

Standing Committee on Health (HESA) - COVID-19 – Vaccines Rollout

February 5, 2021

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Notice of Meeting Minutes Evidence Meetings (HESA) Watch on ParlVU

NOTICE OF MEETING AMENDED

Standing Committee on Health (HESA)
43rd Parliament, 2nd Session

Meeting 17
🕒 Friday, February 5, 2021, 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
📍 Room 035-B, West Block
📺 Televised

Emergency Situation Facing Canadians in Light of the Second Wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Appearing

- Hon. Patty Hajdu, P.C., M.P., Minister of Health
- Hon. Anita Anand, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Services and Procurement

 Amended Section

Witnesses

Canadian Food Inspection Agency
• Dr. Siddika Mithani, President

Canadian Institutes of Health Research
• Dr. Michael Strong, President

Department of Health
• Dr. Stephen Lucas, Deputy Minister

Department of Public Works and Government Services
• Bill Matthews, Deputy Minister
• Arianne Reza, Assistant Deputy Minister, Procurement

Public Health Agency of Canada
• Iain Stewart, President

Clerk of the Committee
Jean-François Pagé (613-995-4108)

2021-02-02 4:48 p.m.

2) COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Liberal Party of Canada



Ron McKinnon
Chair
Coquitlam-Port Coquitlam, BC



Darren Fisher
Parliamentary Secretary/
Dartmouth-Cole Harbour, NS



Mike Kelloway
Cape Breton-Canso, NS



Marcus Powlowski
Thunder Bay-Rainy River, ON



Sonia Sidhu
Brampton South, ON



Tony Van Bynen
Newmarket-Aurora, ON

Conservative Party of Canada



John Barlow
Foothills, AB



Chris d'Entremont
West Nova, NS



Larry McGuire
Brandon-Souris, MB



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1st Vice Chair
Critic
Calgary Nose Hill, AB



Luc Thériault
2nd Vice Chair
Critic
Montcalm, QC



Don Davies
Critic
Vancouver Kingsway, BC

Bloc Québécois

New Democratic Party

**Opening remarks for
the Honourable Patty Hajdu
Minister of Health**

Appearance before the Standing Committee on Health

Canada's COVID-19 Vaccination Strategy

Allotted speaking time: 10 minutes

Speech length: 10.5 minutes (1,287 words)

Check against delivery

Introduction

Mr. Chair, Honourable members,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you about the Government of Canada's COVID-19 vaccination strategy.

It has been just over one year since the first case of COVID-19 was detected in Canada. The intervening months have been extremely challenging. Canadians have experienced hardship, anxiety and heartbreaking losses. To say that it has been difficult is an understatement.

But there is reason for hope. In less than a year, vaccines have been developed and authorized. Canadians are receiving them right now — and every single vaccination brings us closer to a safer, healthier and more prosperous future.

Vaccine distribution

[I would like to begin by acknowledging the good news we received this week — that the AstraZeneca vaccine has been found by Health Canada to be safe and effective and is now authorized for use across the country. This gives us one more much-needed tool to fight the pandemic.] TBC

[I would like to begin by providing an update on vaccine distribution.]

As you know, both the Pfizer and the Moderna vaccines have **[already]** been authorized for use in Canada and are now being distributed across the country.

So far, we have secured a total of **80 million** doses of these two vaccines. Of these, more than **1.1 million** doses have been delivered to the provinces and territories.

This means that more than **860,000 people [TBC]** have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

Delivery schedule

Although the delays recently announced by Pfizer and Moderna will have a short-term impact on vaccine rollout, we are still on track to receive the full six million doses from Pfizer and Moderna by the end of the first quarter.

Starting in April, the pace will accelerate, with at least 20 million doses being delivered between April and June.

It is during this time that mass vaccination campaigns will begin to ramp up around the country. We are working with the provinces, territories and Indigenous partners to prepare for this next phase.

Most importantly, we expect to have enough vaccine for every Canadian by the end of September 2021 — even if no other vaccine is authorized for use in Canada.

Prioritization

In the meantime, while supplies are limited, vaccines are being distributed strategically to the groups who need them most.

While the provinces and territories are responsible for the distribution of vaccines within their jurisdictions, their decision-making is informed by the recommendations of the **National Advisory Committee on Immunization**.

Last fall, the Committee recommended who should be vaccinated first, given limited initial supplies of vaccine. This includes:

- Residents and staff of congregate living settings that provide care for seniors;
- Adults 70 years of age and older, starting with those 80 years of age and over;
- Healthcare workers; and
- Adults in Indigenous communities where infection can have disproportionate consequences.

Given these guidelines, I'm pleased to say that there has already been notable progress in the territories. In Nunavut, more than 11% of the population has received at least one dose of the Moderna vaccine.

In the Northwest Territories and the Yukon, more than 21% and 9% of their respective populations have received at least one dose of the vaccine.

This month, the National Advisory Committee will be updating its guidance on the prioritization of initial doses of COVID-19 vaccine. This updated guidance will help inform stages two and three of the vaccine rollout, as vaccine supplies increase.

Expedited review process

In the meantime, we expect additional vaccines to be authorized. Health Canada is now reviewing vaccine submissions from [AstraZeneca](TBC), Janssen, Verity Pharmaceuticals and Novavax. Should these vaccines be found to meet Health Canada's strict standards for safety, efficacy and quality, they would be authorized and included in upcoming vaccination campaigns.

Vaccine development is a long and highly complex process. In normal times, it can take years to carry out the extensive research needed to produce a safe and effective product. Vaccine reviews normally take place after all clinical studies are completed and the full results are available.

But these are not normal times. We are fighting a global pandemic and many thousands of human lives hang in the balance. With this in mind, we have put in place measures to safely expedite vaccine authorization.

Health Canada is the regulator responsible for this process. We recognize the need for flexibility to expedite it, given the urgency of the COVID-19 pandemic.

But we cannot compromise on safety, quality and efficacy.

That's why, this fall I signed the *Interim Order Respecting the Importation, Sale and Advertising of Drugs for Use in Relation to COVID-19*.

This Interim Order allows us to accept rolling submissions for COVID-19 drugs and vaccines. This means that manufacturers can submit data as they become available. These requirements are comparable to those established by other major regulators, such as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the European Medicines Agency, and the World Health Organization.

It was through this expedited process that the [AstraZeneca] (TBC), Pfizer and Moderna vaccines were authorized. Health Canada is using the same process to review subsequent submissions for COVID-19 vaccines.

Once an authorized vaccine is in use, Canada continues to monitor its safety through its well-established post-market surveillance system. This system collects safety data from various domestic and international sources — including mandatory reporting by manufacturers — which allows

Health Canada and public health authorities to respond quickly to changing trends or unusual adverse events.

This system was enhanced through the Interim Order, which provides the authority to impose terms and conditions on any authorization or establishment licence at any time. This includes a post-market safety and effectiveness system with risk mitigation measures and additional assessments of safety information as requested by Health Canada.

Health Canada will not hesitate to take action if any safety concerns are identified.

Logistics

The Government of Canada is working closely with provinces, territories, Indigenous and public health partners to ensure the timely rollout of the vaccines, as they are authorized by Health Canada.

Our vaccine strategy is being led by the National Operations Centre. The Centre was created by the Public Health Agency of Canada and is supported by the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence.

At the same time, the National Emergency Strategic Stockpile of the Public Health Agency is making sure we have the supplies we need for a smooth rollout. This includes millions of needles, syringes and alcohol swabs, as well as freezers for vaccine storage across the country.

Conclusion

With vaccination now underway and measures in place to ensure a reliable supply of vaccines, we can look ahead to a future free of COVID-19.

The Government of Canada is doing everything it can to reach that future as soon as possible. We are taking steps to authorize safe and effective vaccines quickly. We are protecting our most vulnerable citizens first. And we are working with our partners to ensure that everyone who wants a vaccine, gets a vaccine.

At the same time, the Government of Canada continues to invest in research. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research is addressing many issues related to COVID-19 — from the development of vaccines and therapeutics, to the variants of the virus including their impact on the effectiveness of vaccines.

In the meantime, we cannot let our guard down.

We must continue what we've been doing — physical distancing, hand-washing, wearing a mask.

We owe it to our seniors. We owe it to our neighbours with high-risk conditions. We owe it to our health care providers and essential workers.

We must stay vigilant as we wait for our turn to get vaccinated. That day is coming soon — and when it does, I want Canadians to be proud of how they worked together to overcome this unprecedented crisis.

Thank you.

Inspection Activities During the Pandemic	PPE for Inspectors	Vaccines for Inspectors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The CFIA took immediate and decisive action in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to do its part to protect the integrity of Canada’s food supply, invest in research and protect its employees. Throughout the pandemic, the CFIA has been regularly engaging with its employees, the unions, provincial, territorial, and international trading partners, as well as industry to understand and address their concerns. The CFIA prioritized critical Agency activities such as food safety investigations and recalls, export certification, animal disease investigations and laboratory testing. The Agency has continued to support a stable food supply for Canadians during this challenging period, reduced the regulatory burden on industry where possible and enabled the ongoing movement of goods between countries. All critical activities continue to be fully delivered and all parts of critical activities requiring on-site visits are being delivered on-site. There are currently no confirmed cases of COVID-19 or its new variants being spread through food or food packaging. 	<p>Number of CFIA employees who contracted COVID:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the first phase of reporting, prior to May 11, we had 36 cases of COVID-19 among our employees. We did not have a new case between May 11 and September 15, 2020. However since September 15, we have had 72 new cases. <p>Personal protective equipment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In order to protect the health and safety of its employees, the CFIA expects that each establishment operator abide by the advice and guidance provided by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), as well as by local public health authorities in addressing the COVID-19 outbreak. Masks and face shields are made available to all CFIA employees, such as meat inspectors, who cannot practice physical distancing. Non-medical disposable masks are available at worksites for staff delivering critical inspection services. The Agency works with Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) to source and procure a variety of personal protective equipment such as masks, visors, face shields, gloves, wipes and goggles. Staff requiring equipment can speak with their manager. Protective equipment will be considered for other operations, as required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The CFIA supports efforts to vaccinate its front-line employees and other critical service personnel, in accordance with the recommendations of the National Advisory Committee on Immunization. The administration of available vaccines will continue to be determined by federal, provincial and territorial governments, informed by NACI advice. CFIA will continue to collaborate with provincial/territorial health authorities to support the health and safety of its workforce. Should CFIA employees be prioritized alongside other critical service personnel, they will be encouraged to receive the vaccine. <p>If pressed...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is presently no federal legislation, regulation or policy that requires employees to be vaccinated in order to enter a workplace. While vaccination will be an important tool to protect our workforce, for the foreseeable future, existing effective preventive measures will remain in place.

5) COVID-19 VACCINE ROLLOUT

BACKGROUND

The amount of vaccine available now, in early 2021 is limited. Priority groups will receive early immunization. Provinces/territories are responsible for deciding who will have access to the vaccine and when.

POSITIONING STATEMENT

CFIA would support its front-line employees being vaccinated in line with other critical service personnel following the recommendations of the National Advisory Committee on Immunization.

KEY MESSAGES

- Throughout the COVID-19 global pandemic, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has continued to deliver essential services that support the health, safety, security and economic well-being of Canadians.
- Canadians can feel confident that the Canadian food safety system is strong and the Government of Canada is working to ensure that Canadians have continued access to safe, high-quality foods.
- The CFIA supports efforts to vaccinate its front-line employees and other critical service personnel, in accordance with the recommendations of the National Advisory Committee on Immunization, to support the continued safeguarding of Canada's food, plant and animal resources, as well as market access.

GENERAL

- The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI), an independent external group of experts, provided recommendations on key populations for early COVID-19 vaccination.
- NACI recommends that a number of key populations be considered for early vaccination and those contributing to the maintenance of essential services for the functioning of society (approximately 2 million Canadians) are expected to receive an early dose when it is available.
- The availability of vaccines will increase throughout the year, ultimately providing every Canadian with the opportunity to be immunized.
- The administration of available vaccines will continue to be determined by federal, provincial and territorial governments, informed by NACI advice.

RESPONSIVE ONLY

Provincial decisions on prioritization and vaccination rollout

- As Canadians, all CFIA employees will have access to the COVID-19 vaccine through their provincial health authority at some point.
- Most public servants (i.e. employees without clear occupational risks who fall outside the [NACI stages 1 and 2 priorities](#)) will receive their vaccines from their provincial health care system during stage 3.

CFIA's ability to deliver for Canadians despite its absence from rollout strategies

- Since the outset of the pandemic, CFIA has adapted its program and service delivery to continue to make safe food available to all Canadians.

CFIA employee well-being (before vaccination)

- CFIA employees are equipped with face shields and visors and personal protective equipment where necessary to continue to deliver inspection and other service.
- CFIA will continue to use this protective equipment and to engage with public health authorities on methods and best practices that protect one's health and preserves the ability to continue to deliver on its mandate to the benefit of all Canadians.

If pressed...

- CFIA will continue to adjust its service delivery priorities based on workforce availability, with the understanding that further changes may be needed to respond to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

CFIA on mandating employee vaccination

- CFIA will continue to collaborate with provincial/territorial health authorities to support the health and safety of its workforce.
- Should CFIA employees be prioritized alongside other critical service personnel, they will be encouraged to receive the vaccine.

If pressed...

- There is presently no federal legislation, regulation or policy that requires employees to be vaccinated in order to enter a workplace.
- While vaccination will be an important tool to protect our workforce, for the foreseeable future, existing effective preventive measures will remain in place.
- These preventive measures include, but are not limited to, using protective equipment (where required), following the guidance from public health partners, staying home when showing symptoms or sick, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, wearing a non-medical mask that is well fitted if physical distancing cannot be maintained, etc.

CFIA position on mandating employee vaccination if required by industry for site entry

- Federal inspectors are employees of the Government of Canada, who carry out duties as authorized by the Ministers of Health and of Agriculture and Agri-Food on behalf of Canada and Canadians.
- Vaccination is not mandated by the Government of Canada.
- CFIA will continue to follow federal/provincial public health protocols.
- CFIA is not aware of any provincial public health jurisdiction that has made vaccination mandatory.

CFIA on vaccination of meat establishment workers

Position de l'ACIA sur la vaccination des travailleurs des établissements de transformation de la viande.

- CFIA inspectors and veterinarians work in slaughter facilities, overseeing compliance with federal regulations.
- CFIA supports measures that help to make workplaces safer. Vaccination, along with the continued practice of public health controls would make the working environment safer for everyone.
- CFIA is aware that employees who work in slaughter facilities have been identified by some provinces as essential workers.
- This means that they may receive vaccination before other populations as part of their provincial vaccination rollout plans.
- CFIA inspectors and veterinarians work in federally inspected slaughter facilities; vaccination of federal employees, working alongside slaughter facility workers, would help to avoid disruption in the food supply.
- CFIA has shared information on Agency essential service delivery with provinces for consideration as part of their vaccination prioritization/rollout plans.
- CFIA has been advised by provincial health authorities that they are considering establishing vaccination clinics in certain federally inspected facilities in the Atlantic – [REDACTED TEXT] in New Brunswick.
- CFIA will continue to advocate for the inclusion of federal employees as part of early vaccination opportunities.

CFIA on participation in any future provincial/industry vaccination programs for establishment workers.

- Should provinces/industry operators be in a position to offer vaccination to establishment employees, CFIA would request that provinces/operators also make this option available to the CFIA employees working at establishment sites.

If pressed re CFIA's relationship with industry

- Open communication with external stakeholders, including industry and bargaining agents, has been a key part of the Agency's COVID-19 response efforts.
- CFIA regularly meets with stakeholders to discuss challenges and find solutions, enabling the CFIA to be on top of issues while ensuring the safety of its employees and avoiding any slow down or compromising the safety of Canada's food supply.

CFIA expectations of industry in maintaining a safe operating environment

- CFIA recognizes COVID-19 prevention and response activities to be a critical element for employee health and safety.
- The CFIA expects that each establishment operator continues to abide by the advice and guidance provided by the [Public Health Agency of Canada \(PHAC\)](#) and local Public Health Authorities to address the COVID-19 outbreak.
- CFIA continues to take the health and safety of its employees seriously. As an employer, CFIA must meet the Canada Labour Code Part II and Canadian Occupational Health and Safety Regulations.
- CFIA has made clear that it expects operators to have COVID-19 response plans in place and to provide a safe work space for CFIA inspectors.
- The absence of appropriate measures by the operator to protect CFIA employees may impact the delivery of CFIA inspection services.

6) CFIA & COVID-19

- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) took immediate and decisive action in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to do its part to protect the integrity of Canada's food supply, invest in research and protect its employees.
- Throughout the pandemic, the CFIA has been regularly engaging with its employees, the unions, provincial, territorial, and international trading partners, as well as industry to understand and address their concerns,
- The CFIA prioritized critical Agency activities such as food safety investigations and recalls, export certification, animal disease investigations and laboratory testing.
- The Agency has continued to support a stable food supply for Canadians during this challenging period, reduced the regulatory burden on industry where possible and enabled the ongoing movement of goods between countries.
- Currently, there have been no reported cases of food or food packaging being associated with the transmission of COVID-19.
- The CFIA does not record or retain information on Canadian food processing facilities impacted by COVID-19 outbreaks. Information about these human health issues should be directed to the food processing facilities themselves, or to the public health authorities that confirmed the outbreaks.

- The CFIA has been involved in pandemic planning activities. The CFIA even developed a 'Pandemic Influenza Business Continuity Plan' (2006) and designed exercises to test the plan.
- The CFIA has been able to draw on elements of this plan and continues to work with Central Agencies, other government departments and public health authorities to keep its planning, response and business resumption protocols current.

A) GOVERNMENT OF CANADA'S ACTIONS

The Government of Canada is investing \$162.6 million in the Canadian Food Inspection Agency over the next five years and \$40 million per year of ongoing funding after that to:

- Modernize import control functions and conditions to focus on the areas of highest risk
- Expand delivery of export certification to support market access and meet ever-growing demands related to the growth in the trade of Canadian agriculture and agri-food products
- Augment the CFIA's oversight and surveillance capacity in its domestic programs by dedicating resources to areas of highest risk
- Increase the CFIA's support of digital-first tools and services to provide clients with a full range of modern services and information

This investment will serve to improve CFIA's domestic and import control systems through increased surveillance and inspection, help expand markets for Canadian exports, and continue the digitization of the Agency's internal and public-facing business.

The investment is critical to alleviating the resource pressures faced by CFIA in the design and oversight of the Canadian control system due to increased demand and operational risks from rapid growth in international trade, rapid growth in technology developments, changing consumer preferences, and new food safety threats.

Additionally, as part of its core responsibilities, CFIA is required to inspect, test and issue export certificates to permit trade in regulated food products. Exports of these products have increased by 60% over the past decade.

The Government of Canada supports continued aggressive growth in Canadian export volumes, underpinned by the Barton report and the Budget 2017 announcement that set an ambitious target to grow agri-food exports to at least \$75B by 2025, from \$65B in 2017.

Export and import streams are connected; if work to facilitate the flow of imports into Canada cannot be advanced, it directly affects Canada's exports. Increasing import and domestic inspection will help Canada's market access goals. Further, Canada's export market access requests are often met with reciprocal requests for access to the Canadian market. For example, in the past, China has sought to advance work on exports of Chinese apples and pears to Canada, in parallel with advancing its work on importing Canadian plant products.

KEY MESSAGES

- The Government of Canada's July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Snapshot earmarked \$162.6 million over the next five years and \$40 million ongoing to CFIA to enhance the level of services essential for Canadian businesses, and to reinforce the security of the health of Canada's food supply, its plant and animal resources, environment and economy.

- This investment will bolster Canada's reputation as a trusted trading partner by enhancing export certification, import and domestic inspection capacity, and expanding the CFIA's digital services.

B) FUNDING FOR INSPECTORS

(Government of Canada announcement: April 14, 2020)

- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) plays a critical role in making safe food available for Canadians.
- Under these unprecedented circumstances arising from the COVID-19 pandemic situation, the Government of Canada is providing funding of \$20 million to the CFIA to continue its important work to safeguard Canada's food system and better support the production demands of Canada's food industry.
- With the funding, the CFIA is:
 - reassigning staff to areas of high priority and providing them with necessary training and tools;
 - increasing the number of inspectors by hiring new staff or temporarily bringing back those CFIA employees who have recently retired;
 - hiring more veterinarians to provide inspection in industries like meat slaughter;
 - funding more overtime hours to help support longer production hours;
 - developing flexible ways to carry out inspections, such as through the use of digital tools such as tablets and access to the CFIA's remote service delivery network;
 - developing arrangements with provinces to train and equip some provincial inspectors so they can provide assistance to the CFIA on a temporary, as-needed basis
 - in some provinces, it may also mean training federal CFIA inspectors to support provincial inspectors; and
- continuing work with international partners to support exports, Canada's economy and jobs.

These efforts uphold the Government of Canada's commitment to safe food for Canadians and support for Canada's agriculture and agri-food industry.

C) SHORT STORYLINE ON CFIA'S WORK DURING COVID-19

- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) took immediate and decisive action, prioritizing critical activities such as food safety investigations and recalls, animal disease investigations, laboratory testing and export certification.
- CFIA inspectors, laboratory staff and veterinarians have worked tirelessly on the front lines throughout the pandemic to ensure Canadians have access to safe, high-quality food. The Agency received \$20 million in new funding to support critical food inspection, which was used to hire

and train new inspectors, increase overtime hours, bring back retired employees and arrange with provinces to share inspectors.

- The CFIA has put into place (and has actioned as needed) resource-sharing agreements with Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and continues to work with Quebec under an existing agreement.
- To support industry and make sure food was accessible, the CFIA introduced temporary compliance flexibilities. For example, the Agency suspended certain non-safety labelling requirements for restaurant and hotel food products so that they could be sold directly to consumers at retail. And special provisions allowed the inter-provincial movement of provincially inspected meat, if needed. This helped to reduce the risk of food waste and food shortages.
- Based on recent industry feedback (who had originally relied on these flexibilities), they were no longer required and ended on December 31, 2020. The CFIA can re-instate these flexibilities at any time if needed during the COVID-19 response.
- In CFIA's laboratories, scientists are actively engaged in research on the coronavirus and vaccine development, as well supporting the Public Health Agency of Canada in testing human samples for positive cases of COVID-19.
- Reducing the chance of exposure or spread of COVID-19 has been the Agency's primary focus. Face-to-face interactions were minimized as much as possible through the introduction of new online services and remote inspections. In places like slaughterhouses where physical distancing is not possible, the Agency insisted that public health guidance be followed and it procured protective equipment for the safety of its employees.
- Open communication with external stakeholders, including industry and bargaining agents, has been a key part of the Agency's success. Regular meetings to discuss challenges and find solutions allowed the CFIA to be on top of issues while ensuring the safety of its employees and avoiding any slow down or compromising the safety of Canada's food supply.
- Internal communications remains critical throughout this pandemic. The Agency regularly communicates with staff using multiple channels to reach them wherever they are working. In addition, the Agency is making sure all employees have access to the latest updates and guidance on office equipment, leave, and workspace safety. Constant feedback and dialogue is encouraged through interactive town halls and regular surveys. The mental health of CFIA employees continues to be a top priority. To support a healthy work environment, the Agency conducts routine employee wellness checks and shares resources with managers and employees, including a Manager's toolkit on mental health in the workplace, which is designed to help recognize early warning signs of mental health difficulties.
- These examples show how CFIA has exemplified the principles of Beyond 2020 to be more agile, inclusive, and better equipped. Employees across the Agency have risen to the challenges presented by COVID-19 by continuing to embrace innovation and working together to ensure the CFIA continues to keep food safe and plants and animals healthy.

OVERARCHING MESSAGES

- The CFIA understands the concerns held by Canadians with respect to COVID-19 and food safety.
- The CFIA took immediate and decisive action in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to do its part to protect the integrity of Canada's food supply, invest in research and protect its employees.
- Throughout the pandemic, the CFIA has been regularly engaging with its employees, the unions, provincial, territorial, and international trading partners, as well as industry to understand and address their concerns.
- The Agency has continued to support a stable food supply for Canadians during this challenging period, reduced the regulatory burden on industry where possible and enabled the ongoing movement of goods between countries.
- The CFIA will continue to deliver critical services that serve to preserve the integrity of Canada's Food Safety System while safeguarding its animal and plant resource base.

ROLE OF CFIA IN FOOD PRODUCTION FACILITIES (HEALTH AND SAFETY)

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is committed to protecting the health and safety of its employees.

CFIA employees follow the health and safety guidance issued by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and Health Canada, as well as by local public health authorities, and follow protocols put in place at the establishments in which they work that serve to mitigate risks of exposure to the COVID virus.

When cases of COVID-19 occur in a federally-registered food processing or meat slaughter establishment, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) works with local public health authorities to help determine the level of risk of exposure for its employees working within that establishment. CFIA inspectors complete a CFIA health self-assessment questionnaire before and after each shift.

The CFIA works with establishments and local public health Occupational Health and Safety representatives to ensure all measures recommended by public health authorities are in place before reintroducing CFIA employees into the establishments' work spaces.

The CFIA works with establishments to ensure all measures recommended by public health authorities are in place in the workplaces occupied by CFIA employees.

The CFIA's oversight at federally-registered meat facilities relates to food safety. CFIA veterinarians and inspectors are present in these facilities to enforce federal standards for the safe, humane slaughter of food animals, the mitigation of health and food safety risks associated with the slaughter or processing of meat products, and for export certification.

The CFIA can exercise its authorities under the *Safe Food for Canadians Act* and *Regulations* to effectively stop food production (and related activities) over food safety concerns.

The CFIA does not have an authority to suspend operations at a federally regulated plant because of a COVID-19 outbreak as COVID-19 is not known to be a food safety concern.

A decision to suspend operations because of COVID-19 related issues may be made by an establishment operator, oftentimes with direction from provincial health authorities and/or occupation healthy safety officials.

The CFIA will not deliver inspection services if there is a public health order closing a facility and may not provide inspection services if:

- o A review and recommendations from the relevant public health authority has not been completed to assist the CFIA in determining if CFIA employees can safely return to work and provide inspection services.
- o The CFIA determines that the findings of the public health authority indicate that it is not safe for CFIA employees to work at that facility.

The Agency expects that establishment operators abide by the advice and guidance provided by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) as well as by local Public Health Authorities in addressing the COVID-19 outbreak.

When establishments provide their employees with equipment such as face shields or masks as recommended by health authorities, the CFIA requests that they provide the same equipment to CFIA employees also working on site. The CFIA is also procuring and providing face shields and masks for these employees.

CFIA INSPECTORS KEEPING FOOD SUPPLY SAFE

- The Canadian food safety system is strong and the Government of Canada is working to help Canadians have continued access to safe and high-quality foods.
- We must continue to provide high-quality food for Canadians, while protecting the health of our workers.
- The CFIA is committed to maintaining critical inspection services and putting in place plans to deliver these critical services in the event of a reduced number of inspectors.
- The CFIA continues to work diligently to ensure that the safety of the food made available to Canadians is not compromised.

E) CFIA'S ACTIONS

1) COVID-19 AND MINK FARMS (PHAC LEAD)

SYNOPSIS

As of January 15, 2021, there have been 2 mink farms positive for SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19 illness in humans) in British Columbia (BC). Disease control actions include quarantine of the farms, and self-isolation of exposed or infected individuals. Enhanced biosafety measures have been put in place to protect farm workers. Media have reported on both farms. There has been

previous media attention to mink farms, in particular in Denmark, where millions of infected mink were considered a “public health risk” due to mutations of the virus, and were culled. While the initial findings on the BC mink farm did not find any mutations of concern, ongoing monitoring and vigilance is required to better understand the implications of mink farm infections to public health.

BACKGROUND

The SARS-CoV-2 virus (the virus that causes COVID-19) originated from animals; however, has adapted to humans and is now primarily transmitting from human-to-human. Although predominantly transmitted from person-to-person, there have been cases of people transmitting the virus to animals, including farmed mink.

There have been several reports of SARS-CoV-2 outbreaks in farmed mink in some European countries and in the USA. Recently, concern was raised over a mink-associated SARS-CoV-2 mutation in Denmark that affected the spike protein, which is a key target area for human vaccines. While the impact of these mutations on vaccine efficacy is unknown, Denmark made a decision to cull 15-17 million mink as a precautionary measure.

Mink in Canada

On December 4, 2020, the Chief Medical Officer of Health in British Columbia (BC) advised the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) of an outbreak of human COVID-19 cases on a mink farm in the lower mainland, BC. This was the first report of an outbreak on a mink farm in Canada. As of December 18, there were 17 confirmed or probable human cases linked to this farm. Virus was isolated from both mink and human samples; genetic sequencing in both humans and animals found the virus strain was a human strain that has been circulating in BC. Although one mutation was detected, this mutation has been described previously in mink, is not in the spike protein, and is not considered a risk to human health. Health of farm workers and remaining mink on this farm is being monitored by local and provincial authorities.

On December 23, the CFIA confirmed SARS-CoV-2 on a second positive mink farm in the Fraser Health Authority. To date, there have been no human cases associated with the second farm, however the investigation is ongoing. The owner of the second farm elected to euthanize all mink on their farm in order protect the health of his family and other business entity.

There are a total of 10 active mink farms in British Columbia, all are located in Fraser Health Authority. On December 15, Fraser Health Authority issued a public health order to all mink farms, requiring enhanced surveillance measures, including human and animal health testing. There are regulatory requirements for any movement of animals or animal products on or off-farm to control disease spread.

The CFIA has reported the results to the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) in accordance with international protocol and is providing weekly updates, when needed. PHAC notified the WHO on December 22, under Art.44, collaboration and assistance to provide details of the investigation to date.

Mink farming in Canada is a provincial jurisdiction. As of December 2020, there were approximately 64 active mink farms located in 7 provinces of Canada with a total of approximately 194,000 breeding animals. In Canada mink farms are generally in rural locations, employ a small number of staff and follow the National Farm-Level Mink Biosecurity Standard.

SARS-CoV-2 infections and international mink farms

On April 26, 2020, the first international report of a positive mink farm was reported by the Netherlands. Since that time, infected mink farms have continued to be reported. As of January 2021, outbreaks of SARS-CoV-2 in farmed mink have been reported from a number of countries, including the Netherlands, Denmark, Greece, Spain, Sweden, Poland, Lithuania and the United States. These outbreaks have primarily resulted from human-to-mink transmission.

Denmark's decision on November 4, 2020 to cull more than 15 million mink on Danish farms is based on a report issued by the Statens Serum Institut (SSI), Denmark's national public health agency. The report points to evidence that the virus is mutating as it moves through the population of farmed mink, giving rise to new variants of COVID-19. Some of these new variants have also been detected in people. Preliminary laboratory evidence has found that the mutations have occurred in the same areas of the virus (spike protein) that are the focus for vaccine development, which may have implications for vaccine protection, therapies, and testing.

SARS-CoV-2 and risks to susceptible wildlife species around infected mink farms

On December 11, the United States announced the first report of a SARS-CoV-2 infection in a free-ranging wild mink in Utah, that was captured close to an infected mink farm. The viral sequence from the wild mink sample was indistinguishable from farmed mink samples. While there is currently no evidence that SARS-CoV-2 has been established in wild populations, spillover into wild populations is of concern, as it could lead to the establishment of a sylvatic (wildlife) reservoir. Canadian Guidance for managing SARS-CoV-2 infections in mink recommends One-Health collaborative response to protect public health, animal health and wildlife/environmental health.

Canadian Food Inspection Agency Activities

The CFIA has been active in several areas to address this risk, in collaboration with other Federal departments, provinces and industry as appropriate including laboratory support for confirmatory testing and sequencing and disease reporting to international bodies (OIE); preparation of National Guidance for managing SARS-CoV-2 in farmed mink; preparation of National Surveillance Guidelines for SARS-CoV-2 in farmed mink; messaging to the mink industry regarding risks and biosecurity; and providing technical advice directly to the government of British Columbia during outbreak management on mink farms. The agency is also collaborating with domestic and international partners and standards setting bodies for the development of guidance, risk assessments and trade requirements.

Public Health Agency of Canada Activities

The Agency is working with its partners to better understand the emerging evidence of SARS-CoV-2 in farmed mink. The Agency has offered support to BC counterparts and prepared a public health enhanced investigation form, which was shared previously with provincial counterparts and is being used by local public health in BC. The Agency is supporting work led by the BC Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development to collect samples from wildlife in the vicinity of the SARS-CoV-2 infected mink farms, in order to assess their viral status, and better understand the risk both to and from free-ranging wildlife.

The Agency continues to play a key role in the communication of public health advice/guidance to various government departments (both federally and provincially/territorially). This includes

communication to healthcare providers and the general public to debunk misinformation circulating regarding the source and transmission of the disease. Canadians, and particularly at-risk populations, need to understand their risks and be informed on how to adjust their lifestyles and decision-making to better protect themselves. Risk communications that are grounded in behavioral analysis (e.g. enabling factors for action) will protect the health of Canadians, assist in reducing the overall burden on the health system and strengthen the public health system overall.

In addition to surveillance and data collection, emerging international science is being reviewed and discussed with international counterparts, to inform Canada's understanding and position on emerging evidence on COVID-19 and animals. Rapid Risk Assessments of a number of animal groups have been undertaken to understand the risk of transmission to animals, between animals, or back to people.

The Agency has information on animals and COVID-19 on its website, which is updated on an as-needed basis. This includes the recommendation for people to avoid contact with pets and other animals if they have or may have COVID-19. Guidance for managing mink farm outbreaks has been developed by an expert working group, comprised of animal health, public health and environmental health representatives, along with academia and other national non-government organizations. A Biosecurity Advisory regarding enhanced precautions during pelting was also developed and distributed on December 5, 2020 to the Canadian Mink Breeders Association for distribution to their members across Canada.

KEY MESSAGES

- There have been two mink farms reported positive for SARS-CoV-2 in British Columbia. The source of infection on these farms is believed to be infected workers. The human cases and their contacts are being managed by local public health and the affected farms are quarantined.
- Authorities and responsibilities for farmed mink rest with the provinces and territories, and the Government of Canada helps coordinate and provide guidance across the country. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency has provided technical support to British Columbia counterparts.
- Our understanding of the virus evolves as new scientific evidence becomes available. Canadian public health guidance related to COVID-19 will also evolve, based on new evidence. This includes the development of guidance on infection prevention, monitoring, testing, and response for mink farms and employees.
- Our Government is committed to protecting the health and safety of all Canadians and will continue to monitor and respond to COVID-19 virus infections in both humans and animals.

IF PRESSED...

- Individuals who have COVID-19 symptoms or who are self-isolating because of COVID-19 should avoid close contact with animals to help prevent transmission to their animals, including farmed mink.
- The Government of Canada continually reviews and evaluates the latest scientific evidence as it becomes available, working with scientific experts and other partners across the country and around the world. When we determine that the body of evidence has gained sufficient credibility, and is accepted by the scientific community, we update our advice and guidance as quickly as possible, often in collaboration with provinces and territories.

- It is important to remember that, while some animal species can become infected with COVID-19, this pandemic is being driven by human-to-human transmission.
- As we continue to learn more about the virus, Canadians are reminded to keep doing their part to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This includes following public health precautions, such as:
 - o staying home when unwell
 - o physical distancing
 - o hand hygiene
 - o respiratory etiquette
 - o wearing masks when in closed indoor spaces
 - o regularly cleaning and disinfecting common surfaces
 - o self-monitoring for symptoms
- Globally, mink infections with SARS-CoV-2 have largely been from humans passing the virus to mink, and subsequently between mink. Strong biosecurity measures on farm are important to prevent introducing the virus to mink farms, and to protect those handling or being in close proximity to animals.

IF PRESSED ON ACTIONS BY THE CANADIAN FOOD INSPECTION AGENCY...

- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the Public Health Agency of Canada are working closely with federal and provincial partners to respond to this emerging issue and provide appropriate guidance for people who have COVID-19 symptoms or have been exposed to a COVID-19 case and are in contact with animals. This includes the development of national guidance on infection prevention, monitoring, testing, and response for mink farms and employees.
- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is collaborating with the Canada Mink Breeders Association on communicating the importance of biosecurity measures to prevent the introduction of virus in mink farms.
- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the Public Health Agency of Canada continue to track and analyze research and case reports from around the world on SARS-CoV-2 and farmed mink.

2) TRANSMISSION OF COVID-19 IN ANIMALS

The World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) considers COVID-19 as an emerging disease and requires countries to investigate and report animal cases.

Current evidence suggests COVID-19 emerged from an animal source, however there is not enough evidence to confirm the original source or explain the original transmission to humans (which may involve an intermediate host).

The susceptibility of various livestock, pet, and wild species to COVID-19 continues to be studied.

Recent susceptibility studies performed by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) on domestic turkeys, chickens and pigs confirmed that these animals do not spread COVID-19 to humans, animals or the environment. CFIA scientists demonstrated that the virus does not replicate in domestic turkeys and chicken and replicates poorly in domestic swine under laboratory conditions. The studies also showed that these animals did not carry the virus in their tissues used for human consumption. To date no SARS-CoV-2 cases among domestic livestock have been documented by natural infection; however, further laboratory research can help understand any role these animals might play in the maintenance and spread of SARS-CoV-2.

Recent experimental studies conducted in cattle by various countries have also shown that the virus replicates poorly in this species, is not found in tissues used for human consumption, and does not spread to other animals.

No natural cases of COVID-19 have been documented in any livestock species (mink not included).

SARS-CoV-2 infections have been reported in zoo animals such as lions and tigers in few countries. They are believed to have been infected by zoo keepers.

Globally, there have been numerous reports of pets infected in households where owners are sick with COVID19 in various countries. Some cases have been reported in Canada.

Mink

There have been several cases of SARS-CoV-2 infections in farmed mink in various European countries and in the United States. Recently, a SARS-CoV-2 mutation was identified in Denmark that led to speculation of reduced effectiveness of a COVID-19 vaccine for humans. In order to stop the spread of this mutated virus, Denmark made a decision to put down its total population of mink (15-17 million animals).

The size of the mink farming industry in Canada is relatively small (approximately 64 farms active currently). Mink production currently occurs in 7 provinces and farms are mostly concentrated in Nova Scotia, Ontario and British Columbia (BC).

The CFIA is providing a coordination role for the development of a national guidance for managing SARS-CoV-2 infections in farmed mink. This guidance provides direction for provinces/territories in the proactive management of mink farms to prevent COVID-19 infection and respond, should any mink farms in Canada report infections with this virus.

On December 5, 2020, the CFIA was notified of an outbreak of COVID-19 among 8 workers on a mink farm in the Fraser Health Authority in BC, as a result of their interactions in their community.

Suspect cases were confirmed by the CFIA National Centre for Foreign Animal Diseases Laboratory in Winnipeg. On December 23rd, 2020, mink samples from a second BC farm were confirmed positive.

Whole genome sequencing was conducted on the virus strains in order to monitor for possible mutations of the virus.

Confirmed cases have been reported to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) in accordance with international protocol.

At this time, import requirements remain unchanged for mink and mink products, and there are no restrictions in place to export Canadian mink pelts. The OIE ad hoc working group on Safe trade in animal and animal products will meet the week of February 8, 2021, to discuss mink pelts, specifically to assess the risk to human health posed by international trade in mink pelts and, if appropriate, recommend risk mitigation.

The mink industry has experienced low pelt prices for 5 consecutive years, largely due to a world over supply and a decline in consumer demand. During this period, the number of mink farms and production in Canada declined by approximately 80%.

Mink prices were expected to improve in 2020 as the oversupply had cleared. However, COVID-19 has affected the mink industry's ability to recover. China and South Korea, the mink sector's main markets, have both been hit hard by the effects of COVID-19 and have not been participating in active buying. In addition, COVID-19 has prevented buyers from attending physical auctions. While virtual auctions have been attempted, there was little participation and purchasing of product as fur is a tactile product that needs to be viewed and handled before it is purchased.

The North American Fur Auction in Toronto closed as it was forced into bankruptcy protection in 2019 and as a result Canadian mink producers are shipping their pelts to one of two fur auction houses in Europe for sale.

The mink industry has fully implemented on-farm assurance programs and industry sustainability practices. The mink industry has been an active participant in the National Farmed Animal Care Council and among the first to develop a Code of Practice for Care and Handling of Farmed Mink. The Code includes a chapter on biosecurity outlining requirements and recommended practices. Mink farmers went a step further with the development of a National Farm-Level Biosecurity Standard in cooperation with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, provincial/territorial governments and academia.

Canada Mink Breeders Association has been working closely with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to reinforce biosecurity messages to producer members including developing a video for producers.

The mink sector participates in the Advance Payment Program which is a federal loan guarantee program which provides agricultural producers with easy access to low-interest cash advances. On September 25, 2020 the Government of Canada approved the mink sector request for a Stay of Default for 2019 outstanding advances on mink pelts. The repayment deadline was extended by 12 months to September-October in 2021.

KEY MESSAGES

- No SARS-CoV-2 cases among domestic livestock or poultry have been documented by natural infection to date.
- Should the Canadian Food Inspection Agency be made aware of any suspected cases of COVID-19 in farm animals, existing federal and provincial/territorial mechanisms to deal with animal disease situations would be implemented.

RESPONSIVE REGARDING MINK

- We are aware of the current situation on the mink farms in British Columbia. As of January 29, 2021, SARS-CoV-2 outbreaks have been confirmed at two mink farms in British

Columbia. On the first farm, both humans and mink have tested positive for the virus, while on the second farm only mink have tested positive; however, investigations are ongoing.

- The Province of British Columbia is leading the disease response at the affected farms using a One-Health approach to mitigate risks for public, animal and wildlife health.
- Authorities and responsibilities for animal health management in farmed mink rest with the provinces and territories. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is providing technical support to its British Columbian counterparts.
- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the Public Health Agency of Canada are working closely with federal and provincial partners to respond to this emerging issue. This includes the development of national guidance on infection prevention, monitoring, testing, and response for mink farms and employees.
- Our mink farmers follow strict biosecurity practices. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is collaborating with the Canada Mink Breeders Association on communicating the importance of biosecurity measures to prevent the introduction of the virus in mink farms.
- Globally, there have been cases of SARS-CoV-2 infections in mink farms in several European countries and in the USA.
- The mink cases of SARS-CoV-2 have primarily involved transmission from humans to mink, or between mink. There has been a few documented cases, most recently in Denmark, where transmission from mink to humans has been detected in people working closely with mink.

RESPONSIVE REGARDING CONFIRMATORY TESTING OF MINK

- Confirmatory testing of the mink samples from the BC farms has been done by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and the results have been shared with the British Columbian Government. The testing included sequencing to monitor evolution of virus mutants.
- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) testing of the mink samples confirmed that they were positive for SARS-CoV-2. The CFIA reported the results to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) in accordance with international protocol.

RESPONSIVE REGARDING CONTACT WITH ANIMALS

- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency works closely with the Public Health Agency of Canada and provincial and territorial partners to provide appropriate guidance for people who have COVID-19 symptoms or have been exposed to a COVID-19 case and are in contact with animals.

RESPONSIVE REGARDING PETS

- The current spread of COVID-19 is primarily a result of human to human transmission. To date, there is no evidence that pets play a significant role in spreading the disease. (from World Organisation for Animal Health [OIE] website)
- Testing of animals, including companion animals, is generally not recommended unless it will assist in disease control or public health action. Some testing to determine susceptibility

has taken place in Canada and found some evidence of infection in cats and dogs living with COVID-19 positive people.

SUPPLEMENTARY RESPONSE: INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency leads an international network of laboratories, with key partners from 5 countries and works closely with the Public Health Agency of Canada, to strengthen Canada's knowledge base by sharing information on diagnostics and research.

3) MEAT SHORTAGES

- The Government of Canada is working to help Canadians have continued access to safe foods.
- In order to sell meat inter-provincially, a federal licence is required under the *Safe Food for Canadians Act* (SFCA). In the event of a meat shortage, a Ministerial Exemption can be granted under the SFCA to enable the inter-provincial movement of provincially inspected meat, provided specific inspection requirements are met.
- Requests for Ministerial Exemptions will be assessed and granted on a case-by-case basis for the purpose of alleviating shortages in any province or territory.
- So far, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has not received any request from the provinces or territories for Ministerial Exemptions for the inter-provincial movement of provincially inspected meat products.
- The *Food and Drugs Act* (FDA), the *Food and Drug Regulations* (FDR) and certain provisions of the *Safe Food for Canadians Act* (SFCA) as well as other relevant federal, provincial and territorial laws will continue to apply to all provincially inspected meat products. Food labels must be truthful and not misleading and the information should continue to be provided in both official languages.

4) ADJUSTMENT OF SERVICES

- The CFIA is continuing to deliver critical services that preserve the integrity of Canada's food safety system while safeguarding its animal and plant resource base.
- Appropriate oversight of domestic production and imported food products are essential to meeting that objective while also supporting trade and the supply chain, including through the certification of exports.
- CFIA continues to prioritize critical services for Canadians related to:
 - Food safety investigations and recalls
 - Mandatory regulated inspection presence (e.g., meat slaughter)
 - Emergency response (e.g., animal disease)
 - Export permissions and associated inspection (prioritized if/as required)
 - Import permissions and associated inspection (prioritized if/as required)
 - Laboratory diagnostics in support of the above
 - Critical communication notices

- The Agency is gradually resuming work beyond critical services, including some inspection services and laboratory operations that were temporarily suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The CFIA will continue to monitor developments regarding COVID-19 and make adjustments to its service delivery plans as needed, while always prioritizing critical services.
- The Agency is adopting a risk-based approach to prioritize the resumption of its activities. The resumption of services also varies by region, as CFIA staff need to comply with the provincial and national public health guidance that is in effect where they work.
- Several new measures have been implemented to help with the transition back to near normal operations within the CFIA's 13 laboratories, including: social distancing, rotational shifts, enhanced cleaning and disinfection, precautions for service contractors, and guidance on how to proceed if positive cases of COVID-19 occur among laboratory staff.
- Industry remains responsible for the safety and quality of the food that it produces, imports and exports. Despite the current pandemic situation, the CFIA will continue to exercise its enforcement discretion as appropriate.
- If the CFIA finds issues of non-compliance, it may use its wide range of enforcement tools to encourage compliance.
- This evolving situation highlights the importance of continued collaboration and communication between the CFIA and industry, partners and stakeholders.

5) TEMPORARY ENFORCEMENT DISCRETION - LABELLING & PACKAGING

- At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the CFIA provided temporary enforcement flexibilities for non-food safety labelling requirements for foodservice and prepackaged meat products.
- The temporary enforcement flexibilities were introduced in April 2020 (for foodservice products) and June 2020 (for prepackaged meat products) and were extended in September 2020 to continue to provide industry with certain labelling and packaging flexibilities. This helped to reduce the risk of food waste and food shortages due to the pandemic.
- Under the temporary measures, food businesses could, under specific conditions:
 - o sell food products that were made in Canada and intended for foodservice (such as hotels, restaurants and institutions) to consumers through retail if certain specific labelling information was included
 - o re-import foodservice products made, packaged and labelled in Canada according to U.S. labelling requirements to sell to Canadian foodservice without label changes
 - o provide label information for prepackaged meat in any legible format or in any place on the label or otherwise made available, such as a sticker or a highly visible sign at the point of purchase
- Flexibility was also provided for labelling format, language requirements and standard container size requirements.

- The temporary measures sought to provide industry with flexibility while maintaining food safety and supporting Canada's economy.
- Based on industry feedback (who had originally relied on these flexibilities), it was determined that they were no longer required. Industry was notified in advance that the flexibilities would expire on December 31, 2020. Industry was also informed that the CFIA could re-instate these flexibilities at a later time if needed during the COVID-19 response.

6) TRAINING FOR NEW AND RETURNING MEAT INSPECTORS

- To support the need to deliver food inspections and protect the food supply without putting undue pressure on its existing workforce, the CFIA continues to hire additional inspectors and veterinarians.
- As of January 22, 2021, the Agency has hired 374 inspectors and laboratory staff, and 69 veterinarians to help deliver operations that maintain the integrity of Canada's food safety system, and protect the health of plants and animals.
- These additional inspectors include retired inspectors, inspection staff that work with other commodities (including those who have been meat inspectors in the past), meat inspection staff that currently work for the provinces, and new hires.
- Training provided by the CFIA is tailored to each individual's level of experience with meat inspections.
- The additional inspectors who have done this job before are being provided refresher training.
- All new inspectors are trained and mentored by current CFIA meat inspectors in addition to online training and readings.
- Staff who have not previously worked in meat inspections are provided the normal training for the specific tasks they will be performing. They will not do anything beyond those tasks.
 - For example, a new slaughter inspector could perform humane transportation inspection tasks, but would not assess an establishment's preventative control plan.
- Mentoring and supervision for these tasks will be the focus of training and will be the same as the normal training for inspectors.
- No inspector will be deployed to duties for which they have not been properly trained and assessed.

7) PROVINCIAL/FEDERAL RESOURCE SHARING

- To support the need to deliver food inspections and protect the food supply without putting undue pressure on its existing workforce, the CFIA has implemented work arrangements with several provincial and territorial inspection authorities.
- Provincial meat inspectors are being thoroughly trained to support CFIA inspection activities on a temporary basis if there are COVID-19 related inspector shortages.

- These inspectors are trained to perform specific tasks and are mentored and supervised by current CFIA meat inspectors, as any new inspector would be.
- In some provinces, CFIA inspectors are trained to support provincial inspectors.
- Resource sharing arrangements are in place with Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia and Manitoba, and CFIA continues to work with Quebec under an existing agreement. There is also an agreement in principle with Saskatchewan for a two-way resource sharing agreement for meat inspectors.

SAFETY OF EMPLOYEES IN ESTABLISHMENTS

8) CFIA EMPLOYEE SAFETY

- The CFIA is committed to protecting the health and safety of its employees while maintaining critical inspection services.
- All facilities should follow appropriate public health protocols and seek guidance from local public health authorities.
- All facilities should enhance their cleaning and sanitation efforts to control any risks associated with workers who are ill. This is in addition to regular cleaning and sanitation under their preventive controls.
- The CFIA has advised all employees that they have a duty to follow the guidance of health authorities to protect public health.
- The CFIA has also asked employees to follow the health and safety protocols put in place at the establishments in which they work.
- CFIA employees (including inspectors) who are exhibiting any signs or symptoms of illness have been advised to contact their managers and stay home.
- CFIA inspectors and veterinarians complete a pre-shift CFIA health self-assessment questionnaire and are asked to stay home when sick or if they have come into close contact with someone with COVID-19. Further, inspectors participate in operator screening processes for employees where appropriate to do so.
- Employees always have the right to refuse work if they have reasonable cause to believe there is danger.
 - o Danger means any hazard, condition or activity that could reasonably be expected to be an imminent or serious threat to the life or health of a person exposed to it before the hazard or condition can be corrected or the activity altered.
- The CFIA is committed to maintaining critical inspection services and has a plan in place to address potential inspector absenteeism.
- To support the need to deliver food inspections and protect the food supply without putting undue pressure on its existing workforce, the CFIA is also:
 - o Temporarily bringing back CFIA employees who have recently retired and hiring and training new inspectors and veterinarians. As of January 22, CFIA has hired 374 inspectors and laboratory staff and 69 veterinarians to help deliver operations that

maintain the integrity of Canada's food safety system, and protect the health of plants and animals.

- o Exploring work arrangements with provincial and territorial inspection authorities. Resource sharing arrangements are already in place with Ontario, British Columbia, Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan, and CFIA continues to work with Quebec under an existing agreement.
- o Reassigning staff to areas of high priority and providing them with necessary training and tools to properly execute food safety inspections. When reassigning staff, CFIA looks first for volunteers. If no volunteers are currently available, the CFIA can ask employees with similar job descriptions and appropriate training to support meat inspection work.

9) CFIA MEAT INSPECTORS IN MEAT ESTABLISHMENTS

- Given that federally registered meat establishments require CFIA inspection staff on site in order to operate, the CFIA is working closely with establishments to determine what capacity is required to ensure food safety and prevent pressures on the meat supply.
- CFIA continues to maintain the appropriate number of inspectors in meat establishments.
- The CFIA is committed to maintaining critical inspection services and has a plan in place to address potential inspector absenteeism.

10) MULTIPLE ESTABLISHMENT VISITS

- The CFIA is making best efforts to have veterinarians and inspectors work in a single establishment. However, current industry demands may require same-day oversight or inspection services at more than one establishment.
- When multiple establishment visits are required, CFIA employees submit to the health and safety protocols in place at those establishments to ensure that their exposure to the COVID-19 virus – and the exposure of others at the establishment – are appropriately mitigated. These include:
 - o completing a pre- and post-shift CFIA health self-assessment questionnaire
 - o participating in operator screening processes for employees where appropriate to do so
 - o using face masks and / or shields while in the establishment
- The CFIA has also hired additional inspection staff to minimize the need for movement of staff between work locations, and has set up work arrangements with provincial and territorial inspection authorities in an effort to meet industry demands without putting undue pressure on its existing workforce.

11) PPE

- The health and safety of employees is a top priority.
- In order to protect the health and safety of its employees, the CFIA expects that each establishment operator abide by the advice and guidance provided by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), as well as by local public health authorities in addressing the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Masks and face shields are made available to all CFIA employees, such as meat inspectors, who cannot practice physical distancing.
- Non-medical disposable masks are available at worksites for staff delivering critical inspection services.
- The Agency works with Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) to source and procure a variety of personal protective equipment such as masks, visors, face shields, gloves, wipes and goggles. Staff requiring equipment can speak with their manager.
- Protective equipment will be considered for other operations, as required.

12) CFIA EMPLOYEES WITH COVID-19

- In the first phase of reporting, prior to May 11, we had 36 cases of COVID-19 among our employees. We did not have a new case between May 11 and September 15, 2020. However since September 15, we have had 72 new cases.
- Paid leave is available for employees who are ill, as well as various mental health resources to assist them in dealing with their diagnosis.
- CFIA follows direction from the local public health authority and the employee's medical practitioner with respect to the employee's return to duties.
- The CFIA is committed to maintaining critical inspection services and has a plan in place to address inspector absences.
- CFIA wants to be as transparent as possible in these circumstances, but must also respect the privacy of its employees and will not provide specific details of any individual employee.

13) OVERTIME FOR CFIA INSPECTION STAFF

- Given that federally licensed meat establishments require CFIA inspection staff on site in order to operate, CFIA is working closely with establishments to determine what capacity is required to ensure food safety and prevent pressures on the meat supply.
- Establishments routinely ask CFIA inspection staff to work shifts over and above what is outlined in the work shift agreements. These shifts are often accommodated when inspectors can be made available.

- As the situation evolves, information and updates will continue to be communicated early and frequently to partners, industry and Canadians.
- The work done by the CFIA's front line staff, and their dedication to it, are critically important to the mission and mandate of the Agency. The CFIA recently worked collaboratively with our Bargaining Agents to successfully negotiate, ratify and sign four renewal Collective Agreements covering all of our represented employees. Those renewal agreements include significant wage increases, which also impact on overtime rates, and substantial enhancements to terms and conditions of employment for these valued employees.

7) HOT TOPICS

A) COVID-19 AT BC MEAT PLANTS

Query Questions and Answers

1. Has the CFIA found any regulatory violations, issued any fines or orders to BC meat plants related to COVID?
2. If so, how do BC plants compare to those in other provinces?
3. Have CFIA inspectors contracted COVID at meat plants? If so, how many, where, when, etc....
4. Has the CFIA made changes in policy or practice with the goal of protecting inspectors and workers from COVID?

Response:

Questions about the public health investigation should be directed to the BC Center for Disease Control: [BC Center for Disease Control](#)

Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) oversight at federally registered meat establishments relates to food safety. CFIA veterinarians and inspectors are present to provide food safety inspection oversight whenever there are slaughter activities taking place. The CFIA also provides food safety inspection services related to the preparation and packaging of meat and export certification.

CFIA is committed to protecting the health and safety of its employees while maintaining critical inspection services. CFIA employees follow the health and safety guidance issued by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and Health Canada, as well as by local public health authorities, and follow protocols put in place at the establishments in which they work that serve to mitigate risks of exposure to the COVID virus.

The CFIA has asked employees to follow the health and safety protocols put in place at the establishments in which they work. Any CFIA employees (including inspectors) who are exhibiting any signs or symptoms of illness have been advised to contact their managers and stay home.

When cases of COVID-19 occur in a food processing or meat slaughter establishment, the CFIA works with local public health to help determine the level of risk of exposure for CFIA employees.

Additionally, the CFIA has published guidance for industry to help them with their business planning and to ensure occupational health and safety of CFIA staff working at these sites. Information for industry can be found at the CFIA website: <https://www.inspection.gc.ca/covid-19/cfia-information-for-industry/eng/1584462704366/1584462704709#a3>.

B) INTERPROVINCIAL TRADE OF POULTRY

The Twin Maple Group of Companies headquartered in Abbotsford, British Columbia (BC) is operated by the Falk family (includes companies such as Fraser Valley Specialty Poultry, the Twin Maple Construction company which includes a lumber yard operation, construction business and

commercial building developer as well as the Clarion Tanks Ltd liquid management solution service).

In February 2015, the Canadian Food inspection Agency (CFIA) received a complaint that Twin Maple Produce Ltd., a non-federally (only provincially) registered meat establishment in BC, was allegedly engaged in the interprovincial trade of poultry (chicken, duck, squab, and goose) products to Alberta.

This long standing matter involved eight separate Notices of Violation (NOV), two distinct applicants and two hearings:

- seven (7) violations under section 8 of the former MIA were issued against Twin Maple Produce Ltd., for sending or conveying meat inter-provincially without meeting the mandatory requirements (total \$48,000 penalty). The seven initial interprovincial transport NOV's were heard first between September 10-14th, 2018.

CART rendered its decision on June 6th 2019 setting aside the NOV's given the lack of evidence to support a finding that Twin Maple was part of the "supply chain logistics" to send its product interprovincially.

- one (1) violation was issued to the company's President, Ken Falk, under section 14 of the former Meat Inspection Act (MIA), for failing to provide documents requested by a CFIA inspector (\$10,000 penalty). This obstruction NOV matter was heard in a second hearing before the CART from September 30 - October 4, 2019.

On April 3, 2020, the CART rendered its decision and set aside the Notice of Violation and \$10,000 penalty issued by the CFIA against Mr. Falk for obstructing an investigation. The CART held that the CFIA did not prove that the failure to provide the customer list obstructed or interfered with the investigation.

Administrative Monetary Penalties (AMPs) are part of a comprehensive set of enforcement tools that the CFIA may use to encourage industry to comply with applicable federal legislation. The decision to issue a Notice of Violation under the authority of Administrative Monetary Penalties Act is taken very seriously and takes into account the gravity of the alleged violation, the compliance history of the regulated party and the intent associated with the alleged violation.

CANADA AGRICULTURAL REVIEW TRIBUNAL (CART) – DECISION ON OBSTUCTION

The Canada Agricultural Review Tribunal (CART) is an independent body that was established by Parliament under the Canada Agricultural Products Act. It provides independent oversight of federal agencies' use of Administrative Monetary Penalties in relation to agriculture and agri-food.

Anyone who disagrees with a notice of violation can request a review under the Agriculture and Agri-Food Administrative Monetary Penalties Act.

As permitted by law, Mr. Falk requested a review of the obstruction NOV by the CART. In September 2016, the CART found the request for review to be admissible. On March 15, 2019, he also served a Notice of Constitutional Question alleging that paragraph 13(1)(c) (powers of inspector to require the production of documents), subsections 13(2) (obligation to provide reasonable assistance to an inspector) and 14(1) (prohibiting obstruction) of the MIA offend section 8 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which protects against unreasonable searches and seizures.

The obstruction NOV was heard before the CART from September 30 - October 4, 2019.

On April 3, 2020, the CART rendered its decision and set aside the Notice of Violation and \$10,000 penalty issued by the CFIA against Mr. Falk for obstructing an investigation. The CART held that the CFIA did not prove that the failure to provide the customer list obstructed or interfered with the investigation.

CURRENT STATUS

There have been several letters received at the Canadian Food Inspection by Ken Falk and his supporters before and after the CART decision. Most recently, in a letter addressed to CFIA's President dated June 26, 2020, Mr. Falk alleged that the CFIA acted "based upon conjecture, speculation, hunches, hearsay, or assumptions" and suggested it acts as "judge, jury and executioner" using its own "flawed evidence". Mr. Falk has asked for CFIA officers to be held to account for what he considers to be "unacceptable behaviour by any government official", and has requested the reimbursement of his and Twin Maple Produces Ltd.'s legal fees (totaling \$214,384.24).

In consultation with legal counsel, the CFIA's Vice-President of Operations responded to Mr. Falk's letter on July 20, 2020, to advise that careful consideration was given to the issues raised and provide assurances that "CFIA compliance and enforcement activities are guided by the principles of fairness, impartiality and transparency with consideration given to the authorities set out in a legislative framework and risk management principles. Trained, designated personnel carry out compliance and enforcement activities in an unbiased manner. All CFIA employees carry out their activities in a manner consistent with the Agency's corporate values and ethics, as set out in the CFIA's statement of values document, "Our Values: Safeguarding the Canadian Public, Environment and Economy", which can be found at the following link: <https://www.inspection.gc.ca/about-cfia/organizationalstructure/mandate/eng/1299780188624/1319164463699>."

The Agency will be hosting a half-day virtual consultation session in Spring 2021 with select small and medium-sized businesses in the agri-food sector. The consultation will aim to support an ongoing collaboration with industry, gauge the Agency's service improvement work to date and garner an increased understanding of industry's ongoing regulatory support requirements. CFIA is committed to ensuring that its staff are always respectful and professional in their interactions with industry.

The Agency will continue to make this a priority as it trains and prepares inspectors for their daily tasks. The Agency will also be conducting more public opinion research with food businesses in 2021, including a survey with small and medium-sized businesses and consumers. The survey will include questions on satisfaction with the CFIA's services.

LEGAL FEES

Under the AMPs scheme, the Canada Agricultural Review Tribunal does not have the legal authority to issue legal cost award orders. Individuals and companies are not required to have legal representation for a hearing before the Tribunal.

THE SAFE FOOD FOR CANADIANS ACT

In relation to the seven interprovincial transport NOVs, Twin Maple Produce Ltd. was issued Notice of Violations with penalty pursuant to the Agriculture and Agri-Food Administrative Monetary Penalties Act for alleged violations of the now repealed Meat Inspection Act (MIA). The MIA stipulated that no person shall send or convey a meat product from one province to another unless it was prepared or stored in a registered establishment that was operated in accordance with the MIA and Meat Inspection Regulations.

The Safe Food for Canadians Act (SFCA) came fully into force on January 15, 2019, with the consequential repealing of the more prescriptive MIA, which was considered by many stakeholders to be more costly and burdensome.

The SFCA and Safe Food for Canadians Regulations (SFCR) were designed to be consistent with international standards and to meet trading partner requirements. The outcome-based SFCR allows flexibility to achieve federal food safety outcomes. For smaller- and medium-sized provincially regulated food businesses wanting to expand their markets, meeting the outcomes required can be achieved in a variety of ways, which might make opting into federal regulation easier under the SFCR.

Under the SFCA, it is the responsibility of the person who is sending a food from one province to another to ensure the food was prepared by a license holder and meets the requirements of the SFCR. Generally a person who is preparing food and selling it only within the province with no intent of inter-provincial trade, (which was the argument successfully advanced by Mr. Falk) would not be subject to enforcement actions if their product ends up in another province without their knowledge. It would be the person who sent the food to the other province who would be in non-compliance.

KEY MESSAGES

- This Government is committed to protecting the Canadian food supply through laws which set out requirements that must be respected when foods are produced or prepared for inter-provincial trade.
- The issue relates to two sets of Administrative Monetary Penalties assessed to a corporate entity and an individual director under the former federal Meat Inspection Act, both of which were successfully appealed before the Canadian Agricultural Review Tribunal in June 2019 and April 2020.
- The Canadian Agricultural Review Tribunal concluded that in relation to events dating back to February 2015, Twin Maple and Mr. Ken Falk did not commit violations and the monetary penalties issued by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency were set aside.
- The administrative monetary penalties (AMPs) legislation does not require the Canadian Food Inspection Agency or other unsuccessful applicants to cover legal fees related to appeals before the Canadian Agricultural Review Tribunal.

C) PRIVATE MEMBERS BILL C-205

Private Members' Bill C-205, Act to amend the Health of Animals Act was introduced and read a first time in the House of Commons on February 18, 2020 and is expected to be up for second reading, second hour of debate, on February 25, 2020.

The Bill was sponsored by MP John Barlow, the former Critic for Agriculture and current Member of the Standing Committee on Health.

This enactment amends the Health of Animals Act to make it an offence to enter, without lawful authority or excuse, a place in which animals are kept if doing so could result in the exposure of the animals to a disease or toxic substance that is capable of affecting or contaminating them.

The Bill would provide for punishment, including imprisonment (up to two years) and/or significant monetary fines for individuals (up to \$250K) or corporations (up to \$500K) who contravene its provisions.

Minister Bibeau is quoted as saying in reference to boosting trespassing legislation, "[i]t has to be done at the provincial level, but I'm following it closely because this is something that I care about," she said. "This is not acceptable, that our farmers are being threatened for feeding us."

The provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario have passed laws aimed at preventing trespassing on farms or whistleblowing on farms, during transport and/or at slaughterhouses. Similar legislation is also being considered in British Columbia, Manitoba and Atlantic Canada and has been passed in several US states (and overturned in some states).

KEY MESSAGE

- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is aware that this Private Member's Bill is currently on the order paper in the House of Commons.
- Effective biosecurity measures are essential to protect animal health and well-being and the protection offered by biosecurity improves the mental health of farmers and the marketability of farm products.
- The CFIA provides significant support to producers and industry to bolster biosecurity on farm and in processing facilities. Biosecurity is the set of practices and principles that protect a population of animals from the introduction and spread of infectious diseases. Currently, the CFIA provides technical advice and guidance to industry and P/Ts on biosecurity measures (standards, new risks, other preventive approaches).
- Biosecurity is recognized as a critical and effective industry- and producer-driven tool to protect animal health at production sites. Current biosecurity mitigation measures do not focus on trespassing because the introduction of a pathogen or pest in Canadian livestock is most likely to result through routine animal health management practices such as moving animals between herds/flocks without appropriate biosecurity measures, movement of personnel and service providers in previous contact with other animals/environs and movement of contaminated equipment, manure or carcasses. The Bill targets a low risk threat to biosecurity. To date, there have been no documented cases of unlawful trespassing on farms triggering an animal health crisis.

- In Canada, at the farm-level, biosecurity is principally the responsibility of agricultural producers and agricultural service providers, and they are supported by industry associations and P/T and Federal governments through funding, programming, and guidance documents. A major component of federal funding for this support is the Canadian Agricultural Partnership (the Partnership) administered by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC).
- Protecting animal welfare in Canada is a shared responsibility between governments (federal, provincial and territorial) and industry (producers, transporters and staff in registered slaughter establishments).
- The CFIA is responsible for the enforcement of the *Health of Animals Act and Regulations* and works closely with the provinces and industry on biosecurity standards and other animal welfare issues.

Federal Instruments to Address this Issue

- At the federal level, the *Health of Animals Act (the Act)* governs the rules around diseases and toxic substances that may affect animals or that may be transmitted by animals to persons, and respecting the protection of animals. All authorities outlined in the Act pertain to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA or Agency) is responsible for enforcing the requirements of *the Act*, which features punishments, including fines and imprisonment, for exposing animals to diseases and toxic substances, or actions which contribute to diseases/toxic substances being transmitted from animals to persons. The maximum fine for an indictable offence under *the Act* is \$250K and the most severe punishment is imprisonment for two years.

Criminal Code

- Under the Criminal Code of Canada (the Criminal Code), the trespassing activities are captured under the mischief offence (subsection 430(1)), namely, the obstruction, interruption or interference with the lawful enjoyment or operation of property. Punishments include fines of up to \$5,000 and up to two years in prison. A trespass offence in section 177 of the Criminal Code, against loitering or prowling at night near a dwelling house without lawful excuse could also be applicable in such some cases, with the same punishments applying.

Trespassing and Mental Health

This Bill has also been associated with concerns over mental health, anxiety and stress that ensue when activists trespass on private property. Statistics Canada data shows that 7% of Canadians perceive their mental health as fair or poor. However, farmers are a particularly vulnerable group, with one study showing that 45% of respondents reported high stress levels, 58% anxiety and 35% depression (University of Guelph, 2019). The mental health of farmers was also underscored by a report by the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food (AGRI) in May 2019. This report included a recommendation to combat the growing incidence of cyber bullying, intimidation, and threats targeted at Canada's agricultural workers. Many programs at the provincial level exist to support the mental health of farmers. AAFC continues to work with provincial and territorial governments to respond to the AGRI recommendations.

D) HORSE EXPORTS

SUMMARY

- Horses are considered food animals under Canadian regulations.
- Canada ships several hundred horses to Japan every month on a bilaterally negotiated Canadian health certificate for permanent export. The horses are fed by Canadian farmers to Japanese standards and harvested and processed in Japan.
- The majority of horses exported to Japan are from Alberta. At this time, there are three active exporters in Alberta and one in Manitoba.
- Japan has very specific sanitary health requirements for import of horses from Canada. The animals must be isolated on CFIA-approved premises, tested for various diseases and inspected by CFIA inspection staff. If they meet all the export conditions, an official health certificate is issued to the exporter or its agent.
- The CFIA continues to monitor the shipping loads through pre-embarkation inspections and feedback from the transport companies. Under its legislation, the CFIA can take a number of enforcement actions, including for example, penalties and prosecution.

BACKGROUND

Canada exports thousands of horses to Japan every year. Japan's market demands that horses be imported, fed to certain standards for a period of time and then slaughtered for food. Due to this, horses are imported on a permanent export certificate (rather than a slaughter certificate).

The export of live animals lies under the legislative authority of the Health of Animals Act and Regulations. Horses are considered food animals. Export follows international trade recommendations. Part of the CFIA's mandate is to ensure that animals are transported in a humane manner and that only healthy animals, which meet the import health requirements of an importing country, are exported from Canada.

All horses going to Japan are inspected by the CFIA inspection staff prior to export in order to verify compliance, as required by Section 19 of the Health of Animals Act.

The CFIA inspectors work diligently to enforce the Health of Animals Act and Regulations as mandated, to ensure that all animals are properly certified, fit to travel and transported humanely in a way that does not cause injury or undue suffering. The CFIA continues to monitor the shipping loads through pre-embarkation inspections and feedback from the transport companies.

The CFIA strongly urges those who witness events that they believe to be in violation of the Health of Animals Act and Regulations to bring their concerns to the immediate attention of CFIA inspection staff. The CFIA will investigate and take appropriate actions as needed.

CURRENT STATUS

The transportation of horses to Japan was the subject to a judicial review of the CFIA's practice and/or policies associated with head room and crating concerns which has been dismissed.

In December 2019, the Federal Court ruled that the CFIA is engaged in the protection of animal welfare during export and is reasonably exercising its discretion in the enforcement of the Health of Animals Act and Regulations. The review determined that the CFIA did not violate the regulations that pertain to horse inspections for humane transportation. The court's decision to dismiss the case is currently being appealed.

CONSIDERATIONS

- The CFIA has no authority to monitor or enforce compliance with Canadian regulations or standards in another country.
- Any Canadian exporter who has successfully negotiated a commercial contract with an importer in Japan and who can comply with Japan's import conditions may export horses to Japan.
- The CFIA has no legal authority to prohibit a Canadian operator from exporting animal(s) if the shipment meets all sanitary health requirements of the importing country, and if it is in compliance with the humane transport regulations.
- The CFIA is aware of 5 horse deaths related to air shipments to Japan since 2013. Approximately 40,000 animals have been transported during this period, which is a mortality rate of 0.012%. This is very low mortality.
- There are groups that oppose the classification of horses as food animals. They consider horses to be similar to pets and the groups' moral compass does not agree with the use of horses as sources of edible protein.

KEY MESSAGES

- The export of horses to Japan was the subject of a judicial review application that determined that the CFIA did not violate the regulations that pertain to horse inspections for humane transportation.
- The court dismissed the case and that decision is currently being appealed. As such, I cannot comment any further on this issue at this time.

E) HUMANE TRANSPORTATION

Under the Health of Animals Act (HAA) and the Health of Animals Regulations (HAR), the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has legislative authority for the humane treatment of all animals during transportation into Canada or anywhere across Canada, and for oversight of the humane slaughter of food animals in federally inspected slaughter plants.

The humane transport requirements under the Health of Animals Regulations were the result of a number of consultations CFIA had with stakeholders since the early 2000s. Most stakeholders agree that amendments are needed. The amendments: provide clarification by adding definitions; improve animal welfare; reduce the risk of suffering during transportation; better align with Canada's international trading partners; and remove obsolete or unnecessary requirements to reduce the burden on industry.

The amended humane transport regulations were published in the Canada Gazette, Part II, February 20, 2019 (<http://www.gazette.gc.ca/rp-pr/p2/2019/2019-02-20/html/sor-dors38-eng.html>). The amended regulations came into effect on February 20, 2020.

Due to the challenges faced by the cattle, veal and sheep sectors in meeting the reduced transportation times and new requirements for feed, water and rest times, the CFIA established four working groups which include industry representatives of the national industry associations – (one

with the beef sector, one with the dairy sector, one with veal sector and one with the sheep sector) These working groups serve to identify issues and work on solutions concerning the transport practices of cattle, young calves and sheep with respect to complying with the amendments of the animal transportation regulations.

The CFIA worked with industry to implement a two-year transition period, focused on education, for the feed, water and rest maximum time requirements in the amendments. This allowed time for industry to work out logistical issues, gather data on impacts of requirements, and work on effective solutions.

CFIA is committed to working with industry and researchers to identify future research needs.

The CFIA has a directive requiring its inspectors to report animal abuse to the appropriate enforcement agency when these fall outside of the CFIA's mandate.

The Government of Canada participates in national and international groups and organizations that are working together to improve and harmonize animal welfare practices throughout all phases of production and slaughter.

Moreover, the Government makes available funding support for animal welfare projects under the Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP). For example, under CAP, the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's AgriAssurance Program is continuing to share the cost of projects aimed at improving animal welfare. Major new funding of up to \$4.56 million was announced under this Program in February 2019, which will support both new and existing projects, including:

- Updating the Transportation Code of Practice for the care and handling of farm animals during transport. This initiative will complement and support industry implementation of the amended animal transportation regulations under the Health of Animals Act;
- Updating the Dairy Cattle Code of Practice that will address new scientific findings, changes in industry practices and changes in market and consumer demands;
- Updating the Goat Code of Practice that will respond to growing buyer and consumer expectations for on-farm animal welfare; and
- Developing a new Code of Practice for farmed finfish. Fish welfare is a new and emerging animal welfare concern for which the industry needs to be able to demonstrate its commitment and alignment with public values and consumer expectations.

These animal welfare projects are being managed by the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC), which is a division of the National Farmed Animal Health and Welfare Council.

Recent media coverage expressed concerns about a shipment of exotic birds which were intercepted transiting Canada from Guyana to Japan, specifically about humane transportation conditions.

Canada does not allow commercial shipments of birds from Guyana into Canada due to animal health considerations. The CFIA took appropriate regulatory actions by ordering the birds removed from Canada.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency has the authority to order the removal of animals from Canada if there are reasonable grounds to believe that they were imported in contravention of the Act and Regulations or could be affected by a disease.

KEY MESSAGES

- Updated animal transportation regulations, came into force in February 2020, and seek to improve the health and well-being of animals during the entire transportation process.
- These updated regulations were the result of 10 years of consultations with farm groups, industry, other stakeholders and the Canadian public.
- A two-year transition was provided period continues for the feed, water and rest requirement provisions to enable industry to work through logistical issues and implement effective solutions.
- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is committed to working with industry and researchers to assess scientific data on humane transportation that could help inform future considerations.

RESPONSIVE REGARDING INSPECTIONS

- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency conducts inspections related to the transportation of animals into, within, or out of Canada.
- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is present at all times in federally inspected abattoirs when slaughter operations are under way.
- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency investigates animal welfare incidents within its jurisdiction and responds to instances of non-compliance with appropriate enforcement measures.

RESPONSIVE REGARDING HORSE SLAUGHTER

- The methods used at federally-registered horse slaughter establishments in Canada are aligned with internationally accepted standards.
- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency's oversight verifies the effective application of stunning to render the animal unconscious and insensible to any pain and distress associated with slaughter activities.
- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency requires the operator of a slaughter plant to evaluate each animal immediately after stunning to make sure that it was effective.

RESPONSIVE REGARDING EXOTIC BIRDS

- The commercial shipment of birds from Guyana into Canada is prohibited. Their shipment through Canada to another country is prohibited as well.
- A shipment of exotic birds from Guyana that was in transit through Canada was found to be in contravention of Canadian import requirements. As a result, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency issued a Notice to Remove from Canada as per existing regulatory authorities.

F) CWD

First detected in Canada in 1996, chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a contagious and fatal disease that affects cervids (deer, elk, moose, caribou and reindeer). It can be spread by infected animals and through a contaminated environment.

The management of chronic wasting disease in Canada is a shared responsibility between the federal/provincial/territorial and Indigenous governments as well as farmed cervid producers themselves.

Canada has a suite of regulatory and policy measures to manage CWD under the Health of Animals Act and Regulations. CWD is a reportable disease under this Act. This means that all suspected cases must be reported to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) for immediate investigation. If CFIA determines that CWD may be the cause of disease, the animal(s) may be ordered destroyed.

In 2017, CFIA updated the national standard for a Herd Certification Program (HCP) established in 2002. CWD-HCP is a program delivered and administered by third parties and audited by CFIA. The updated CWD-HCP requires enrolled producers to take preventative measures against CWD in keeping with the current science of the disease. These include limiting the introduction of live cervids into a herd, testing mature dead cervids, and practicing additional biosecurity measures such as protecting feed from access by wild animals.

As of April 1, 2019, only producers enrolled in and compliant with a CWD-HCP for at least 12 months are deemed eligible for depopulation and associated compensation.

CFIA has also developed an enhancement to the CWD-HCP response, whereby CFIA may enact depopulation and compensation measures on the first cervid farm to detect CWD (not only CWD-HCP farms) in provinces/territories where CWD has not yet been detected. This enhancement is only available if the responsible wildlife authority in the affected province/territory agrees to enact eradication measures in wildlife surrounding the infected farm. Historically, this drastic approach has been the only effective measure of preventing establishment of CWD within a geographic region. This collaborative, aggressive response was implemented in Quebec in response to their first case detected in September of 2018. CFIA is currently negotiating similar agreements with wildlife ministries in two provinces who have not yet detected CWD in their farmed or wild cervid populations.

There has been no known transmission of CWD to humans. Extensive disease surveillance in Canada over the last 50 years and elsewhere has not provided any direct evidence that CWD has infected humans. However, experts continue to study CWD and its potential to infect other animals and humans. As a precaution, measures are in place to prevent known infected animals from entering the food chain, including:

- o mandatory testing of all cervids sent for slaughter (over the age of 12 months) at all abattoirs in Saskatchewan, Alberta, Manitoba, Yukon and Quebec. This is based on provincial testing requirements and applies to federal, provincial and territorial abattoirs in those provinces. Live animal inspections are performed before slaughter and carcasses are detained while they are being tested.
- o not allowing animals known to be infected with CWD to enter the commercial food chain
- o reporting all suspected cases immediately to CFIA, as CWD is a “reportable disease” under the Health of Animals Act.

The Health Portfolio has updated risk communications products in collaboration with their federal, provincial and territorial partners.

The provinces and territories take the lead role in monitoring and implementing any control measures taken in regards to CWD in wild cervids. These include the granting of licenses to allow cervid farming in some provinces, permits to import cervids from out of province, as well as restrictions on baiting and feeding of wild cervids. Some provinces offer free CWD testing of hunted wild cervids. Testing all hunted wild cervids would exceed testing capacity. Environment and Climate Change Canada is supporting the provincial and territorial wildlife managers in collaborating on their CWD-related measures.

KEY MESSAGES

- Along with provinces and industry, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is working to prevent and control the spread of chronic wasting disease in farmed deer and elk.
- The Government of Canada is currently working with provincial, and territorial agriculture and environmental resource counterparts to decide whether to review the 2011 Canadian National Chronic Wasting Disease Control Strategy.
- Canadian federal control programs are available to deer and elk producers that take precautions to prevent chronic wasting disease from entering their farms. These programs also assist farmers to respond to the disease.

SUPPLEMENTAL RESPONSE (Food Safety)

- While there is no direct evidence to suggest that the disease may be transmitted to humans, Health Canada recommends taking a precautionary approach; preventing all parts of a known infected animal from entering the food chain.
- Federal, provincial and territorial governments are working collaboratively to ensure that no food products from known positive animals are allowed to enter the food chain.

8) QUESTION FROM RECENT COMMITTEE MEETINGS

A) AGRI, DECEMBER 10, 2020, SUPPLY MANAGEMENT COMPENSATION

Transcript: www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/43-2/AGRI/meeting-12/evidence

Members present (on camera) :

LPC: Pat Finnigan (Chair), Lynne Bessette, Kody Blois, Tim Louis

CPC: Liane Rood (1st Vice Chair), Dave Epp, Richard Lehoux, Warren Steinley

BQ: Yves Perron (2nd Vice Chair)

NDP: Alistair MacGregor

4:45 p.m. to 5:45 p.m.

Appearing

- Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau, P.C., M.P., Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food

Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food

- Annette Gibbons, Associate Deputy Minister
- Frédéric Seppey, Assistant Deputy Minister, Market and Industry Services Branch
- Tom Rosser, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy Branch

Canadian Food Inspection Agency

- Colleen Barnes, Vice-President, Policy and Programs

Summary of Q&As posed to and of pertinence to CFIA

1. We imported chicken from Brazil, I believe, in 2018. We did import 11.1 million kilograms. There have been some concerns from the Chicken Farmers of Canada about the standards that those chickens are raised in. What is the Government of Canada doing to ensure that those standards meet what we would expect with our chicken?

Minister Bibeau: Yes, of course, we are following what goes through the border as closely as we can and with the Act and the Regulations around the *Safe Food for Canadians*. We have increased our capacity and requirements to be sure that what comes, does meet the Canadian standards. You might be also talking about the 'Poule de Réforme'. Sorry, I'll just try to find my notes in English. Yes, it's spent fowl. I can tell you that this is one of the priorities that we have asked the border services to look at. We are also investing in ways to be able to tell the difference based on science, because it's not necessarily obvious. We have to develop the tools to control it.

2. Another really important issue with the United States comes with the issue of spent fowl. Chicken Farmers of Canada estimated, back when I met with them in February, that the amount of fraudulent labelling of poultry entering Canada from the United States can equal around \$200 million a year. Can you give us an update on how our efforts are going to crack down on this problem? We have just renegotiated our agreement with the United States. A certain amount of poultry is allowed to come into Canada, and that will increase. Of course, a lot is slipping through the cracks still, so how are we going to crack down on that?

Minister Bibeau: I wouldn't say it increased, because with the controls we have put in place in recent years, it has decreased. As I said, this is a sector that we have asked the Canada Border Services Agency to focus on. We are investing in additional means to control it. You know that we have the food policy for Canada, which also includes a dimension on food fraud. We have also given additional capacity to CFIA to have more control around that.

3. When I was meeting with Chicken Farmers of Canada last month, they were also worried about this second wave and the impact on processing facilities. They were worried that if there wasn't enough capacity, they might have to move to on-farm processing. Is your government in conversation with them about that and whether there might be any assistance offered to producers themselves to help them with on-farm processing?

Minister Bibeau: Annette might want to add something, but this is not something that falls under federal jurisdiction. I would be tempted to say that the provinces might have a word to say on that.

4. Financially, though, because the federal government has offered financial compensation for processing, I'm just wondering, if it had to go to on-farm processing, whether that would be something you would consider. It's just a concern I heard from them.

Minister Bibeau: The idea behind the compensation is to compensate them for markets they have lost, so whether they fall under the producers or the processors.... This is maybe something that will be interesting to pay attention to while we design the compensation program.

B) AGRI, NOVEMBER 26, 2020, MAIN ESTIMATES

Transcript: www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/43-2/AGRI/meeting-8/evidence

Members present

LPC: Pat Finnigan (Chair), Lyne Bessette, Kody Blois, Francis Drouin, Tim Louis

CPC: Lianne Rood (1st Vice Chair), Richard Lehoux, Martin Shields, Warren Steinley

BQ: Yves Perron (2nd Vice Chair)

NDP: Alistair MacGregor

Witnesses

3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Appearing

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau, P.C., M.P., Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food

3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food

- Chris Forbes, Deputy Minister
- Christine Walker, Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Management Branch

Canadian Food Inspection Agency

- Colleen Barnes, Vice-President, Policy and Programs

Summary of Q&As posed to and of pertinence CFIA

1. Neonics are a critical chemical that we use in the agricultural sector. If we're talking about sugar beets, it's critical to the sugar beet industry. My riding is the only place left in Canada where the sugar beet industry is manufacturing. Are you supportive of the continuation of the use of that chemical?

Minister Bibeau: I will let the scientific.... I would follow the advice of our scientists. These are the types of discussions that must be had very carefully. We want to protect our environment while we make sure that our producers are competitive, but the health of Canadians and the health of everybody eating Canadian food is the first priority. I'm not the one who will make.... I will listen to the experts on that. We want to make decisions based on evidence and science.

2. I was hoping to pivot. The COVID pandemic has impacted every aspect of our society, of course, including the farmers, and it's been a very tough year. Mental health is something that comes up a lot. It's important to the health of our farmers. I have had some difficult but important conversations, as I'm sure my colleagues have, with the farmers in my riding of Kitchener-Conestoga. It's important that we have resources to provide mental health support for those in the agricultural sector. We need to raise awareness. We need to destigmatize these issues and help the people who are suffering silently. Minister, can you share with us some of the measures our government is taking to address mental health issues in our agriculture sector?

Minister Bibeau: You will remember a few years ago we announced the transfer to provinces of \$5 billion for mental health, and I know that in Quebec, Minister Lamontagne, maybe a year ago, announced a few hundred million dollars for an initiative for farmers, although I don't remember the exact amount. I was very excited to see that our transfers to the provinces were, in some of them, utilized to offer direct services to farmers. I hope many other provinces will do the same as Quebec, because providing health services is, really, provincial. We are also

supporting Farm Credit Canada. It has put in place some resources to support its clients, and farmers in general. I think they are easily accessible through its website. We have invested \$240 million to develop, expand and launch virtual care and mental health tools. Obviously, our colleagues at the Public Health Agency are also providing different tools that are available to everyone, including farmers.

3. Minister, my question has to do with UFCW. I brought this question up with CFIA officials during our processing study. I think we all acknowledge the central role that labour plays in keeping agriculture and agri-food going, and I know we have a shortage of labour. For the workers who are employed and who have very real and legitimate concerns about their workplaces.... I know they submitted seven core recommendations to your ministry with regard to how they can make their workplaces safer. Some of the recommendations have been taken up quite well, but others are being applied quite haphazardly. Given that we're now in November and are going through a second wave, can you please explain to the committee how you are going to act upon the recommendations to ensure that there is uniform compliance by employers, so that our workers are feeling safe when they go to do this critical work?

Minister Bibeau: There are shared responsibilities between the provinces and the federal government on this issue, of course. You know about the \$77.5-million program that we have provided to the processors to help them put the right measures in place to protect their workers. When it comes to the CFIA, their first responsibility is to ensure that food is safe for Canadians while protecting their employees, but also to collaborate with and support the businesses by making sure the right protocols are applied, while these protocols are put in place by the regional or local public health services. It's a collaboration. There is only so far we can go as the federal government. If I may—I think it's a matter of language—were you talking about PACA in your last question? I was not sure.

4. For the Canadian Produce Marketing Association, that has been a long-standing ask. My question to you was, how are you going to advocate for the establishment of PACA, given that it was a unanimous recommendation of two standing committees? It's been quite some time since then.

Minister Bibeau: I'm sorry. I know a bit about this issue; it was just that I'm not using translation, so I'm doing my best. This is something we are following up on, but I think that the safe food for Canadians regulations are already a good step in the right direction to support them, giving us more capacity and the right measures to make sure that producers who enter into Canada apply the same rules. I know there's a difference between.... There is also a dispute resolution program included in this regulation, but I can't pretend that I have a clear answer. I don't have a clear answer, but this is something we keep working on. My deputy minister will probably be a bit more technically informed on this issue. You might want to ask him that question later.

5. African swine fever is a top-of-mind priority for pork producers. I had a recent Nova Scotia agriculture round table in my riding. You had the chance to participate and call in. This was one of the topics that came up in the pork context. Can you speak a little bit about the work our government is doing? A lot of producers talked about the important research and protection that's happening in that domain.

Minister Bibeau:

Yes. This is a very, very important priority for me. We are following this extremely closely, working with the provinces and working with the industry. We are doing everything we can, first to prevent the disease from entering the country and, second, to be ready, if ever it comes, to protect our farmers and protect our industry. We are negotiating zoning agreements, and have

actually concluded an agreement with the EU and United States. We're continuing this work. We have recently announced the promotion office for the pork sector. They have more resources to invest from their part as well in terms of protection and getting ready for that.

6. My questioning is around the change of regulations to do with the traceability of animals. This had been attempted to be started to be enforced. It would be fairs and rodeos and agricultural events. There was a significant change that would be under CFIA's direction and inspection. Are you familiar with this? It will be in effect in 2021, I believe.

VP Barnes: I'm familiar with the regulations, yes, but there's nothing changing on traceability in 2021. We have been working with the sector for quite a few years on the next round of changes. We're not even at the first stage of consultation on the next regulations. I think the most that would happen is that we would be consulting in 2021.

7. Well that's great to hear! The consulting, in a sense. As I've heard from agricultural Alberta, organizations, rodeos, events. The amount of information that I would have seen in the past on traceability. It's been tough this year as our rodeos and events, agricultural fairs have been cancelled because of COVID. But when I look at the Calgary Stampede for example, and the amount of work that it would do, with what I saw with the regulations. As a massive organization, they might be able to handle that. But when I move out to many of our community events, rodeos, winter events where they bring reindeer and other animals out, I've been told that they will be done. They do not have the manpower. These are all run by volunteers, they're not professionals. So there is great anxiety out there that I'm hearing from communities that do a lot of events with animals. Rodeos would be number one and some people think the Calgary Stampede is the only rodeo. I probably have 50 to 60 in my riding, three or four on the same weekend. But these are all run by community organizations and volunteers so the regulations as I saw them. These people say we're done. We can't do it because we're volunteers.

VP Barnes: Happy to keep working with stakeholders on these regulations. Obviously they have to make sense for industry. The reason traceability is important though is to try to make sure we protect the health of our Canadian beef herds, dairy herds on the cattle side. So that's sort of the balance. I do not foresee any path where there would be regulatory changes coming in on traceability next year. So we can keep talking with the sector, that is the plan. Just to add there that we're hoping that with technology, a lot of this is going to get easier for small producers and smaller organizations to be able to report and get us the information that we need.

8. I understand traceability. I have the biggest feedlots in the country in my riding. We're talking 50,000 to 60,000 head. I understand traceability, and the industry understands traceability, from the cow-calf operator to the packing plant. We understand why that's important and why it's needed, but to put this back on volunteers....I hope you'll listen to and consult with the small communities. We have rodeos where there are no communities. There are a few volunteers in those areas. We have Pollockville. There's nobody there—other than the huge arena—and volunteers come out and thousands of people show up for the world's biggest bronc-riding competition. But they're volunteers, so when you're talking about technology.... With what I've seen in the regulations at this point, I would understand why they're done. They can't do it with volunteers. Traceability in the industry I understand, but in community fairs...? When you're talking about the chickens, the roosters, the geese, the donkeys and the reindeer that show up in my winter one, I think that's.... I hope you get that back from them, because this is just not viable. It's not viable. I understand traceability in the industry, trust me— went through 16 in my riding. I understand it well and know it well, and I understand what happened to a lot of genetic herds that have been destroyed in my riding. I understand traceability, and I think you've figured out how to do it better than you did then.

VP Barnes: I'll make sure we consult with those small fairs. I think there are a few organizations and associations of them as well. We'll make sure we reach out.

9. Yes, but understand that from what I saw of the regulations before this won't work. You will kill small communities' industries, and you'll kill a lot of organizations that depend on these fairs, and they're countrywide. I understand traceability, but killing communities through traceability.... With volunteers, it just will not work. Hopefully, you'll listen, but the regulations I've seen to this point and what you attempted to enforce back.... I remember that in Ontario with small fairs and stuff. This isn't the industry we're talking about; the industry is the big guys in my riding, with the biggest meat-packing plant in Canada. We understand that industry. Community fairs? That's a different story and that's not the industry that I think you should be involved in in terms of that traceability. Thank you. You're working on other things as well. Is there anything else in terms of the cattle industry and traceability you would like to share with me at this point?

VP Barnes: No. On trace, that's where we're at now: moving to consultation on those regs.

10. I'm just wondering if you could give us a bit of an update as to some of the experiences that CFIA has gone through over the last six or seven months and the collaboration between the provinces in terms of inspectors. If you've been paying attention to our committee, which I'm sure you are every day, we are undertaking a study on processing and potentially reinforcing local processing capacity. I was curious just to find out what some of the issues are that CFIA has noticed during COVID-19 and whether you would have any thoughts to share with us right now.

VP Barnes: We have worked really closely, I'd say, with industry and the provinces over the last six months to make sure that those key roles that the agency plays, especially in the meat-slaughtering plants, can actually be fulfilled. Initially we were concerned. Our top priority is making sure our inspectors are protected and taken care of, but at the same time we had to be there for the industry too, as they had their own issues. They would want to come back and put on extra shifts to try to clear some backlog, so we were there to help them. The government made an investment of \$20 million in the agency. We were able to use that to go out and hire some surge capacity, so former inspectors who had retired, people we could bring on in the short term to really help us work with the sector to make sure that the processing could continue. That was a really big success. One thing of note is that the provinces have provincial inspection regimes as well, so we were cross-utilizing each other's resources in Ontario, Alberta, B.C. and, I think, Manitoba. We were able to work together and train each other so that we could help out on both sides, and that just helped us make sure we were there for the sector.

11. Would you say that one of the potential barriers or risks would be access to labour? I'm sure that \$20 million you just mentioned and the surge and how you had to rehire some folks who were retired to come back...but that collaboration with provinces and access to labour, is that a risk that CFIA is looking at?

VP Barnes: We're always trying to make sure we have the capacity we need, especially in terms of veterinarians. Those are really key resources that we need access to, so we're working hard to make sure we can keep a good supply of the key scientists and inspectors we need in the plants.

12. Mr. Forbes, you may recall from the first hour in committee that the minister said she might turn it over to you for a few more technical details on PACA. Is there anything you can inform the committee on? I sent a letter to the Deputy Prime Minister, the Honourable Chrystia Freeland, about this issue. Of course, it was a recommendation in a previous Parliament. In your conversations with other deputy ministers and other departments, is this something the federal government might be working on or interested in? Has there been any analysis to lay the groundwork for a possible decision by the ministers themselves?

DM Forbes: We've discussed this. I've been in the department for the better part of six years and we've been discussing this on and off in that time. There's been a lot of work with the horticulture sector and our partners in what is now Innovation, Science and Economic Development, who are responsible for the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act. We've looked at options. We've talked to the sector, I would say, regularly. Thus far—and there's been communication to this effect—I think the government's view has been that the evidence is not there that this is a widespread problem. It's an issue we think can be dealt with under the Safe Food for Canadians Act. That said, we're certainly constantly and regularly engaged with the sector, and we're always open to discussing solutions to problems in this issue and others if there's further evidence the sector has to bring to bear. We're always open.

13. Is there any connection with the money earmarked for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency for border post audits? If we want to meet our producer commitments under the newly signed agreements, there has to be reciprocity on standards, and we have to monitor carefully what goes on at the border to achieve that.

DM Forbes: Ms. Barnes can tell you more about that, but the CFIA budget is separate from ours. Our capital expenditures are, to a large extent, allocated to our research centres.

14. So this budget cut doesn't mean there's been a cut to investment in the research centres. I say that because several witnesses we've seen in recent months have told us it's important to conduct more agricultural research.

DM Forbes: We entirely agree. That incidentally is one of our priorities. We have to retain our research capacity, by which I mean our scientists, real property and research centres.

15. Does the Canadian Food Inspection Agency need more money to ensure that work is properly done at the border, especially between Canada and the United States?

VP Barnes: We have to work with all stakeholders to target our activities at the border and thus reinforce the system.

16. I'd like to start by talking about the health of animals regulations. Of course, this was legislation that we as a government introduced in 2020.

As it relates to the Maritimes and specifically to my community in Nova Scotia, one challenge that has arisen is the fact that in our dairy industry we have a number of bob calves, male calves that really don't have any benefit on a dairy farm, and we don't have a whole lot of processing capability. That's one thing that of course we'll hear about during the study we're taking on. A lot of these bob calves are transported to Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec. They have to go a long distance. The new provisions that came under the regulations are starting to involve and basically create challenges for some of our producers.

I'm just wondering, Ms. Barnes or Mr. Forbes, if this particular issue in the Maritimes is on your radar and if it has been discussed before.

VP Barnes:

Yes, it is very much on our radar screen. When the new humane transportation regulations came into force, it was clear that there were some issues, depending on the sector and on the place in the country. What we've done is that, for the first two years, we're focusing on compliance promotion in relation to those feed, water and rest intervals that have to be respected. We've also set up a series of working groups with the targeted sectors. The issue you've brought up I know well. We are trying to find a solution. Yes, it's definitely something we're working on.

17. I'm certainly glad to hear that, because it's something that has been coming up over and over, of course, in Nova Scotia, and it has cascading impacts in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island as well. I'll take you back to the 2018 fall economic statement. My predecessor at the time, Scott Brison, was the president of the Treasury Board. At that time, we announced a series of regulatory reviews and a series of different iterations. Of course, agriculture was featured prominently in that, and I know that it had some involvement between CFIA and the Department of Agriculture.

Can you speak to how some of those processes are unfolding? When I look at the deficit we have right now, and when we look at ways to drive the economy and to be able to help make producers' lives easier in terms of growing employment and opportunities, those seem like key measures. Can someone speak to those and where we're at broadly?

VP Barnes:

Yes, there was a very extensive review done for agriculture and aquaculture, for the two together. That included not just CFIA and the Department of Agriculture, but also Health Canada and PHAC, and also DFO, obviously, given the aquaculture. We set up over 30 initiatives that we wanted to move forward on with that lens of maintaining safety but also promoting competitiveness and innovation. I think it's fair to say that, with COVID, the regulatory changes, the pure changes in the law that we had wanted to do, have slowed down a bit, but we're gradually getting back on track. For instance, just in the past week, we were able to finally publish our fertilizer regulations, which was one of the initiatives in that road map. We are now getting back into those. A number of other issues that we were able to keep working on were conversations with the sector on plant-breeding innovation and how we can structure that. These things have kept going during COVID. We're preparing now for a public report that will be coming out in the coming months on where we're at with the initiatives that were in that plan.

18. Ms. Barnes, one of the concerns for producers under supply management, who have seen their market share handed over to foreign countries, is the quality of the products that will be coming in. What will you do to ensure that products that enter the country meet the same standards as those governing our local producers?

VP Barnes: The law requires that the same standards apply to imported goods as to goods produced in Canada. This is a basic fact in our discussions with Canadian and foreign industries.

19. It's fair to say that no one was fully prepared for the COVID-19 pandemic, and now we're hearing about the potential danger of African swine fever to Canadian hogs. I'm just wondering what the department is doing to prevent it from coming to Canada, and if it does come to Canada, what the department's plan is for addressing African swine fever.

VP Barnes:

It's very much a shared file. On the prevention side, we have focused on a few key things. Number one is biosecurity. We need to make sure that producers are doing everything they can and have all the tools they need, all the guides they need, to make sure we have a good line of defence there. We've also taken action at the border. We have new dogs. When people were travelling, they were really checking on all the flights. Now they are focused more on the postal stream to make sure that no meat products are coming in illegally through that stream. In terms of preparing if the worst were to come, we have been working a lot with provinces and industry on destruction options, on where disposal would happen, just so we can think through all of those key details before we ever have to face it for real. Then we have a whole line of businesses, as the minister mentioned in her remarks, around zoning and compartments, working with trading partners so that, should it hit, we would have some good ways to keep the markets open or get them reopened very quickly. Last is communication, just to keep this top of mind for everyone.

DM Forbes: I would just add that, as Colleen said, there is quite a close connection between the agency, the department and our provincial and territorial counterparts and industry as well, through the value chain there. Obviously part of that would be the programming, the types of supports. The industry has certainly reached out to us on that, and we are having kind of an ongoing discussion with them and the provinces and territories about what would be in place if it ever came to responding.

C) COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE, NOVEMBER 26, 2020, MAIN ESTIMATES

No questions or statements related to CFIA were raised during this meeting.

D) HESA, NOVEMBER 20, 2020, SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (B)

No questions or statements related to CFIA were raised during this meeting.

E) AGRI, NOVEMBER 19, 2020, PROCESSING CAPACITY

Transcript: www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/43-2/AGRI/meeting-6/evidence

Members present

LPC: Pat Finnigan (Chair), Kody Blois, Francis Drouin, Tim Louis

CPC: Lianne Rood (1st Vice Chair), Dave Epp, Richard Lehoux, Warren Steinley

BQ: Yves Perron (2nd Vice Chair)

NDP: Alistair MacGregor

Witnesses

Panel 1 (3:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.)

Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA)

- Theresa Iuliano, Vice-President, Operations
- Tammy Switucha, Executive Director, Food Safety and Consumer Protection Directorate

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC)

- Warren Goodlet, Director General, Research and Analysis Directorate
- Frédéric Seppey, Assistant Deputy Minister, Market and Industry Services Branch
- Marco Valicenti, Director General, Sector Development and Analysis Directorate, Market and Industry Services Branch

Summary of Q&As posed to and of pertinence CFIA

1. In your presentation, you talked about interprovincial trade and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's more flexible rules. Could you tell us in a few seconds what has been done specifically?

AAFC ADM, Frédéric Seppey: As you know, all food products traded interprovincially must normally be manufactured in a federally certified plant. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency, in cooperation with provincial and territorial authorities, has made an exception to this rule to allow interprovincial trade in meat products processed in provincially regulated establishments and to prevent meat shortages. As there have been no shortages, no province or territory has applied to the agency for this exception. The exception exists and would be ready for use should the situation require it.

2. Is there any possibility of establishing this on a regional basis? In certain regions of Quebec, there are particular slaughter problems and the slaughterhouse may be located close to another province. If I'm correct, there would be an opening for temporary arrangements to be made on this basis. Is that correct?

AAFC ADM, Frédéric Seppey: There is this obligation, given that interprovincial trade is under federal jurisdiction. The work done by the CFIA demonstrates that exceptions can be considered in specific cases. In the case you point out, particularly in border regions such as the Outaouais, there is enormous interest in these elements. In fact, a few years ago, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency was working on a pilot project to allow this type of temporary arrangement in the national capital region.

3. Yesterday I had a meeting with representatives from UFCW, which represents approximately 70,000 workers in processing plants across Canada. I'm happy to hear the acknowledgement that labour is a critical part of the puzzle, because indeed it is. However, during the course of my meeting with UFCW, they clearly raised some ongoing concerns they had for the safety of their members. If we acknowledge the important part that labour plays...I want to reiterate to members of the committee and our witnesses that UFCW did submit to Minister Bibeau's department seven recommendations for best practices. Even with the timeline we are on right now, and with all that we know about COVID-19, they found that in some cases recommendations were adopted and followed, but in many cases they were not. With COVID numbers now on the rise again, and the vulnerability we've already seen in our supply chain, with some processing plants having to shut down, why is the CFIA not stepping in to enforce these consistently applied protocols to protect the health and safety of our workers?

Theresa Iuliano:

Mr. Chair, I'll start by saying that CFIA is committed to protecting the health and safety of our employees, while of course maintaining and delivering critical inspection services. All of the facilities we operate within are required to follow appropriate public health protocols and seek guidance from local public health authorities. We expect that the facilities are undertaking efforts to control any risks associated with workers who are ill. This is in addition to their regular cleaning, sanitation and other preventative controls. We've also asked our own employees to follow the health and safety protocols put in place at the establishments where they work. CFIA employees, including inspectors, who exhibit any signs or symptoms of illness are advised to contact their management. We work very closely with the industry, the unions and public health authorities to ensure that appropriate measures are put in place.

4. I appreciate the answer, Mr. Chair. However, it was made very clear to me yesterday by the UFCW that many of these protocols are still being applied haphazardly. When can we expect a full compliance rate? How is CFIA measuring the timeline for that level of enforcement?

Theresa Iuliano:

CFIA's mandate in food establishments relates to food safety. Therefore, we take the measures necessary to enforce the acts and regulations in relation to the safety of the food produced in the establishments. Compliance with public health measures is the responsibility of the operator working in collaboration with local public health authorities and following the requirements of the Public Health Agency of Canada.

5. I am wondering if you could tell me about got interprovincial travel and trade as well. That's something that gets brought up from time to time, the fact there are different credentials for federal and provincial.... What kinds of steps are we taking to work on that basis to procure co-operation for our food processor?

AAFC ADM Frédéric Seppey:

Perhaps I can start, Mr. Chair, with your permission. My colleague from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency may wish to add. I gave a number of examples. For example, allowing

exemptions from the requirement that if there's interprovincial trade in meat products they have to be produced in federal plants. That's one venue. An unprecedented level of federal-provincial-territorial co-operation on regulatory issues is under way. It has always been like that, but since the beginning of the pandemic, that collaboration has been more intense than ever. Therefore, regulators are discussing concrete problems that may exist. To give an illustration, in Nova Scotia there are meat plants that would like to reach the level required for a federal establishment to export outside the province. These issues are being discussed between CFIA and the Government of Nova Scotia.

6. I appreciate that. I know that my colleague had previously mentioned protecting our workers. That's important to all of us. Can you explain what steps we have taken as a government to help some of the food processors make sure that their workers stay safe so we can keep food on the table?

AAFC ADM, Frédéric Seppey:

My colleague Madame Iuliano from CFIA will probably have things to add. I would make a very quick point. In addition to what Theresa mentioned earlier, we are working closely with organizations such as the Canadian Meat Council, the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, and the Public Health Agency of Canada to ensure that operators have all of the guidance and policies to understand what are the best practices to put in place to ensure the safety of workers, as Mr. MacGregor indicated before. I don't know, Theresa, if you want to add to that.

Theresa Iuliano: Obviously, the CFIA plays a critical role in providing service to food processing establishments. Because of that critical role, we make maintaining the safety of our employees a number one priority. Our staff work very closely with the industry to ensure that we are putting in place the appropriate risk mitigation, including personal protective equipment, following public health guidelines and working closely with the establishments to minimize any unnecessary physical contact.

7. Maybe I can stay with CFIA questions. We also have to make sure that our inspectors themselves are protected and safe. What kinds of challenges did you have, especially in the beginning of this pandemic, in making sure that these inspectors could get their jobs done but remained safe as well?

Theresa Iuliano:

I think that in the early days of the pandemic one challenge was ensuring that we had an adequate supply of personal protective equipment. As soon as the public health guidance on the provision of non-medical masks evolved, we acted immediately to ensure that our front-line staff had access to the appropriate personal protective equipment, including face masks, face shields, visors, wipes, as required. We also took measures to ensure that our staff were delivering critical services in person only when required, and to deliver services remotely where that was feasible. Those were some measures we've taken to protect the safety of our staff. Through an investment of \$20 million that was made in the agency, we've used those funds to hire emergency staff to bring in previously retired inspectors to work with the provinces to increase inspection capacity, all of that with the intent of reducing pressure on the current workforce, to make sure we could continue to deliver those critical services.

8. At a convention of the Union des producteurs agricoles, or UPA, in 2019, a cheese producer spoke. She said she herself found samples of 23 foreign cheeses that did not pass 200 inspection points.

Quebec's minister of agriculture, fisheries and food, Mr. Lamontagne, who was on hand, responded by saying he wants to be a leader in standards reciprocity. At present, it seems that we are having difficulty establishing reciprocity of standards. If we want our processors to be dynamic and present everywhere, there needs to be a level playing field for products coming into Canada from abroad. Do you have an action plan to increase resources for this purpose? How do you see this problem?

Tammy Switucha:

First, I'd like to begin by stating that the Safe Food for Canadians Act and regulations require that imported food must meet all the same regulatory requirements as food that's produced in Canada, so when it comes to imports, all imported products are treated equally, as they would be treated for those that are produced and sold in Canada. The CFIA undertakes various activities to ensure compliance of imported products. Before they leave their countries, we also work at the border very closely with the CBSA to ensure that products entering Canada meet all Canadian requirements. Then, when they arrive in Canada, we do engage in post-border activities. We do testing and we do follow-up compliance and enforcement activities to make sure that those products meet all Canadian requirements.

9. I again want to revisit the issue of our meat-processing capacity. This of course has been a huge topic for the committee. We've heard a lot of reports from many witnesses about how the over-concentration of meat-processing capacity in Canada, while it has been very efficient in the past, has certainly been one of our weak links. I have a specific question. Back in August in the province of Ontario, it was reported that the old Ryding-Regency meat plant had been going through its final inspection. I think the plant is being renamed. It's under Tru Harvest Meats. The Beef Farmers of Ontario were quite excited about this because, of course, they are suffering from a lack of meat-processing capacity in Ontario, but we are now in November and we still have yet to hear from the CFIA as to whether this plant is going to restart. Given the situation we find ourselves in, is the CFIA able to comment on this specific application? Can we expect some news on it soon? I know that a lot of farmers would like to hear some good news on that front.

Theresa Iuliano:

I'm afraid I can't comment specifically on the application itself. When an operator chooses to make an application for a licence, that's a business decision on behalf of the operator, and we will assess those licence applications on a case-by-case basis. I can tell you that we have a process in place and that we stand ready to work with the operators as those licence applications come forward.

Transcript: www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/43-1/HESA/meeting-28/evidence

Members Present:

LPC: Darren Fisher, Mike Kelloway, Ron McKinnon (Chair), Marcus Powlowski, Sonia Sidhu, Tony Van Bynen

CPC: Tamara Jansen, Matt Jeneroux (1st Vice-Chair), Robert Kitchen, Len Webber

BQ: Luc Thériault (2nd Vice-Chair)

NDP: Don Davies

Witnesses

1st Panel

Agriculture Union

- Fabian Murphy, National President

Canadian Federation of Agriculture

- Mary Robinson, President

Canning Sauce Company

- Kim Hatcher, Farmer

2nd Panel

Canadian Food Inspection Agency

- Colleen Barnes, Vice-President, Policy and Programs
- Theresa Iuliano, Vice-President, Operations

Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food

- Frédéric Seppey, Assistant Deputy Minister, Market and Industry Services Branch
- Steven Jurgutis, Director General, Policy, Planning and Integration Directorate

Summary of Q&As posed to CFIA

1. I'm going to start with the CFIA. I just have a couple of questions and clarifications. You talked about how the CFIA and the U.S. Department of Agriculture provided a six-month extension. When was that six-month extension going to expire?

CFIA submitted a response following the meeting: The six month extension for approved facilities to continue to export certain animal products and pet foods between Canada and the U.S. started in April 2020 and will expire on September 30, 2020.

Update from IAB: The six month extension for approved facilities to continue to export certain animal products and pet foods between Canada and the U.S. ended on September 30, 2020. Both the countries agreed to return to routine inspections as per bilateral certificate requirements. However, if there are resource challenges due to resurge of COVID both countries agreed to re-engage and review the agreement.

2. You went to companies, in particular Cargill, and said they had to have a response plan in place. Is that not CFIA's job, to make certain that a response plan was in place even before the COVID virus started?

Theresa Iuliano: We promoted guidance to industry very early in the pandemic indicating that they should have a response plan in place to respond to any outbreaks in their establishments, and that was in place very early on in the pandemic.

3. Part of PHAC's position is for it to have established protocols in place for hospitals, etc., as well as food agencies. I'm surprised that such a response plan would not be in place prior to COVID actually even coming into existence.

Colleen Barnes: COVID-19 is not a food safety issue. The CFIA...that's the extent of our purview. What we did was make the plants have plans in place so that our employees were safe going in there, but we had no authority over the responses of the plants to COVID-19. That really went to local public health.

4. Since the onset of COVID-19, there have been major issues with the spread of the virus at meat-processing plants, as you've indicated. One concern was the inspectors could be vectors to the virus, transmitting it from plant to plant. There was also a problem with the shortage of PPE for workers, which contributed to one of the biggest outbreaks in the country at the Cargill plant. Can you tell us what the situation is with respect to access to PPE right now?

Theresa Iuliano: At the moment we have sufficient PPE for our meat inspectors. We are providing them with disposable masks. Certainly there are cloth or surgical masks—

We have a sufficient supply of masks and visors for meat inspection staff at the moment.

5. We heard from previous witnesses in the previous hour that at Cargill the inspectors were coming in without their own equipment. That makes no sense to me when CFIA gets over \$749 million a year. Why wouldn't they be able to provide protective equipment to their employees?

Theresa Iuliano: We began providing equipment to meat inspection staff in meat-processing plants where social distancing could not be respected [Technical difficulty—Editor]. Mr. Chair, as soon as the public health advice on the use of masks evolved, we immediately procured masks for our front-line staff. Those masks were deployed in late March and we began deploying face shields in mid- to late April.

6. How often do you look at the expiry dates of these masks?

Theresa Iuliano: Our occupational health and safety experts would take that into consideration, absolutely.

7. I have a Maple Lodge Farms meat-processing plant in my riding. There was an outbreak, and I heard that you hired 144 inspectors. I want to know what you are doing to protect these workers to ensure that meat-processing plants like Maple Lodge Farms are able to operate safely during COVID-19.

Theresa Iuliano:

We take a number of measures to ensure that our workers can operate in a safe environment. Obviously the health and safety of our staff is the number one priority. It starts with following the advice of public health authorities, and that includes everything from hand hygiene to social distancing to the use of masks and shields where these measures cannot be respected. We have issued guidance to our inspectors on operating in this COVID environment. This guidance includes undertaking safety assessments before workers enter a

plant and after each shift. We've also issued guidance to the industry on mitigation measures that they need to take.

8. In April 2020, the federal government invested \$20 million in CFIA to ensure that our food supply was secure. Do you think this investment is achieving that goal?

Colleen Barnes: Yes, we certainly do. It has permitted us to hire the extra surge capacity that we've needed. It has also allowed us to finance some overtime for our inspectors because of changes in shifts that the plants want. It has also helped us train new inspectors and give refresher training to our staff. It has allowed us to make investments in IM/IT tools for them to use as well.

9. What steps is CFIA taking to ensure our food supply remains strong if a possible second wave of COVID-19 happens in the fall?

Colleen Barnes:

We're trying to learn lessons from the last couple of months about how we have to behave in food plants. We've also built some security measures through our compliance approaches on regulations so that we have procedures available now should there be shortages if there is an uptick in the number of cases in the fall. We've really tried to learn the lessons from the last couple of months.

Theresa Iuliano: I would add that we continue to refine our business continuity plan. We have defined what our critical services are and we are prepared to focus on delivering those critical services in the event of a resurgence of cases.

10. Ms. Barnes, I don't know if you had the opportunity to listen to the testimony of Fabian Murphy, the national president of the Agriculture Union, who just testified at the committee. He represents all of the food inspectors and employees of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and the picture he painted of the CFIA's response to protecting its workers was rather startling. To summarize his evidence, he thought that the CFIA was late to protect its workers. In fact, there's personal protective equipment that just arrived in Alberta last week. He spoke of employees having to share face shields. There has been a shortage of latex gloves, N95 masks and shields. There is no consistent national approach across the country. There is the spectre of inspectors having to be assigned to multiple facilities, potentially being vectors of transmission of COVID-19, and in fact, being banned by the CFIA from using their own cloth masks, at least at the beginning. What's your response to that testimony?

Theresa Iuliano:

I'll start by saying that the health and safety of our staff is a top priority for us at the CFIA. All of the actions that we have taken to mitigate risks have been done in consultation with our occupational health and safety experts, our unions, local public health authorities, the Public Health Agency of Canada, Health Canada, etc. We acted immediately to provide protective measures for our staff. As I mentioned in my earlier remarks, we began procuring masks and face shields for employees in establishments where physical distancing could not be respected as soon as the public health advice in this matter evolved. We were providing masks to our staff in late March, and we began procuring and distributing shields in mid-April.

11. Ms. Barnes, how many food processing facilities across Canada have experienced outbreaks of COVID-19 to date?

Colleen Barnes: We'll have to get back to you with that specific number. I know, anecdotally, that there have been a few, but the exact number I don't know.

CFIA submitted a response following the meeting: The Canadian Food Inspection Agency does not record or retain information on Canadian food processing facilities impacted by COVID-19 outbreaks. Information about these human health issues should be directed to the food processing facilities themselves, or to the public health authorities that confirmed the outbreaks.

12. Would you be prepared to work with the union on their national plan? They outlined the five points that they would like to see, moving forward, particularly if there's an outbreak of COVID-19 in the fall. It includes a national approach, slowing down line speeds, routine testing, inspectors at one facility, and appropriate and sufficient PPE. Is that a plan that you would commit to work with the national Agriculture Union on?

Colleen Barnes:

Our work has been ongoing with the union, and so obviously we would continue those conversations. Some of what is in the plan is not within our purview. It's more for industry to take up. In terms of our commitment to our employees to make sure they have PPE, we are making efforts to try to minimize the extent to which inspectors have to go from one establishment to the other. We've committed to that. Certainly, we are working on elements of that plan today with the union.

13. In the testimony you shared with the committee today, you mentioned you had hired new inspectors, 144, in fact, and 44 veterinarians. You've welcomed back some recently retired individuals, reassigned staff and also funded more overtime. I assume that you probably do not have a concern with a lack of inspectors. However, have there been challenges in meeting minimum staffing levels? Have there been absenteeism problems with food inspectors? Should we be concerned that a lack of inspectors could further disrupt the meat supply chain?

Colleen Barnes:

Really, with the investment that we received, we've been able to service all of the shifts that the sector has asked for by virtue of that investment. Our employees have been incredibly dedicated. Former meat inspectors who are now working in another area of the agency are now putting up their hands to say they'll come back to help out. With the dedication of our staff, we have not had issues yet to keep the plants running and we anticipate that will continue. With the investment, we have that extra surge capacity to make sure we can continue to be there when we need to be.

14. You also mentioned that you're working with some provincial counterparts to train and equip provincial inspectors to provide the CFIA with inspection support on a temporary basis, as needed. What type of training is unique to the federal inspectors? What specifically do you have to give them, the provincial counterparts, additional training on?

Colleen Barnes: One example is the law. It would be different. It's the actual provisions that would be applied if a non-compliance were observed. The inspector would have to be able to move between their former regime and the current one.

15. In your testimony you said that to ease the burden on industry and to support the food supply for Canadians, CFIA has introduced temporary compliance flexibilities. The changes include suspending some CFIA compliance activities and delaying compliance activities. Can you elaborate more on this and give us some areas with suspensions and delays of compliance?

Colleen Barnes:

Early on in the pandemic the agency moved to its business continuity plan. We determined where we absolutely had to be to provide critical service to keep the supply chain running. Luckily we live in Canada where we have an incredible level of food safety and high levels of compliance in just about the entire food system. We were able to dial back or postpone some of our oversight in areas of the grocery store where risks are really pretty low, such as, for example, with cookies or manufactured foods of that sort. While COVID was running, we delayed inspections that we would have done. Now that we're starting to normalize, we're going to start those inspections back up.

16. What plans does the CFIA have for ensuring that we have proper food inspections in place there? I understand that physical distancing and sanitation on board boats is a unique challenge. How is the CFIA going to deal with that?

Colleen Barnes:

We'll approach it the same way we've approached the issues in facilities producing meat. To the extent possible, inspectors will keep that two-metre distance. You're right that in some cases that's not possible, so Theresa's group will be making sure they have the adequate personal protective equipment that is going to be needed. We'll also be looking at whether there are other ways to do the inspections, like maybe looking at records or trying to be innovative in how we do the inspections. Again, we'll be making sure the food supply continues to operate.

17. Recently, there have been some media reports out there saying that the most recent COVID outbreak in Beijing may be related to fish preparation boards. Do you have any information on this? Have you heard anything about this issue? If so, could you share that? Should Canadians be concerned about the transmission of a virus through any part of the food supply and preparation process?

Colleen Barnes:

This is something we are aware of. It came up yesterday evening, I think. We have been officially notified by China, and they've asked us to make sure there's no chance of COVID-19 coming to them in products they import from Canada. The evidence is very clear on this globally. There have been no cases of transmission of COVID-19 linked to the food supply or even to the packaging of food. Globally, regulators are very clear that this is not a pathway for the transmission of the disease. We are communicating with China, as are all regulators, because this wasn't just a Canadian issue, and we stand behind the strength of our food supply.

18. I just want to say that it has been my unlucky pleasure to have to deal with the CFIA back in the day when I was farming, so it's interesting to have this opportunity to ask some questions. It was

mentioned in the presentation that you “took immediate and decisive action to protect the integrity of Canada's food supply”. I wonder if you can tell me why I'm hearing very different stories from poultry processors here in B.C. When a few of our processors had to shut down due to COVID-19 outbreaks, the other processing plant stepped in to fill the gaps by doing a lot of overtime, but their CFIA inspectors were unwilling to help out. They were demanding two weeks' notice for overtime work, which of course is not feasible in a pandemic. Why were they refusing to do overtime in the beginning?

Colleen Barnes:

In the beginning, we were all learning what the new environment was like. Very quickly we put in place an escalation protocol, so that if plants had an issue, they worked it up through the chain of command. If there was an extra shift that they wanted to put on, there was a protocol on how to let us know so we could arrange for our staff to provide that oversight. We also worked with the associations. Working at that level too, at the most senior level at the agency, we worked through these issues together. After we set up these protocols, there were no shifts that we weren't able to cover.

19. I don't know if you heard, but plants were basically telling their inspectors that in order to deal with the enormity of the situation, they had to proceed with humane killing with or without inspectors on site. When did CFIA finally encourage overtime for inspectors? When did that happen?

Colleen Barnes: I'm not sure I know that exactly. As soon as those protocols were in place, we were doing extra shifts I think.

Theresa Iuliano: We provide overtime services on a daily basis for industry, overtime in terms of daily shifts and overtime on weekends. So that—

20. Unfortunately under the pandemic, it seems that some of our meat processors were not getting that kind of service because the inspectors were unwilling...without two weeks' notice. You mentioned that you have hired 144 new inspectors and 44 veterinarians. As Canadian poultry processing is now down by an average of 7.5%—and I understand it goes across the sector due to the drop in food demand by restaurants and tourism—why do you need more inspectors now compared to when Canada was in full swing? You mentioned it yourself that there are many inspections that aren't happening. Why are there the extra inspectors all of a sudden?

Colleen Barnes:

I think what we saw, and what we're seeing now, is that plants that had challenges have sorted out their new way of operating, given equipment to their employees and they are now ramping up. We are seeing a quick return to former levels of capacity and output in plants. We are investing to make sure that if there is an uptick in cases in the future.... As Agriculture mentioned, there is a bit of backlog in terms of some animals that have to be cleared. We're going to need that extra capacity to help the industry do it.

21. You're aware that the Agriculture Union appeared earlier during this committee meeting. Mr. Murphy made a clear request for some national standards. You have also alluded to the fact that in terms of your employees and issues like personal protective equipment and so on, you were very reliant on individual public health units. I suppose this explains some of the lack of consistency in terms of some of the advice that was being given within each of...well, we'll say the meat packing plants or the processing plants. Would you not find it preferable to have clearer national standards in terms of public health practice? Just so you know, during this committee over the last many

months, there has been a call for clearer national public health standards. Could you speak to that a little bit? Certainly from the union perspective, this lack of consistency resulted in different outcomes in the plants themselves. I'm sure, given your concern for your employees, that you would also be somewhat in favour of something clearer across the country.

Colleen Barnes:

We have heard those calls for a national approach. As we have worked through these issues over the past three months, what we've learned is that the approach can't be national. The reason is that in each community, those plants were either a hot spot within a broader community that was a hot spot or they were very localized. The response that happened in each plant really depended on the extent of the health care resources that were available in each community. Sometimes there didn't have to be as stringent a response if there was greater capacity to deal with the issue. For us, it really became working with the local public health authorities in each instance to make sure we were responding and making sure our own employees were protected in that environment.

22. What sort of infection control procedures do you have as a minimum in all of the establishments that CFIA inspects? Obviously there's a risk to employees, your inspectors, in terms of those infections such as E. coli, where there is a risk to the individuals handling the meat. What is your normal practice in terms of infection control on behalf of your employees?

Colleen Barnes: As you've mentioned, there are hazards in a meat plant, so we would generally have proper hygiene that our inspectors would respect, generally speaking. With COVID, we've added that they do a check before they go into the plant and that they then check to make sure they're feeling well after a shift. They inform their manager how they're feeling. Those are added steps we've taken. Then there's the addition of PPE. Where we have had these issues of not being able to keep the two-metre distance, as Theresa mentioned, we've provided our staff with masks and face shields.

23. Well, I was getting to the normal practice, not that in the COVID-19 situation. What sort of personal protective equipment do you provide to your inspectors on a regular basis?

Colleen Barnes: I don't know if Theresa can respond to that or if we can get back to the committee if the translation issue is a problem.

Theresa Iuliano:

Mr. Chair, the type of equipment that we provide staff is very much tied to the requirements of the job. In a meat processing plant, they are provided with appropriate equipment such as coats, boots and hard hats where they're required. A hazard assessment would be done in other situations that might be more dangerous, like working in a barn, where there is an animal disease situation. If risks were identified, the appropriate equipment would be provided to staff.

24. I'm wondering if CFIA has ever been involved in any sort of pandemic planning, given that obviously so many people are working in very close proximity to each other. Prior to COVID-19, had there ever been any exercise related to the possibility of a pandemic?

Colleen Barnes: Mr. Chair, we can get back with specifics that I'm sure we have, because we are responsible for the animal health area as well, so we've definitely exercised around

major animal health diseases, and I do believe that in some of the human health pandemics we have been involved, but we'll have to get back to the committee with specifics.

CFIA submitted a response following the meeting: The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has been involved in pandemic planning activities. The CFIA even developed a 'Pandemic Influenza Business Continuity Plan' (2006) and designed exercises to test the plan. The CFIA has been able to draw on elements of this plan and continues to work with Central Agencies, other government departments and public health authorities to keep its planning, response and business resumption protocols current.

25. To CFIA, according to a June 12 article in Food in Canada, CFIA has announced that it is now in a position to gradually resume some inspection services that were temporarily suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Could you tell the committee specifically what inspection services were temporarily suspended? In your view, what impact did the suspension of those inspections have on food safety in Canada, if any?

Colleen Barnes:

As we mentioned earlier in our remarks, when COVID hit, we went to our business continuity plan. We prioritized food safety investigations, and focused on export and import investigations, all the lab work that would have supported that, and any animal health issues that needed to be prioritized. That allowed us that bandwidth to ensure the food supply system kept moving. Where compliance has traditionally been very high, we knew we could delay some inspections for a month or so. It wasn't going to compromise food safety for Canadians. Those are the kinds of things that—

26. The question was regarding what services were you not doing. I understand what you were doing. My question was, which inspection services did you suspend?

Colleen Barnes: Inspections in the manufacturing of cookies, cereals, or something like that. They would have been delayed, but we are now restarting.