the industry producing enough evidence to suggest that they're doing enough? Right now, I would argue that whatever evidence they're producing is not enough, but maybe it's just not the proper language being utilized to provide that evidence. That's why I think we need an agency to better connect with the public, because as far as I'm concerned, the public should be our number one concern.



**Mr. David Anderson:** But those are two different things. Managing the information is what you're talking about. Are we doing that adequately? Then you're also talking about something separate there, which is just promotion of our system.

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** "Promotion" wouldn't be a good word.

**Mr. David Anderson:** When you're talking about dealing with perception and fear and trying to let people know what the system is in Canada so they can feel comfortable with it, isn't that different from managing the data correctly and accurately?

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** You're distorting the message here. We're talking about awareness and education, not promoting anything. Awareness and education. It's a big difference.

**Mr. David Anderson:** I think by virtue of the fact that you're educating people, you're telling them about a structure or system that you've got, so that's certainly promotion.

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** I'm an educator myself. I earn my living by educating adults and people who have careers. I can tell you that there's a big difference between promoting and educating.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Okay.

You talked about over-regulation having overtaken the agenda. That was one of your first comments. Yet it seems that the suggestion of another agency would actually add to that again. Do you have any suggestions as to how to reduce that regulatory burden? You're saying you don't know if the information is being managed correctly, so we need another bureaucracy to make people aware, but at the same time, you said that over-regulation is one of your three main points. How do you reduce the regulatory burden when you want to do the things that you're suggesting at the other side?

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** I didn't say that we should reduce it.

**Mr. David Anderson:** You said regulations are unbearable, at the beginning. That sounds like you want something done about them.

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** To increase processing capacity in Canada is an issue, especially in the Prairies. In order to increase that processing capacity, we're going to have to make some tough decisions. However, I'm not suggesting that we should reduce the level of regulation we have. What I'm concerned about is that we go into this funk of putting more regulation on the table, inspect more, thus increase cost. What I'm saying, basically, is be careful what you wish for, because at the end of the day you may be penalizing consumers—most importantly, consumers who are not as well off as others.

● (1850)

**Mr. David Anderson:** How do you put farm-to-fork traceability in without adding a regulatory burden for people? I agree with you that we probably have over-regulation in a number of areas, but I don't know how.... We have to be able to reduce that. That's the solution, isn't it?

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** Yes. We've been trying for decades to establish a supply chain approach to food traceability. We haven't been successful. Why? It's not because of a lack of regulation. It's because of conflicting interests, as I was saying earlier. I had the same question earlier. It's because people can't agree on who will be accountable and who will pay for the system.

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

Mr. Easter, you have five minutes.

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

This is an interesting discussion. Your comment, Mr. Charlebois, to be careful what you wish for.... You'd better look in the mirror on that one, because if you had an agency, a reincarnation of the CFIA set up to report to Parliament, you'd have one hell of a mess. It would be just unbelievable.

I think there are some lessons to be learned here, given what you're proposing, in terms of how this place works. We work in a system of ministerial accountability and responsibility.

I can tell that you haven't been in cabinet. Who's going to sit around the table and talk about reducing, improving, and changing regulations, on a daily basis or on a weekly basis? In my humble opinion, it just wouldn't work. It would be the worst system in the world, in my view. You'd have a bureaucracy run riot. So that's my point of view, to tell you where I sit on that.

In terms of some of the questions along the lines David was talking about—small plants, big plants—Michael McCain, when he was before us, talked about how maybe everyone should have to go to a federal standard in which everything is CFIA-inspected. I tell you, that would be great for the big boys like Maple Leaf.

Maybe you have these figures, because you researched this area. Where are most of the recalls in terms of the Canadian food safety system? I had a little operator call me from Ontario the other day, a sausage operator who is under provincial regulation. CFIA sent out the new reporting rules, which are clearly designed for a huge company. This is a two-man shop that produces a high-quality product from a local supply of meat. It has a local delivery system. They've certainly never had a recall in their lives. They're not the problem, but they're paying a heavy price in terms of burdensome paperwork designed for the national system, and so on.

When you compare provincial regulations to national regulations, where, in terms of a recall in the food system, are most of the recalls coming from? Are they coming from the small operators or the big operators in this country? Do you know?

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** In terms of numbers, it is the small ones. In terms of scope, of course, when you look at numbers—the number of products, volume, money—the majority of products are recalled by the bigger companies right now. For example, if you take the Maple Leaf recall, it blows everything out of proportion. That's the problem. It depends on where you're coming from. We get about 300 recalls a year. If you look at the nature of each recall, the majority of them come from smaller outfits.

I see your comment that if we set up the system it's going to be a complete disaster as a clear indication that we haven't gone through the crisis we need to go through to make some clear, evident, strong changes to our system.

● (1855)

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** No, I'm going to interrupt you—

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** Let me finish.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** —for a second, because that's not what I'm saying. I'm saying that you do not understand the parliamentary system. To have an agency report to Parliament—

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** England has a parliamentary system.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** —in the parliamentary system, you'd have no....

Anyway, I'm not going to argue with you. I'm disagreeing with you, and you might as well know that I disagree.

I want to get another question in here. In terms of your comparison, you did a study, *The Food Safety Performance World Ranking 2008*, which I went through. Can you explain where you see Canada being in that? You didn't have that in your presentation, and I want that on the record. We rank five out of 17. We're five in 17 items. What are the highlights of that report, in summary?

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** Unfortunately, I don't have a copy of the report in front of me. From my memory, Canada fared well in terms of biosecurity programs and food safety programs in place in industry, as I mentioned earlier. For example, we have HACCP, which is very strong in our country. In terms of risk communications, we were weak.

I'm just going by memory. I apologize—

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** That's okay.

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** We had 45 different variables. I can send you a copy.

**The Chair:** Thanks very much.

There's a briefing by Public Health Canada at seven o'clock, just one floor up, and I'm sure a bunch of us would like to sit in on it.

I have just one follow-up question.

Mr. Charlebois, you were talking about how at one time 25% of our available disposable income was spent on food. Now, you've said, it's down to 10% to 12%. I've heard figures of 8% to 10%. Are you saying in your comments that there's a link between cheap food and a lack of food safety? I just want to clarify.

**Mr. Sylvain Charlebois:** No, that's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is that before we make any decisions on food safety policies, we need to understand the macroeconomic repercussions of any policy. We need to understand that food is not as much a priority as it was a generation ago. Food is competing against trips to Cancun and 52-inch plasma TVs. We have to be real. We have to acknowledge that. It's a reality.

**The Chair:** Well, it's a sad state of affairs when it gets to be that way, but it is the truth.

Thank you very much for coming here today. We appreciate it.

Mr. Easter, did you want to raise a point?

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Yes, Mr. Chair.

I'm beginning to worry whether we're going to have enough time for the Agriculture Union. I hear that the potential witness list for Wednesday basically has the Agriculture Union lumped in with quite a number of other witnesses.

We had a discussion in your office last Monday. I do think that the Agriculture Union is one of the main players in this game, in this serious issue, and we need two hours with them, on their own, without other witnesses. There's a couple of inspectors on that witness list who have worked in these plants. We need to give them ample time. We need the groups to drill down into this issue with ample time to get into a thorough discussion with them. I want to be assured that this is what we're going to have.

**The Chair:** Your point is well taken. As you know, we had some witnesses back out on us tonight. We also had some who couldn't come before us, for whatever reason, on Wednesday.

My only comment, Mr. Easter, is that if we have single witnesses for two hours every meeting, we'll never get through the list. We've been trying to get them all on there. The gentleman you talked about is scheduled to be here. I don't have any issue with the two hours, but whether you're questioning or whatever, you get the same amount of time whether there are one, two, or three witnesses there to concentrate on.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** You really don't, Mr. Chair. I think it's important for this committee to get ample time with the key people in this industry.

**The Chair:** Okay. Fair enough. So did you have a motion?

● (1900)

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I'm going to give notice of motion. I don't think we should have to, but I can give notice of motion that we specifically place them in for two hours if—

**The Chair:** I don't have a problem with getting them. We'll ask the clerk to schedule them for two hours. It's not an issue.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** That's fine.

**An hon. member:** And it should be without a motion.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** On the same point, I think if they're at the table with other witnesses, it's a reason for us to go longer. Last week we ran out of questions for witnesses because only one or two people were sitting at the table. The opposition has the right to ask their questions to whomever they want, just as we do, and I think you can bring in witnesses...[*Inaudible—Editor*].

**The Chair:** Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned until four o'clock on Wednesday.







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