



House of Commons  
CANADA

# Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri- Food

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AGRI • NUMBER 051 • 1st SESSION • 38th PARLIAMENT

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EVIDENCE

**Thursday, June 16, 2005**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Paul Steckle**

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## Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

Thursday, June 16, 2005

• (1540)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.)):** Ladies and gentlemen, I'm going to call the meeting to order.

Before we get to hearing our witnesses this afternoon, I want to deal with a matter that needs our attention today because of the urgent need to get it back to the House. It is the approval of a budget to travel to Riding Mountain National Park, something we had earlier agreed to but was postponed for reasons of the time.

The budget was approved today for \$43,934, which allows us to travel in full-hearing composition. It's pretty straightforward. It will conclude our work. We would be travelling the week of October 3. We haven't given attention to the details of that date, but that would be the week in which we would be asking to travel.

So the amount is \$43,934. Are there any questions? If not, I would entertain the question on support for the travel.

**An hon. member:** So moved.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** To give you some indication of how we will move forward into next week, on Tuesday we would continue with Bill C-27, hopefully to have it concluded in a form that could be presented to the House as early as the following day. If that were not to be possible, should the House for some reason decide not to open its doors that day, there would be another way found to have that presented to the House so that we would not have lost all the good time that was spent on this bill up to this point. So we'll meet Tuesday at 3:30.

Let's move to our witnesses today. This should be an interesting afternoon. Always, when we have the Pest Management Regulatory Agency, PMRA, coming before the committee, we have interesting times. We've had difficulties in the past, as those who are before the table know, and some changes have been made. We're looking forward to hearing what you have to say today.

This segment of the meeting today is to deal with the PMRA at 4:30. Given that we have lost 15 minutes, we'll probably give you the full hour and cut into the next sessions. Most of us have to be out of here by 5:30, so the meeting will conclude at 5:30 sharp.

We will now begin with the people from PMRA. Karen Dodds, executive director, is here today, and Trish MacQuarrie, director, alternative strategies and regulatory affairs.

Thank you for appearing, and welcome. I believe for both of you it's the first time to the table but not the first time to our meetings.

Karen, are you leading off?

• (1545)

**Ms. Karen Dodds (Executive Director, Pest Management Regulatory Agency):** I am.

**The Chair:** I would expect today that you'll have some comments, and then we'll begin the question period. If we can abbreviate both our questions and our responses, hopefully we can accommodate everyone's requests today.

Ms. Dodds, would you please begin.

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before you today and to talk about the activities of the Pest Management Regulatory Agency since we were last here six months ago.

[Translation]

As you know, I became executive director of the PMRA in mid-February of this year. This appearance here today provides me with an opportunity to introduce myself to all of you, and to review my first months with the agency and the work we've done since you last met with PMRA.

[English]

Prior to joining the agency, I was the acting associate assistant deputy minister for the health products and food branch, and before that I was the director general of the food directorate in that branch. Our mandate there included food safety and quality, minimizing the health risk factors to Canadians, and looking after the regulatory system for foods, natural health products, therapeutics, etc. I have been before this committee more than once on BSE—mad cow disease—and, indeed, as I think back, on genetically modified foods as well.

I found that my experience in food safety and in therapeutic products, in science and in regulations, and in working with a lot of the different sectors certainly applies to the challenges that I see at PMRA. Much of my career has involved understanding, assessing, and taking decisions on risks, something we do every day at the agency.

From the very first week of my job at the agency, I've made an effort to get out and to meet with the people who are interested in and impacted by the work at the agency. I've told the staff at the agency, the people I've met with, that, in my experience, I've always found that there are common interests among stakeholders, and that good relationships and an openness to understanding each other's perspectives and to working together improve our work outcomes.

[Translation]

The package we have provided to you today includes a number of items of interest, and I'd like briefly to tell you about them, and why we feel the committee will find them of interest.

You have before you the 2003 multi-year progress report. In addition, we have provided appendices on the list of new active ingredients registered this year. This list includes the crops for which these new active ingredients have been registered.

Other items in your package include lists of approved minor uses, approved reduced-risk uses and active ingredients that will be re-evaluated over the next five years. We look forward to discussing with you this package of information.

[English]

We had some very helpful discussions with the clerk and the researchers about the kind of information we would provide, and going forward, we will endeavour to improve the clarity and quality as the agency collects information with the years.

Members expressed interest in getting information on what products, for example, are approved for tomatoes in Canada and the U.S. and their MRLs, and we've just provided the clerk with that information.

I noted to someone the other day that I'm now at about the 100-day mark at the agency. It's been a time of learning for me, but also a time to set a style of operation and to set a path forward. My appearance here coincides with that near 100-day mark, and I can't think of a more appropriate time and place to share some initial impressions.

First, I want to be clear, we regulate pesticides for a reason. They are potentially toxic. They involve inherent risk. Otherwise, we would not have to evaluate the effects on health and on the environment. And as the committee well knows, before a pesticide is registered for use in Canada, it undergoes a rigorous scientific evaluation of the human health risks, the risk to the environment, and its value, using standards that are comparable to those of other countries.

[Translation]

At the same time there's no denying that pesticides are a vital part of our agricultural and agrifood industry and therefore impact on our economy.

• (1550)

[English]

There's no question in my mind that given the need to assess risk and support economic sectors, we must always strive for balance. We must understand the inherent risk, we must protect the health and environment of Canadians, and we must ensure that the growers and

producers of the food of the nation are able to function and thrive. As you all know, these are elements of sustainable development. They're ingrained in Canadian policy and in government policy around the world.

I've been very active in meeting with stakeholders, among them the applicators, the growers, and the people who depend on these products in order to do business. I'm impressed by the number of different grower groups. I continue to be impressed by the commitment of the agricultural sector. I'm very sympathetic to the number of challenges farmers face today. Each time I meet with grower groups and others I'm increasingly convinced that the question of balance is not only essential to our regulatory regime, it's essential to the story we tell about pesticides.

You will no doubt be aware of the ongoing discussion in the public arena about the coming into force of the new Pest Control Products Act. Just last week I had the privilege of participating in my first meeting with our Pest Management Advisory Council. The minister participated and he committed to having the act in force by the end of the calendar year. And I was able to tell him, and I'm able to tell you, that we are on track to meet that commitment.

The agency is striving to work within the spirit of the new act even now. For instance, I know that provisions in the act on transparency and decision-making are very important, that they are the new law's very foundation. This is one area where I know the PMRA can do better. We have improved, there is a commitment to improve, and we will continue to make those improvements.

In my meetings to date I have noted that my priorities include the implementation of the new act, improving stakeholder relations and communication, and delivering on openness and transparency. I have also noted that in my assessment of the situation, there remain gaps and pressures in the area of minor use. I am committed to working to improve the situation in this regard. I know our growers want access to the same products that the growers in the United States have access to.

[Translation]

I look forward to your questions. In closing, allow me to say that I will continue to foster the relationships I have been fortunate to form these first 100 days such as those with Canada's growers and producers in the agricultural and agrifood business.

[English]

The PMRA will continue moving forward to implement our new act and take measures to ensure we continuously aim for that balance that's so essential to a vibrant economy, and to protecting the health of Canadians and their environment.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Dodds. I assume those are the comments from your department.

Mr. Anderson is next, for seven minutes. I think we have enough time to put everybody on for the full seven.

**Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. If I run out of time, I think Mr. Ritz will take it up.

Thank you for coming today. I hope your tenure is a reflection of a change in the PMRA's direction and attitude, because it's been a problem over the years. I think everybody who has been on the committee for a while has recognized that. I'm glad you seem to have a different approach to this from what we've seen in the past.

I just have a couple of questions. The NAFTA working group has been pursuing a five-year plan for Canada, the United States, and Mexico, and trying to encourage some greater collaboration. Given that there seems to be some support for working together among those three countries, do you not agree that the time is right for serious movement toward a North American protocol or approach to pesticide approval? Would this be a good time to move toward that?

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** Thank you very much for the question.

The NAFTA technical working group on pesticides has taken us a very long way, in terms of harmonization. I would be interested in the degree to which you're looking for a North American protocol. We now have common data requirements, so Canada, the United States, and Mexico are now asking for the same data for submissions on pesticides. I think a guideline on that was recently posted on the website. We are doing reviews jointly with the United States on certain products when the registrant brings it to us for a joint review. So we have some common outcomes.

At the meeting of the technical working group I chaired, which we hosted in Canada the first week of May, we also agreed to further detailed work to examine why we're coming to different conclusions, if in the course of one of those joint reviews we come to different conclusions. We know we've harmonized the data requirements and the process to a considerable extent. We now need to focus more on why we are coming to different decisions if we are doing that, and whether we can address that. My colleague from EPA and I have agreed to ask the staff who are working on those joint reviews to see if they can't always come to common end points.

• (1555)

**Mr. David Anderson:** Are you working toward a harmonized model—not just some of the data requirements and those kinds of things? I guess one of the models that's available is the European one, where you at least have data on some of these issues. Have you been taking a look at that and is somebody leading, so you can harmonize these things and do the product reviews, residual levels, and those kinds of things through that system?

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** We've been doing that to quite an extent. For example, in our re-evaluation program, in what's called program 1, we actually take the outcome of the U.S. assessment. We don't redo it; we start with their outcome. We're not yet at the point where we take one decision and share it, but I think that's an objective people would be interested in.

**Mr. David Anderson:** How far down that road are you then? We've talked about that a lot here over the last few years, and it seemed to have really stalled. In spite of the rhetoric, we heard nothing was ever being done about it. How far down the road do you think you are to a functional model of working on these kinds of things?

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** The scientist in me comes out here. There are certain parts of a pesticide that are innate wherever they are, and in the toxicity of the pesticide that's one of the issues. I believe

Canadians would be interested in us always doing an assessment of the exposure in Canada, and whether that exposure is still appropriate.

From my background in the food directorate I can tell you that Canadians eat a different diet from that of Americans. But in terms of certain aspects, we're moving to accept what you can accept, and only do what you have to do for your national situation.

**Mr. David Anderson:** I guess we've talked about this here too. There are some things that are international, and even things like regions, and how the chemicals work in particular climates and environments are similar. So I guess I'm getting a little bit concerned if I hear that you're drawing a lot of these lines along the national boundaries, because some of this approval stuff could be done a lot quicker if the data from similar terrains and climates were being used.

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** We are certainly looking at reducing the data requirements for things such as efficacy, and having larger zones and reducing the amount of data that's needed in different zones.

Trish may have the specifics, and we can certainly provide you that. But again, from the last meeting in May, we agreed to an approach where if you're making a joint submission, the data requirements to make that joint submission, I believe, are at least 25% reduced from if you were making two separate submissions. We are trying to work together and also to economize as much as we can, and then that's also a positive inducement for industry to make a joint submission to make sure access is both north and south of the border.

**Mr. David Anderson:** One of the criticisms of your agency has been their lack of communication with stakeholders and the public. Just in terms of risk communication, things like explaining rationale for decisions made and the factors used in decision-making and the role of your system, I'm wondering what priority you are placing on that. How does improving your risk communication fit into the priorities of PMRA under your leadership?

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** On Monday and Tuesday of this week I met with my senior management team. We had a two-day retreat to look at what we are going to consider priorities in the next six to eighteen months. Communications and improving communications, I would say, is probably one of the top five. It might be one of the top three.

Implementation of the new act I said I had to make my top priority. It's untenable for us to continue to say we had an act given royal assent December 2002 and it's not yet in force. I'm also interested in making sure that the philosophy of the act is actually implemented in the agency, and part of that openness and transparency is good communications and people being able to understand what we're doing, and also people in the agency understanding what the concerns outside the agency are, and what we can do to address those concerns.

It is two-way. Certainly it involves communications. Again, all the senior management team at the agency recognize this and are very supportive of making changes to improve communications.

•(1600)

**Mr. David Anderson:** I think you probably see that we're willing to give you that opportunity to change things, but hopefully the honeymoon won't end.

I'd like to turn it over to Mr. Ritz.

**The Chair:** There's not enough time to start with you, so we'll go to Ms. Poirier-Rivard. We'll make sure you get your time on the next round.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon.

You provided us with a description of registration categories and programs. I'd like you to tell me a little about the Own-Use Import Program.

[*English*]

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** The act and the regulations have regulations that permit the import of pesticides for own use. There are regulations that establish the conditions under which that can happen. To get a product approved for that program of own use importation, you first need to establish chemical equivalency of the chemical of the product you want to import with a chemical that is currently registered in Canada. So it's chemical equivalency first. You also then must have a Canadian-approved label that meets our criteria for a label in Canada.

Once you've met those two, then individuals can import product from another country, most often, obviously, the United States, for their own use.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard:** Could you now tell us what the process is in the case of products meant for human consumption.

[*English*]

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** The way the program is set up, it doesn't differentiate use for what purpose, so if it's for a farmer's use and it's a food crop, that is acceptable.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard:** You make no distinction?

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** No.

**Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard:** What about field crops? Do you have any information concerning them? What is the process in the case of field crops such as broccoli and cauliflower?

[*English*]

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** Is that the own-use import program for those kinds of crops?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard:** Yes.

[*English*]

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** Again, it would depend on what the Canadian label had as approved uses. If the Canadian label had as approved

uses some of those crops, you would also then be able to have a product under the own-use import program for those uses.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Does Mr. Gaudet want some time?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to know if there has been an agreement on changes that you have made in the case of pesticides that Americans are allowed to use on their crops and that we, Canadians, are not allowed to use. Are we now allowed to use the same pesticides on our crops as they are?

[*English*]

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** I'm not sure I understand your question.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** It's quite simple. Our producers tell us that the Americans are allowed to use certain pesticides that we are not allowed to use. The Americans then sell us their products. To what extent have we harmonized practices in both countries? If the Americans are allowed to use certain pesticides and then sell us their products, and we are not allowed to use those same pesticides on our own products, then there is a problem. That means that American products are benefiting at the expense of our products.

That is my question. The same question was put to the PMRA in 2002. I would like to know what has been done since 2002.

[*English*]

**Ms. Trish MacQuarrie (Director, Alternative Strategies and Regulatory Affairs, Pest Management Regulatory Agency):** It's quite true. There are large differences between the products that are available in Canada and the products that are available in the United States. PMRA has been looking at this issue in a number of ways, but there are things the agency has been doing to try to address that gap. There are also issues that are beyond the agency's mandate. If I could, I'd like to give several examples.

In general terms, I think harmonization is a program that largely helps to address this gap. We have been working with the United States to review chemicals and at the same time to share our workload and come to decisions—as much as possible, the same decisions—on the residue levels allowed in the food crops on which these pesticides are used.

We have similar data requirements to ensure the industry is not inhibited from coming to Canada, for example, because we have more data requirements or different data requirements. We have largely harmonized our data requirements. The next step in that issue, as Karen mentioned earlier, is to make sure we are actually doing an evaluation in the same way, that we're coming to the same conclusion through our scientific analysis, so that if we're not, we will sit down together, work out the differences and the rationale for them, and agree on a common path.

Those are, very quickly, a number of the areas, through harmonization, that are helping to address the gap between Canada and the United States. There are other reasons for the gap. I think it's very clear that the Canadian market for pesticide products is much smaller than the American market. It's not perhaps as attractive for the industry to always come to Canada. There is also a wider range of crops grown in the United States than in Canada. For example, we can't grow the southern crops here, and there are a large number of pesticides available for those crops that would have no use in Canada.

Briefly, it's a very complex issue, and we are meeting with our American colleagues, to talk about it and explore ways to address it. Over the last six months we have also been visiting jointly with the EPA and CEOs of a number of major pesticide companies to talk about the issue and about the reason for the gaps. That series of meetings has led to some interesting discussions. We have, for example, found there is some misunderstanding in the pesticide industry about the Canadian registration process. We were able to clarify that. Additionally, we have confirmed with the CEOs that there are business decisions they take that really have nothing to do with the way the regulatory system is set up—but they're business decisions.

• (1605)

**The Chair:** Okay, thank you very much, Ms. MacQuarrie.

Now we'll move to Ms. Ur, for seven minutes.

**Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, Lib.):** I thank you for your presentation, and I appreciate your comments, Ms. Dodds.

In one of your statements you said a project for the PMRA would be communications, and I can say you've gotten out of the gate very well. We had enough material to keep us awake until midnight at the House, going through all the documentation you gave us. So it's nice to see the information that we're able to get through PMRA.

My first question basically follows on my colleague across the way who was just questioning you. You had indicated that you had spoken with your U.S. counterparts regarding harmonization, and you said how close you were getting on that and the difficulties regarding efficacy. That has been a major topic in the past.

My question is are you thinking of moving to their standards, or are we going to maintain our standards and have the U.S. share the standards we have here in Canada? I understand ours are—of course I may be a bit biased—a bit better. Are we experiencing difficulty there?

• (1610)

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** I'm still learning about the issues with respect to efficacy. As I understand it, the U.S. requires that there be data on efficacy. So the data must be produced for the U.S., and it must be produced for the Canadian situation. But the U.S. doesn't necessarily review that data the same way we do.

One of the other misunderstandings about efficacy is what we're using that information for. It's less to show that the product works and more, actually, to set what dose should be used, what maximum number of applications should be used, and then that information is

very important as we do our risk assessment to look at what the exposure of Canadians is.

So we are looking at refining our approach, but if we adopted the U.S. approach we actually wouldn't have room to approve as many pesticides for as many uses, because you would start being concerned about Canadians having too much exposure through their diet.

So doing our efficacy work helps refine the risk assessment, which then allows for more uses of products, which is especially important when you're concerned about the minor-use crops, because it's important that you have enough tolerance vis-à-vis exposure to allow those additional minor uses.

So we have had discussions on efficacy. I know the agency hosted a meeting with stakeholders, I think it was in January of this year, to discuss some of the issues on efficacy. And we're also looking at different approaches, depending on the situation, for the pesticide, so you would have a certain approach for things that are low risk, and a different approach for things that are new actives, minor use, different groupings of crops.

**Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur:** Thank you very much.

In the past there's always been a real concern from our producers that products were taken off the shelf before there was a replacement product. We seem to have difficulty having the PMRA understand that there has to be a substitute before removal.

What stand are you going to take on that on behalf of our producers?

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** What we're doing now in our re-evaluation program—and this was instituted before I arrived—is to have, I think, quarterly stakeholder conferences to let the stakeholders know what the status is of our re-evaluation program and to identify pesticides where there looks like there could potentially be a concern to allow as much heads-up time for growers to say “That may be an issue for us. It's the only pesticide we have to deal with this situation or another situation”, and for us then to also look at an appropriate transition strategy.

We don't have it all worked out yet. As I understand it, stakeholders appreciate these teleconference calls, and it is helping the situation, but it's probably something we can still improve upon.

**Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur:** How do you view the zoning map for Canada and the United States? In the past we've had really good map descriptions and information, where we have the same zones across the border. We've had very great difficulty with PMRA understanding that. If the zones are the same, why can we not work with the information? Because obviously, if the zones are the same, it must be the same documentation.

Are you going to be more receptive and perceptive to the zoning of Canada and the U.S.?

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** I'll ask Trish if she has any information to add.

I know we have a project under way where we're looking at two of the zones. I think it's zone 5/5A or 5/5B, or something like that. I've told stakeholders and staff that it's part of my nature to challenge status quo. I don't think it is acceptable for even a regulator to simply defend status quo. You have to understand the rationale for what you're doing, and you have to be open to other ways of doing it. We are likely going to be able to make progress on the 5A, 5B kind of issue.

I hadn't heard before that if we have the same zone north and south of the border, we would still need information.

**Ms. Trish MacQuarrie:** That's correct, if we have the same zone, we don't need additional information, either in Canada or the United States. We can just use that zone and reduce the number of overall trials required.

There is a project under way to resolve a few of the remaining issues. The 5A zone was an issue within the United States. The United States would not accept information from trials conducted in the Canadian 5A zone. This issue will likely be resolved by December. The analysts have found a path forward, so we're hopeful this issue will be gone by next summer.

• (1615)

**Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur:** I realize, Ms. Dodds, that you've only been in your job for 100 days, and the information in this report is from April 1, 2004, to March of this year. It lists PMRA registration actions, and it has a chart at the top. According to the chart, there has only been one joint review adopted in this time period.

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** As I understand it, that's one where there's been a decision rendered during this timeframe.

**Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur:** But only one.

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** In this timeframe, I believe there are about nine under way. They're under investigation. Canada and the United States are working together to come to a decision, but the decision hasn't been rendered.

**Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur:** There certainly is room to improve there, then.

Also, I've read this work and have found it interesting. Under "total minor uses registered", you have 65—that's a great number. In comparison with other years, is that good or bad?

**Ms. Trish MacQuarrie:** I'm sorry, could you repeat the question?

**Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur:** In 2004-2005, the table gives the "total minor uses registered" as 65. That's only a number to me, if I don't have something to compare it with. Is that better or worse?

**Ms. Trish MacQuarrie:** If my memory serves me correctly, there was a slightly larger number the year before. But we'll have to get that information for you.

**Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur:** Quite a bit larger—it was 300 and something.

**Ms. Trish MacQuarrie:** That's right.

**Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur:** To be exact, it was 302.

**Ms. Trish MacQuarrie:** Yes, so the number is down.

**Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur:** Considerably.

**Ms. Trish MacQuarrie:** Yes.

**The Chair:** I know we could go on, but that's why we're here. We want to see improvement.

Mr. Ritz.

**Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC):** Ladies, thank you for appearing here today.

We've got a product mostly based in western Canada, a generic glyphosate type of product. It's been a rocky road to be able to bring it in, in significant quantities. Some two million litres were brought into Canada in less than four weeks, and it is used right across the country in different amounts. It's in under a temporary own-use type of permit. Any idea when that runs out?

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** The chemicals on the own-use program don't have a finite period of time. It is only good as long as the chemical equivalents remain the same. If there are any changes made to the product in the United States, or the product to which the comparison was made in Canada, we would have to go through another consideration of equivalency. It's the permits that are limited to this amount for this purpose. The permits the farmers work with are limited.

**Mr. Gerry Ritz:** So pool buying is basically out. You'd have to do it individually. That's where the price point is: in buying cooperatively or pooling the buy.

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** If the chair would allow me, the own-use import program this year has seen pool buying.

**Mr. Gerry Ritz:** Okay.

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** It was an association, the Farmers of North America, that got the chemical approved and that on behalf of farmers has actually done the importing.

Now, due to the volume—we've had about 1,400 permits and about 2.5 million litres of the generic glyphosate product imported—it does raise some public policy concerns about the extent of the own-use import program. And many people have raised concerns, because, as I described to one of your colleagues, most people were assuming own-use import meant it was a farmer who would go down and bring product back.

•(1620)

**Mr. Gerry Ritz:** Technically, it is a farmer. They are pool-buying to make it worth while. Transportation costs and the buying itself really have no bearing on how the chemical is applied in Canada. It is an end-user, a single farmer or producer, who's using that, so let's look at it from that standpoint. It's certainly a price point that needs to be carried on. We've had a great discussion here today, and that type of agreement can be had at other meetings, but if you start playing around with the notion that because they're pool-buying it doesn't apply, we'll have some problems.

We're looking at, as you said, 2.5 million litres, roughly, for spring work. That's generally about two-thirds of the commitment for a glyphosate type of product. A third of it, roughly, is put on in the fall. So we're going to see some more pool-buying and some more bringing it in. I want to see that maintained. There's a saving of \$250 million to \$300 million for producers in that chemical and being able to do that. With the dire straits the producers are in, we need to give them every tool at our disposal, so let's look at the end use of the product, not the pool-buying of it.

Regarding the testing cost you were talking about, you're starting to use more of the American testing in a reciprocal agreement. That's a good thing. PMRA has always operated on a cost-recovery basis, when it comes to testing. So if there's no testing cost involved when you're using the American results, I'm wondering if those savings are passed on to the Canadian firm or whatever applying for that use.

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** The cost-recovery scheme is actually applied to the registrant companies, and it doesn't relate to what their costs are to bring the data package together. It relates to the work PMRA has to do. Now, we will—

**Mr. Gerry Ritz:** If you're using the American test, the work is done, and the packet is done, and you're basically saying “ditto”. There can't be nearly the same amount of cost as when you start doing the scientific testing and your prime target is 700-and-some days, two years. So I'm wondering if that cost, then, is passed on.

I've got an operation in my riding that is trying to use ammonia for rodent control. They were told \$250,000 would be the cost to test ammonia to say that it's ammonia. So if there's an American test that is already using it for rodent control, which there is, then why would my producer be charged another \$250,000? You're not reinventing the wheel; you're photocopying.

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** Our charges depend on the category of submission. If it is something similar to what we've reviewed before, the costs are less than those for a first-time review.

The issue has been raised that there is no cost differential for joint reviews, so it has been identified that the industry isn't getting a break. The U.S. and Canada are working together. Canadian companies are under the same fee burden as the U.S. The U.S. also doesn't have any ability to differentiate. Neither does our current fee structure. That's been identified as an issue to address, but we have not yet done so.

**Mr. Gerry Ritz:** Is that something that may require an amendment to the new Pesticides Act that you're going to be operating under come 2006? Is that the type of thing we need to address here?

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** We need to address it—

**Mr. Gerry Ritz:** Those costs are passed on to the end users, the producers, and I'm very concerned about their bottom line, as I know Mr. Easter is.

**The Chair:** Okay, your time has expired.

**Mr. Gerry Ritz:** The time goes fast.

**The Chair:** I've given you your time, and we'll go to Mr. Easter, for five minutes.

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Thank you.

**The Chair:** There's enough time for the both of you to have your five minutes, if you....

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

Welcome.

I, like most others here, was encouraged by your opening remarks, in that you seem to recognize there is a problem and we have to overcome it.

I want to echo what Mr. Ritz said on own use. It is a huge savings for the farm community to pool their purchases. And I hear what you say, in that the intent was for a farmer to bring in a product for own use, but given the circumstances and the need for that product, don't get too technical in terms of the meaning of the words and ensure that product is able to come in, because it is a huge savings for the farm community.

A key concern from the farm community is the lack of access, of which you are well aware, to products that are available in the United States but not available for us. What farmers look at is they're not allowed to take advantage of that product as the Americans are, yet as a country we'll import the food that product was produced with. We have a kind of catch-22. Farmers find themselves in a less competitive position.

My question is how are we doing on getting rid of our backlog, and do you envisage a time when Canadian farmers will have the same access to those kinds of products as Americans? Where are we in terms of the backlog?

•(1625)

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** Can I check an assumption first? Your use of the term “backlog” I assume is U.S. total number of products versus Canadian total number of products, because in the PMRA we do not have a backlog of submissions, but there is absolutely a difference in the products available south of the border and the products available north of the border.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** That's what I mean.

It cuts two ways. It may not be your fault entirely that a company is not applying for use of the product in Canada, but it could be a factor as well. Maybe we're too expensive to apply to, so we're going to have to find some way of gaining access to those products in Canada.

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** There are a couple of things I would note, and let me start by saying that minor use is an issue. The agency does have a number of strategies, working with Agriculture Canada we have a number of strategies, but I don't think we have enough in place so that I can say we will not continue to have that differential, and I'm very open to people working with us to provide suggestions.

What we do have to address is the current differential and to try not to have a differential going forward, so how many minor uses were approved this year in the United States versus this year in Canada.

We have two programs: the user-requested, minor-use registration, and the label extension for minor use.

Something that's been very successful, and because of which a head of steam has built up and we'll start seeing the products come through the pipeline door to PMRA now, is the work that Agriculture Canada's pesticide management centre has done. This was money provided by the federal government, a program that spans PMRA and Agriculture Canada to work with the agriculture sector to identify where some of those key minor-use gaps are. So there is a large needs analysis done. A list is prioritized. Agriculture Canada undertakes to do some of the research work that's needed if we don't have all of the data, and then to put the submission package together and get it to PMRA.

PMRA's commitment is to work pre-submission to say this is the data needed and then to apply the resources to the actual submission reviews.

I think we've seen about the first nine or ten submissions received from Agriculture Canada, and it looks like in the next year we'll see 45 to 50 of those submissions. That is clearly working to address that backlog. That still isn't enough. When we do our annual prioritization—those of you who talk to growers may know how complex the situation is—hundreds of needs are identified. We're talking about tackling the top number of them, and there are hundreds being identified. That's where I'm saying we shouldn't be living with the situation where we know we're only addressing maybe the top 10% or the top 20%, because people are concerned.

It was very interesting for me at the technical working group at NAFTA to talk with my colleague in the USEPA. He actually has the same interests as I do: to make sure that the growers north and south of the border have access to the same products. They don't want to see it differentiated. We don't want to see it differentiated. We recognize the issue that you don't want the import MRLs, you want an MRL so that farmers in Canada can use it and farmers in the United States can use it.

I still think there's room to improve on minor use. The current programs are improving the situation, but, in my estimation, it is new. I don't think the current strategies are enough to address the whole issue.

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

Mr. Tweed.

**Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'm going to actually ask a different type of question on something that seems to be occurring in the communities that I represent, and I'm hearing more about it as it moves across Canada, and that is the unwillingness of your agency to speak out with regard to the safety of some of the pesticides that are being used. You talked in your opening comments about risk. It appears to me that you're prepared to go out and talk about the risk to communities, but you're not prepared to go out and promote the safety side of it. I wonder if that has changed under your management style, or is it something that I'm going to continue to hear, not only from my suppliers but also from the municipalities and the communities?

Would you care to comment on that?

• (1630)

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** Absolutely, and I'd be interested in feedback.

When I first started meeting stakeholders, a lot of them—the growers and the industry—said, “Karen, we want PMRA to speak out about the safety of pesticides.”

I grew up with genetically modified foods. I've been responsible for evaluation. I've been responsible for regulation. That taught me that if government tries to tell Canadians that the product is safe, believe us, and this is why you should believe us, you don't attend that result.

What I have said and what stakeholders have responded very positively to is that we must be stronger in saying, “Here is what the regulatory system is doing and here is how it's doing it”. And we need to link with more people.

On our Pest Management Advisory Council we've included a representative from the Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health for Canada, because how could medical officers of health, if they don't have the information about what the regulatory system does from a scientific perspective to protect human health, discuss that when they're in town halls or forums with citizens? We have provided packages of information to municipalities across Canada about what we do.

There may be other strategies, and we may win by saying that pesticides are safe, but from my experience with GM foods, you should allow somebody else to come to that conclusion. What we do is tell them what we're doing. We are doing the assessment for human health. We do a very thorough risk assessment. Canada's system is considered one of the most rigorous internationally, but it still meets international norms. We're not way out of whack with international norms. We are looking at vulnerable populations: infants, pregnant women, children. We haven't been telling that story.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, I think there is agreement in the agency that we need to do a better job of communication. The question is whether our message is “Pesticides are safe”, or is our message “The regulatory system is strong and you can have confidence in the regulatory system” ?

**Mr. Merv Tweed:** I would think that if you're doing the testing and the research behind it, you'd want to stand up and support your position. I look at this document you've sent out. You've sent it out, I presume, to provinces and municipalities. I don't know if it's by request or whether it's automatic, but what I hear constantly is that organizations and groups are moving, particularly in urban areas, to change their path of treatment in certain areas.

The retailers struggle because they're seen as self-serving if they try to defend their position, and yet the people who actually perform the testing and make the recommendations aren't willing or aren't able to stand up and support that position. It seems to be something I see growing and it is going to continue to be a problem. If you're suggesting that it should be somebody else, then I would ask who that somebody else should be.

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** We obviously play an important role, and we recognize that we have to improve our communication. The role of the federal government in regulating pesticides should be more visible. But we will also gain by working with others, such as local medical officers of health and the Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health, to understand the questions they're getting and to provide them with information so they can answer those questions. If we don't address those kinds of stakeholder groups, we leave a void in the system.

**Mr. Merv Tweed:** If what you're suggesting is that you need a better communications package, I would suggest that's what it is, because I'm not hearing from people about what you're standing up and supporting. What I'm hearing is that if they want to find the regulation, they have to go to the website. There is nobody who can actually speak to the issue who can talk directly to the people who are trying to make the decisions.

I don't know how much something like that costs to produce. I suspect it's a fair amount of money, and I suspect it comes out of a communications budget. I might recommend that you look a little harder at your communications budget in terms of how you get the information to the people who are being impacted directly and have no forum to defend themselves and no actual way of getting the knowledge to make the right decisions for their communities.

• (1635)

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

Mr. Bezan.

**Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC):** I just want to follow up on what Merv was saying. Essentially you have the communications strategy you've developed. But we actually need a more aggressive push-back. There are some vicious attacks in the media and we have to have somebody who is a strong spokesperson. It can't always be industry, because it has a vested interest. It has to come from the person or the organization that plays policeman, and that's exactly what you are. You're the ones who have to make sure everybody is in compliance and they did the approvals, and you need

to be able to straighten it out and say that what they're saying is misinformation.

Are you guys at all considering going down that path, being more aggressive in the media and making sure that people are receiving the correct information, especially when you have all these special-interest groups out there creating havoc? I think what Mr. Tweed is getting at is that we have a great deal of misinformation out there. They're getting into a lot of municipal bylaws, and now we're getting a lot of these pesticide bans across the country. And it's really a matter of misinformation and fear-mongering being done by certain organizations.

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** I'll ask my colleague Trish to talk about the initiative we've been working on with our advisory council.

**Ms. Trish MacQuarrie:** Yes, we've heard the concerns about communication, and indeed we've seen the results of what can happen when communication is not done well.

We have through the Pest Management Advisory Council set up a working group, and the working group involves a number of stakeholders who are interested in this issue. We've made some progress on the issue, and we're looking to develop recommendations on an overall communication strategy that will help the agency move forward in this area. We're hoping to have that work done by November.

**Mr. James Bezan:** You need to always keep in mind that once you've approved a product, you've announced to the public that it's safe, and once it's been declared safe, then we need to be able to make sure that message gets out there on an ongoing basis, especially when you have organizations that claim it's not. You've made a decision, and it undermines your credibility if you don't speak up for yourselves and for the industry.

The other thing I wanted to do is go back to the unlevel playing field we have between the world and Canada. We're always talking about making sure that we have a quicker or more streamlined testing regime to mirror that of the United States. I know you're new, Ms. Dodds; I think you said you'd talked to your U.S. counterpart, but have you gone through and looked at their criteria, their protocols, how those compare to ours, and what we need to do differently so we do have a quicker streamlining of products?

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** I have a couple of comments.

As I said in our comparison of the Canadian approval process and the American approval process, we do have harmonization with respect to what data we ask for, and to a large extent we have the same process for reviewing the data. What we did in May was to agree that wherever we now say there are differences, we just don't allow those differences to get documented and to become finalized. We've actually challenged each other to say, look at it; can we come to the same conclusion? If we can't on that specific product, we have to know why we are coming to something different, and can we address it at a more basic level so we can overcome that difference?

In terms of the approval times, the Canadian performance timeline is actually shorter than the United States' approval time.

**Mr. James Bezan:** It's actually shorter here than down there?

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** Yes.

**Mr. James Bezan:** They have way more products available to them than we do in Canada.

Now, what is the discrepancy right now in product stateside versus here with all different licences? Do we have a breakdown?

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** I don't have that information. We could try to get it for you.

Again, it's difficult because the trade names in Canada may not be the same as the trade names in the United States, and in both countries we're talking thousands of products. To be able to say what the difference is... We know that's something people are interested in. I think that was part of the discussion we had with the clerk and the researcher. To do this comparison historically is likely not going to be very doable because of this difference in what we call a pesticide north of the border and south of the border, in the two countries. Working forward, we'll be able to do a better job because we are working so closely now.

•(1640)

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

There's one more short question, and then we're going to try to live by our determined guidelines.

Mrs. Ur.

**Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just have one quick question, Ms. Dodds. In the documentation we have before us, it says "...the Minor Use Advisor position is extremely challenging and the different activities very difficult for an individual to deliver". First of all, do we have a minor-use adviser in place at the present time?

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** No.

**Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur:** Why not?

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** With respect to the duties of the position, there are actually some internal conflicts; you are asking one person to do things that put that person in conflict. The activities and the responsibility are things where we are undertaking and we are looking to improve the situation. In my estimation, one person cannot do that job, and we need more than one person and we need a different approach.

**Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur:** Do you support the committee's recommendation of an ombudsperson and a minor-use adviser?

**Ms. Karen Dodds:** On an ombudsman, I'm not sure I understand the sense. Again, in terms of the minor-use adviser, I do not think one person can do that. I think we need to have more in the agency where people know. They're the people who deal with minor use. It's not one person; it's a different role, but it incorporates a lot of those roles.

**Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. As you can understand, in one hour of discussion we have but touched the subject matter for this afternoon.

There's a reason for us wanting you to report twice a year, and that is of course to bring our expectations in line with your delivery of the program. This has been a pretty easy ride for you today, let me assure you. If things move progressively forward you're going to be heroes

in our eyes. If they don't, obviously there will be some challenges and questions that you're going to have to face at the next meeting. I say that with no malice, but simply as an encouragement to you as you try to do your work and bring forward reports in the future.

Thank you again. Good luck, and have a great summer.

We will pause while people leave the table and our new guests come to the table.

•(1642)

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

•(1645)

**The Chair:** We will reconvene.

Unfortunately we were a little late getting started, but we're going to give you people time to do your presentations. Hopefully we can have most of our members ask you some questions in the five-minute period.

From the Canadian Association of Agri-Retailers we have Bob Evans, president; Steve Lepper, member of the board of directors; and Jeff Kisiloski, technical affairs coordinator.

I'm not sure who's first, but I assume Mr. Evans, the president, will be doing the speaking.

**Mr. Bob Evans (President, Canadian Association of Agri-Retailers):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I manage a farm supply dealership in northeast Saskatchewan. As you've already mentioned, we have Steve Lepper here, who is from Brandon, and Jeff Kisiloski, who is our technical affairs coordinator.

We appreciate the opportunity to meet with you folks, and especially for arranging the invitation on short notice. Thank you very much.

I am going to read the summary of our brief, if you'd care to follow along. The brief was just handed to the committee chair.

**The Chair:** Was that done in English only? It can't be circulated at the table. We apologize for that. It will have to be translated, and then we'll have it circulated after this meeting.

**Mr. Bob Evans:** Our apologies.

**The Chair:** Carry on.

**Mr. Bob Evans:** The Canadian Association of Agri-Retailers appreciates the opportunity to appear before the House Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Our organization believes a safe, healthy environment is the foundation of Canada's high standard of living, and both government and industry share the responsibility for protecting that privilege. By global standards, we do a good job of it. However, the safeguards put in place to protect our food, health, and the environment are not communicated to Canadians in a meaningful manner. The resulting void of solid information provides a fertile breeding ground for mistrust, fear, and public misinformation. Our reason for appearing here today is to encourage this committee to encourage the PMRA and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to communicate their activities to the Canadian public. It is vitally important that we take this threat seriously and work together to raise awareness of the measures employed by government and industry to protect our nation.

The association I represent, the Canadian Association of Agri-Retailers, is a national, not-for-profit industry association representing the interests of approximately 90% of the retail crop inputs sold in Canada. CAAR specializes in providing communications on regulatory and business development to the industry, and in some cases to the general public. We also offer several unique training programs and custodial initiatives that contribute to the sector's long-standing reputation for environmental stewardship in crop production agriculture. Lastly, we engage in lobbying activities at all government levels to ensure that CAAR's collective interests are represented.

Because CAAR members, their employees, and their families work and live in virtually every community across Canada, the health of those communities is both personally and professionally important to us, and it is distressing to us to see the wave of municipal pesticide bans being put in place—for example, 59 to date in Quebec alone. I'm told that, as of today, more than 11 million Canadians live in communities that have a pesticide ban in place.

While the industry has attended most of these hearings to attempt to balance the information put forward, it has not been particularly successful in countering some of the statements made by the nay side. Unfortunately, while every effort was made to present factual, science-based information, the industry's presentations were viewed as partisan and biased.

CAAR recognizes that it continues to be important for industry to make this effort, but industry alone cannot represent the government's regulatory regime and safety measures with a credible voice. We need your help in ensuring that the decisions made for all Canadians are based on the facts.

Steve Lepper has been involved in a battle to oppose a pesticide ban in Brandon, and he's going to share a few comments about that situation.

**The Chair:** Mr. Lepper.

**Mr. Steve Lepper (Member of the Board of Directors, Canadian Association of Agri-Retailers):** Thank you, Bob.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I also work in Brandon at the crop input facility, where I'm a board of director with the Canadian Association of Agri-Retailers and co-chair of the stewardship and agronomy committee, so this is a pretty relevant topic to that area of the board.

In early March, the Brandon and Area Environmental Council announced their intention to propose a municipal pesticide ban to the city council. The ban was developed from a pesticide bylaw toolkit, which can be downloaded from the Sierra Club of Canada's website. The council's intention was to prohibit pesticide use on public grounds; however, it was expanded to include private land based on alleged feedback from local citizens who were concerned that pesticides cause negative health effects.

The president of the Environmental Council was quoted in the *Brandon Sun* as saying that the bylaw would apply to those pesticides the council feels are harmful and dangerous, making specific references to 2,4-D. This pronouncement about 2,4-D was made just shortly after the Pest Management Regulatory Agency, PMRA, completed its study on the product, concluding that when used according to labelling, it poses no adverse health effects. This fact was not mentioned.

In response, CAAR members, including me, and other area stakeholders attended the May 30 city council meeting to present councillors with the facts about responsible pest control use. In total, there were five anti-pesticide and three pro-pesticide presentations on the agenda. While the industry discussed sound scientific research from the government sources, the opposition quoted several negative reports, which have been substantively refuted by both industry and government.

Even after hearing about the stringent regulatory system already in place and numerous scientific reports that demonstrate pesticides are safe when used responsibly, city council referred the issue to its administration for further review. After the meeting, the *Brandon Sun* continued to publish articles about the municipal ban. Unfortunately, very few quotes were derived from the industry presentations. Instead, they welcomed reports from a doctor comparing the effects of pesticides to those of second-hand smoke. An organic food store owner was interviewed and claimed she sees the negative effects of toxic pesticides all the time in her store. Her customers purchase natural herb concoctions to cleanse themselves of these toxins. A university student also claimed that the government could not prove that registered pesticides were safe to use. Instead, he encouraged the use of natural pesticides for weed control, none of which are registered by the PMRA and many of which may be more dangerous.

Media coverage of perceived unacceptable risks associated with the use of pesticides raises concerns in the public consciousness. These are not a few scattered instances. In fact, a media scan done last fall showed a 30-to-one ratio of negatively balanced coverage in Canadian publications and broadcasts. The vast majority of these reports referred to a non-science-based source of facts or simply stated the reporter's take on public opinion, which was largely the case in Brandon.

The PMRA's effort to respond to blatant inaccuracies or broad generalizations has been non-existent in most cases or completely ineffectual in the few where they have responded. It's been very frustrating for me to argue against the story of misinformation, especially when the misinformation becomes nothing more than fear-mongering to the average citizen.

For example, a case in point would be the Ontario College of Family Physicians report last year that stated that pesticide use was directly linked to a wide variety of health issues, everything from endocrine system disruptions to cancer and suicide.

CAAR and other concerned groups contacted the PMRA to request a prompt, effective rebuttal to the report. Much of the content of the report summarized information that was not scientifically credible. Unfortunately, while the PMRA did mount a response, it did not specifically address some of the areas that should have been countered, and it was released more than four months after the initial media coverage had ended. Predictably, at that point very few media outlets saw merit in airing a stale story.

The Ontario College of Family Physicians report was referred to in Brandon by a Manitoba doctor as a credible reason to support the ban. At the very least, the PMRA, on behalf of the Minister of Health, should have provided the correct information on this report to Canadian health care providers.

Under the Pest Control Products Act, the PMRA is charged with the responsibility of protecting the health of Canadians and the environment by managing the risks posed by pesticides. There is no question that this area has seen a heightened level of priority within the government as public interest has grown.

•(1650)

Over the past decade the act has undergone a major overhaul. The agency's mandate and size have dramatically increased. The agency was moved to the Ministry of Health to ensure there was an unbiased regulatory body reviewing the pesticide registrations.

These efforts and a vigilant approach employed by Health Canada have resulted in Canadians being protected by one of the most stringent pesticide regulatory systems in the world. Unfortunately, very little has been done to communicate these efforts. Thus, the pressure from the general public continues to build. In fact, CAAR recently completed a small survey of Canadians from various regions, educational backgrounds, and occupations to determine whether they knew who regulated pesticides. Four percent of respondents could identify the PMRA or the Minister of Health as the appropriate authority. A whopping 60% of individuals surveyed had no idea who regulates these products, or weren't aware that they were regulated. Therefore it's not surprising that the Toronto *Globe and Mail* recently reported a survey done by Oraclepoll Research Ltd. that claimed 82% of respondents want municipalities to adopt bylaws that would stop neighbours from using pesticides on their lawns, gardens, and trees.

That people are afraid of what they don't understand is the unfortunate thing.

With that, I'll turn it back over to Bob.

•(1655)

**Mr. Bob Evans:** As pesticide bans continue to occur across Canada there's a risk that a stigma will develop about the use of these products in agricultural production. In the crop inputs industry, there are many indications that this is already happening. It's extremely frustrating for me when I see that my own customers, who know the benefit of these products, understand the testing process, and understand how they're used, are still, at some fundamental level, nervous about using them. They're exposed to this all the time, every time they go to the city, every time they turn the TV on or talk to their neighbours. They live in an environment where there's a stigma attached to using these products.

An effective information campaign on the part of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency could educate consumers about the rigorous scientific process involved in determining the safety of their food and the role of pest control products. A rational approach would help dispel many of the misperceptions being generated by certain individuals and groups within the environmental movement. I think we're preaching to the converted here, but we would be remiss if we didn't spend at least a moment highlighting the reasons for supporting responsible pesticide use in this country.

We've got a copy of a booklet that was mailed to all members earlier this spring. It contains some interesting facts about the issue, but three items that bear repeating today are these. Based on the amount of active ingredients per hectare, Canada uses a rate of less than one-twentieth of the pesticides used by the Netherlands, one-fifth of the pesticides used in France, and less than half of the pesticides used in the U.S. If pesticides were banned worldwide, it is estimated that the world food supply would shrink by as much as 40%, and food costs would accordingly rise by as much as 70%. More ominously, two billion people would starve.

With respect to urban use, weeds degrade the health of grassy areas and make green spaces less efficient at absorbing pollutants. A well-kept, vigorously growing lawn absorbs air pollutants, like carbon dioxide and sulphur dioxide, and emits oxygen. It tells me here that a healthy 50-foot by 50-foot lawn creates enough oxygen to meet the needs of a family of four for one day. It has also been shown that if the vegetation is stressed by the need to compete with weeds and other pests, its ability to provide these benefits is significantly reduced. In addition, improved air quality from the control of pests such as pollen and mold assists in an overall reduction of asthma.

Pesticides need to be put in their proper context. Products registered by the PMRA must show that their safety factor is 100 to 1,000 times less potent than the level where risk is not yet detectable. In layman's terms, that's approximately the same level of risk as smoking three-quarters of one cigarette in your lifetime.

In conclusion, we request this committee recommend to the Minister of Health and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food that a consumer-level communications strategy be developed cooperatively by PMRA and CFIA. These two agencies should be responsible for promoting their roles in ensuring that pest control products are minimal risk to human health, the environment, and the food supply, when used as directed. Canada has one of the most stringent regulatory processes in the world for ensuring pesticide safety, and that system needs to be defended when challenged.

CAAR believes the following specific actions need to be taken:

An awareness campaign should be co-developed by PMRA and CFIA to educate Canadians on the measures taken by the federal and provincial governments to ensure human, environmental, and food safety. Components of the program should explain the role of both agencies, the overall pesticide approval process, and the types of safeguards in place, from the chemistry stage to food in the store. This initiative should include an information package to be distributed in grocery stores, schools, media outlets, MPs' offices, and other government buildings, and some kind of a myth-buster pamphlet that would be available online as well as in a package to be given to the general public.

There should also be a significantly enhanced web area with contributions from both agencies that would assist Canadians to understand the system and the relative levels of risk associated with pesticides. This site would need to particularly focus on all the factors that affect the health of Canadians in proper proportions.

Federal government representatives must become visible guardians of Canadian food, health, and environment. The proper resources must be allocated to allow PMRA and CFIA to attend events throughout the country, such as municipal meetings set up to discuss pesticide bans. PMRA must have the capacity to respond promptly and effectively to inaccuracies in mainstream media articles concerning the safety of pesticides. This needs to be a broader effort than just challenging specific, quantifiable statistics.

• (1700)

I should insert here that we were pleased to hear recently that PMRA is going to meet privately with the administration in Brandon. We think that's a positive first step; we would obviously prefer that it be a public meeting, but we think it's positive that they are making that step.

PMRA must also make a concerted effort to contradict reports containing sweeping generalizations that serve to erroneously sway public opinion about pesticides and their effect on the well-being of Canadians.

Thank you for listening to these comments. We'd be happy to entertain any questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Evans. We have but a short time.

Next is Mr. Anderson, for five minutes.

We're going to try to get in as many as we can. Again, we will be watching the clock.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was going to ask if you are satisfied that the PMRA is defending their decisions, but I think we have a clear answer on that.

Why do you think there's a reluctance to support their own decisions? I almost heard that today in Ms. Dodds's words again. It just seemed as if she was not willing to take the lead on the fact we've made decisions these products are safe; we don't feel that we're the ones who really have to promote that idea. I don't want to put words in her mouth, but I was a little concerned with that.

Why are they not willing to go to the wall on their own decisions? Do you think it's an ideological thing? Do you think it's an economic or financial thing, in terms of the department's inability to do that, or what?

**Mr. Bob Evans:** Unfortunately, we get mixed messages. We're not sure whether PMRA is willing or unwilling to do this. We get messages when we make an annual visit to Ottawa as an association. We've been assured on previous occasions that they are interested in responding, but when this Brandon situation first came to our attention, we attempted to get a response out of PMRA, and we were told, at several levels of the organization, that they didn't do that. It's confusing for us.

As an association, we'd like to know what the answer is. If that's not part of their mandate, we'll do whatever we need to do to try to make it part of their mandate. If it is part of their mandate and they're not doing it, we have a different course of action. We're confused.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Have you thought at all whether there should be a process for dealing with false claims? We get these extreme claims dealing with these products from extremist organizations fairly regularly. Have you thought about whether there should be a process, or a legislated ability, to respond to them? What would you like to see done?

**Mr. Bob Evans:** We think that PMRA is the legitimate spokesman. They should be able to defend their action. We have a food system that we should be proud of, and why we wouldn't want to defend that system is incomprehensible to me.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Mr. Ritz has a question.

**Mr. Gerry Ritz:** You outlined a fairly aggressive communications program, Bob—and Steve too. Have you looked at a model somewhere that is doing that now, in the U.S. or Europe? You mentioned that they use so much more product than we do. Is there anyone out there who is aggressively communicating in the way you describe?

**Mr. Bob Evans:** No, I'd have to say this communications proposal is homegrown. We don't think it needs to be particularly expensive.

**Mr. Gerry Ritz:** Right.

I'm looking under the response to safety issues under the new Pest Control Products Act. They're actually claiming that under the new act, they'll be able to do more of what you're asking for than they were able to under the existing one. Maybe we're just ahead of our time and will have to assess it a year from now, once this new act comes into play next January. I haven't seen any increased budgets or anything like that talked about in relation to the communicating and websites and so on that you talked about. I haven't seen that.

We know the opposite side of the issue to you folks is very aggressive. It's not, in most cases, based on sound science. It's more mob rule, and I'm not sure how you counter that when you have the college of physicians in their corner, and so on. It has to be based on sound science. There is no doubt about it.

**Mr. Steve Lepper:** Certainly a spokesperson from the PMRA would be one way to address that. When you have a council meeting in Brandon or Saskatoon or Toronto, you can have somebody who knows what the PMRA does and how it is looked at, so that those questions can be answered by council. Standing there in front of the city council getting the questions, you're still painted with a brush of the manufacturer. I have this "Achieving a Pesticide Bylaw" tool kit that I printed off the Sierra Club website. A lot of the information in the 14 pages is directly off the Brandon Area Environmental Council mandate. They've taken the information on this proposal, rolled it out to the councillors, and when they come back with their questions to us, although they are the manufacturers or the retailers who are out for themselves, it takes away our credibility.

That's exactly where we're going. If we could get somebody from the PMRA speaking to it, that would certainly help the position a lot.

•(1705)

**Mr. Gerry Ritz:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Next we have Mr. Gaudet or Ms. Poirier-Rivard. It is Mr. Gaudet.

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** Do you meet with us annually?

**Mr. Bob Evans:** Yes.

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** Next time, please provide your information in English and in French because it is difficult for me to understand when the information is only in English.

I would like to know where the PMRA stands with respect to your association. Does it support you or not?

[English]

**Mr. Bob Evans:** It's very difficult to tell what their position is, because we get one message in Ottawa and a different message when we attempt to access their resource. When we ask them to respond they tell us, "We don't do that."

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** If you had concerns, why did you not send your questions to the committee? We could have put them to the PMRA because their officials appeared before you did. However, please send them to us in French and in English in the future.

[English]

**The Chair:** In defence of our witnesses, they didn't have very much time to do this. This was very short notice. Next time we'll give them more notice.

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** Yes, I agree.

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. Bob Evans:** My apologies. I'm sorry for the omission, but the chair is correct that we had very short notice.

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** That's fine. In the future, if you have questions for the PMRA, send them to the committee and we will put them to the PMRA with pleasure.

Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Easter.

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

If there's ever been an area where we've had difficulties with the anti-herbicide and anti-pesticide movement, I'll tell you, it's in Prince Edward Island, because we have had them big time.

But I do think we have to be careful, Mr. Chair, about what we really request or think the Pest Management Review Agency can do. We have to be clear on what their role is, and what industry's role is. PMRA is strictly a regulatory authority. Their job is to do the approvals, based on science. I don't think you want to put them in a position of being seen as promoting use or non-use. It's up to industry to take the data that the PMRA has available and to use that data. PMRA should be seen in the public arena as a credible agency, in terms of risk-based science. When they make a determination, the public should understand that something is a safe product. But if you put them in the position of being out there promoting that, then I do think you put them at risk.

So I think industry has a tremendous role to play here. PMRA has a role to play, yes, in terms of making sure you have access to the data that can prove your point that these are safe products, because they obviously are.

I really think, Mr. Chairman—and I don't know if it's our committee or some other—that in this country we are increasingly having a problem with the media.

I see Gerry smiling. This is not being political.

**Mr. Gerry Ritz:** No, no, I wasn't smiling. It's serious.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** It is very serious, because they will take an issue and speculate on it. It sells newspapers. Don't let the facts get in the way of a good story. It doesn't matter how you try to get those facts out there, it is the opponents that are going to get the coverage. You gave the example of 59 pesticide bans. I think we're going down a wrong road, and that's partly because of the public's lack of knowledge or their opinion based on what they've read in the newspaper lately.

We faced that in P.E.I., and the industry itself had to really go out with all barrels firing to challenge the Sierra Club and others, because they're using strictly misinformation. They'll use the cancer word every chance they get, and that scares the hell out of people. There is no substance or fact. These people, I think, Mr. Chair, are to be challenged. I think the media has to be challenged in the way that they report, and that the bodies—whatever they're called—should be challenged more, because it's getting worse every day.

I guess mine differ a little from the other questions. There are things PMRA can do, but I think we have to be careful not to put them in an impossible position, which could erode their credibility down the road. That's mainly a comment.

I agree with the concerns you have 100%. Government, in other ways, through the Ministry of Agriculture or others, might be able to assist you, in terms of communication and getting the message out on how safe our food is, and so on. I think it's a good idea for PMRA to go and meet Brandon Council, for instance, but not to get out there in a public campaign. I think we've got to watch that line.

• (1710)

**Mr. Bob Evans:** Well, I guess I respect the fine line you're talking about. I think we've actually had this discussion before. I think the issue, though, is when we start having public policy decisions being made based on junk science that can impact our competitiveness long-term, there has to be a balance there at some point. And we're certainly not suggesting that PMRA should do a song and dance or a promotion campaign for the industry, but we do think there's a role for them to step into some of these areas of misinformation.

I must say that I was encouraged by some of the things that Ms. Dodds said. I think they're moving in the right direction. I would hope that a year from now a lot of these concerns will have gone away.

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

We're moving to Mr. Bezan for five minutes.

**Mr. James Bezan:** I want to follow up on what Wayne was just saying. If he's really concerned, as all of us are around this table, about the misinformation and fear-mongering going on in the media, we can bring in and put in place legislation similar to other jurisdictions around the world where there is a liability tied to misinformation.

If you're willing to bring forward a bill like that, I'd be more than happy to second it. You are in the government, and it would be a lot easier for you to bring it forward than for me, as a private member.

I want to say, following some of the comments Wayne made, that what you're asking is that the PMRA not go out there and promote the industry, but go out there and explain the rationale in the licensing of products and explain the science they use in their determinations. Is that not correct?

**Mr. Steve Lepper:** Exactly.

**Mr. James Bezan:** You don't want them out there as a promoter; you want them out there explaining what their decision-making process is.

**Mr. Steve Lepper:** Totally. Industry can speak for industry, there's no question; that's the way I would put it. We get painted with that

brush pretty quickly, and that's fine, but we need somebody who will come out with their unbiased agenda of what they do—not what industry does, or industry thinks, or what the environmentalists think. It's their agenda we want them to dictate.

**Mr. James Bezan:** And the reality is that PMRA, Mr. Chair, is not in the Department of Agriculture but is in the Department of Health, and these are all fear-mongering based on issues of health more than anything else. Essentially, you want them to go out to explain that side of the regulation.

**Mr. Steve Lepper:** Yes.

**Mr. James Bezan:** I want to thank you for coming in today and making a presentation. I think it was very worthwhile. I appreciate all the information you laid out, the statistics you provided, and the recommendations you made.

A lot of what you're talking about is in relation to the overall municipal bans that are in place. How widespread is this now? You used Brandon as an example, but how many other municipalities are going down that path?

**Mr. Steve Lepper:** I think it was 52, in the report we put out, and it may be as high as 70 proposed. I think it actually entertains somewhere around one-third of the population, if you take into account the Vancouver and Toronto proposed bans.

**Mr. Bob Evans:** The ones we are aware of are Brandon and Saskatoon right now. There's an ongoing battle in both cities right now.

**Mr. James Bezan:** What is that going to mean overall to the industry in lost markets?

• (1715)

**Mr. Bob Evans:** It's almost irrelevant. The market itself for those urban products is extremely small. It's the perception and the negative image it casts on the whole industry that's the risk. Concerning the actual products, the industry can defend itself or not defend itself on the products' use, but that's really not the issue. The issue is the public perception that if these are no good in our towns, how come they're okay just outside the borders of the community?

**Mr. James Bezan:** The ban has always focused on manufactured products, but they're saying the so-called natural pesticides are still available for use in these municipalities.

**Mr. Bob Evans:** Yes, natural and unregulated.

**Mr. James Bezan:** What types of risk factors do you see in some of the products that are out there?

**Mr. Steve Lepper:** We couldn't know, because nobody is regulating them. Really, we don't have any background on that. They haven't really put forward any tangible things; they just keep talking about these so-called other remedies that are organic, natural, or whatever. As we all know, there are many natural things that are toxic out there. It's a lot of the smoke-and-mirrors stuff that is the issue.

**Mr. James Bezan:** So there isn't anything that's being sold on a commercial basis, then, you're saying, that we would be able to use.

**Mr. Steve Lepper:** Not that I'm aware of myself, no.

**Mr. James Bezan:** I guess that's a question that could be thrown back at PMRA. If there are products that are so-called "natural" but being sold as a pesticide, don't they need to go through a licensing process? Wouldn't you think there should be a level playing field here?

**Mr. Steve Lepper:** You'd think you would want something to be. It comes down to the fact that there are as many natural toxins that are as toxic as synthetic chemicals. So sure, yes.

**The Chair:** We must remember that PMRA only investigates those that have been put forward to them by request. They don't go out looking for these kinds of products.

**Mr. James Bezan:** There should be some rules, then, about any—

**The Chair:** There are.

**Mr. James Bezan:** —form of marketing. Maybe, Mr. Chair, we should bring forward the necessary regulation or regulatory body to be in charge of that.

I have asked each question, and I'm done. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Ms. Ur.

**Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur:** This is more a comment, as with my colleague, Mr. Easter.

As Ms. Dodds said in her opening remarks, she certainly recognizes that communication is a vital component that needs to be addressed in PMRA. For PMRA to recognize that and want to address it is a big step forward. She's only been there 100 days and has come a long way.

I think one of the things we have learned here today is that perhaps communication from PMRA to local newspapers and to municipalities as to how PMRA operates and how effective registration is through PMRA might be a helpful tool that

municipalities could use within their own systems. If you have a municipality, you have a council. There are people there who listen, who watch. I think that's a tool PMRA will be able to use to get their message out, along with your message.

**Mr. Steve Lepper:** Certainly, I would agree with that.

**The Chair:** There are a lot of things we would sometimes want to say.

It was important for you to be here today. It was important for the people from PMRA to hear your story, and it was important for you to hear what they had to say. We're almost like crossing the Rubicon. We've come to a point where we recognize that there is a divide here. We have to find ways of dealing with it. There is an image in the community today that the Sierra Clubs and the David Suzukis of this world carry a tremendous clout that some of us wish we could match. We don't have that, so we have to find ways.

Ms. Dodds today indicated that there is some onus on the PMRA to get out and let people know, help them understand, and do better communications. Of course, the industry itself should be able to counter the arguments on the strength of what PMRA has said.

Thank you for appearing. We're all facing these same challenges. You're among friends, and PMRA is among friends too. I don't want them to leave today thinking we have abandoned them. We have not. But I think it was important for us, before we adjourn for the summer, to at least hear one another. So thank you once again for appearing today on short notice, and have a great summer.

● (1720)

**Mr. Bob Evans:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** The meeting stands adjourned.

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

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