



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri- Food

AGRI • NUMBER 064 • 1st SESSION • 38th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Wednesday, November 16, 2005

—
Chair

Mr. Paul Steckle

All parliamentary publications are available on the
"Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire" at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

Wednesday, November 16, 2005

• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.)): Ladies and gentlemen, we will convene our meeting today continuing the work we've begun on the avian flu issue.

Before we do, there's a matter of notice, something we need to deal with.

One of the commitments we have as a committee to the House is—and not only is it a commitment, but we have the opportunity—to review certain nominations. On October 25, the committee members received a certificate of nomination for Adrian Measner, president of the Canadian Wheat Board.

We have options that we can exercise. One of those options would be to waive the consideration of the nomination. We can adjourn the matter and discuss it at another meeting. Or we can call the nominee to appear before the committee. The deadline for consideration is December 12. This is not a new appointment; it is a reappointment.

Yes, Mr. Miller.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): I think we should have the applicant come before the committee, Mr. Chairman. That's what I'd like to see.

The Chair: If, for whatever reason—and I'm not suggesting there would be a reason, and maybe this is totally possible—he couldn't come, for unforeseen circumstances that wouldn't permit this committee to see him before December 12, we would in that case have to waive it.

Mr. Larry Miller: What do you mean, “waive it”?

The Chair: Well, we wouldn't see him.

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): So he wouldn't get a pay cheque until we did?

The Chair: He would get a pay cheque. We would have absolved ourselves or would not have taken our responsibility, perhaps because of the fact that time wouldn't permit it. If you want to see him, that would be your choice.

An hon. member: Let's check out his mettle.

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Chairman, what I'm saying is I think any applicant should come before this board. It's not a question of this one; I think they should all come before us, and in the event they can't make the time available to come, they shouldn't be in office.

The Chair: This is the privilege this committee has.

We've heard from Mr. Miller. His view is that Mr. Measner should appear before the committee.

Are there any other comments or views?

Mr. Anderson.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): I support Mr. Miller's position. I think it's important to hear from Mr. Measner.

The Chair: Those in favour, please signify. Those opposed?

Mr. Measner will be requested to come before the committee. We now understand the deadline is December 12, so take that into consideration.

We'll move to the orders before the committee today.

Yes, Mr. Bellavance.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Chairman, I don't know when you intend to allow us to discuss it, but I would like the committee to know that I have tabled a motion. I know it will come up in the next meeting. I would merely like you to tell us when it can be brought up at the committee.

• (1535)

[English]

The Chair: It requires 48 hours, so it'll probably be considered at the next sitting of this committee.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Probably not.

[English]

The Chair: Have you received it in writing?

[Translation]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Bibiane Ouellette): I received it and sent it to all the members about 20 minutes ago. So I don't think all members have seen it.

Mr. André Bellavance: All right, but I would like the committee members to know that I have tabled a notice of motion and to please read it, so it can be discussed during the next committee meeting. My motion is about supply management, since there are going to be negotiations at the WTO in Hong Kong on December 9. It is very important.

[English]

The Chair: You should be aware that every committee member reads all notices of motions always.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: I know, but I want to say it so it will be on the record.

[English]

The Chair: We are aware now that you have tabled, and the 48 hours' notice will be noted.

Let us get to the real reason for our being here this afternoon, as we continue our work in looking at the avian flu issue.

We have before us this afternoon people who represent various aspects of the industry. From the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency, we have Mr. Peter Clarke, chair of the production management committee. We have Mr. Errol Halkai here as general manager of the Canadian Broiler Hatching Egg Marketing Agency. We have Mr. Phil Boyd, executive director of the Canadian Turkey Marketing Agency here. Phil, it's nice to have you with us. We also have, from the Chicken Farmers of Canada, Mr. Mike Dungeat, general manager, who is not a stranger to this committee. Thank you for coming today. We also have with us Mr. Robin Horel, president and CEO of the Canadian Poultry and Egg Processors Council.

Have we covered everybody? I think we have.

It would appear that Mr. Clarke, sitting in the centre, is ready to take on the challenge of giving us his presentation.

Are you speaking on behalf of all of these people or only for yourself?

Mr. Peter Clarke (Chair, Production Management Committee, Canadian Egg Marketing Agency): As a group we're speaking on behalf of the industry, but we each have different responsibilities regarding the presentation. We're going to share the presentation.

I'm going to start off and close the presentation, so whenever you're ready, I'm ready.

The Chair: I'm ready, but I need to advise you that we have limited time. You have one hour, because this is in two segments.... I'm sorry, it's an hour and 15 minutes. We've just given you another 15 minutes. We'll hear you, and then we'll have questions.

Mr. Clarke, please begin.

Mr. Peter Clarke: Thank you.

We would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to meet with you and discuss all the activities our sectors have been undertaking in order to prevent an outbreak of avian influenza and to respond quickly to reduce the impact should one occur. We have also been actively working to reduce the recovery time related to foreign animal disease outbreaks.

These hearings are important to our industry. Based on what we read every day in the papers regarding avian influenza, it is clear the industry's focus and the public's anxiety are very high. Both the agricultural and health sectors have a responsibility to themselves and to others to do what is possible to prevent avian influenza and, when it happens or is found, to contain it as quickly as possible.

Just to be clear, when we refer to avian influenza, we are referring only to the H5 and H7 subtypes, as these are the ones that have potential health consequences for human beings and the animals we

raise and process. The livelihoods of our stakeholders depend on a sound management strategy in both biological and social science—that is, not only the action of the virus, but also the reaction of people to the virus's potential.

We take our role in this area very seriously and are aware that we present the front lines of detection and containment. The importance of the poultry producers as initial responders was highlighted many times at the World Health Organization meeting on avian influenza and human pandemic influenza held in Geneva from November 7 to November 9. In fact, in his opening remarks, Dr. Lee Jong-wook, the general director of the WHO, stated that poultry producers make the single greatest contribution to preventing and controlling avian influenza, thus preventing or minimizing the risk of a pandemic.

The five national egg and poultry organizations—Chicken Farmers of Canada, the Canadian Broiler Hatching Egg Marketing Agency, the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency, the Canadian Turkey Marketing Agency, and the Canadian Poultry and Egg Processors Council—have responded jointly.

We've identified five priority areas.

The first priority area we've identified is the need for improvements in national minimum bio-security protocols as a primary means of preventing the disease outbreak in the first place.

Second is the need for an emergency protocol that can be implemented and administered jointly by the industry and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency for the 24-hour to 72-hour period following suspicion of a foreign animal disease outbreak. This includes a pre-emptive culling strategy and an operating procedure for testing and for distribution of test results.

Third is the need to refine the funding framework available for producer and other stakeholder compensation. This recognizes the limitations of allowances for compensation under the Health of Animals Act.

The fourth area is the need to consider and make recommendations on the national surveillance protocol.

Fifth is the need to develop a plan of action for the disposal of dead stock. This must include consideration for infected animals and those animals that cannot be processed due to the outbreak.

Each of the stakeholder groups has committed significant resources on addressing these priorities. In recognition of our interdependence in this area, we took the initiative to jointly hire an avian influenza project coordinator to take responsibility for the development and the delivery of actions in these areas, and to act as a single point of reference with the CFIA. For their part, the CFIA has also appointed a lead person, and we have conducted regular senior management meetings to keep the priority work on track.

We would like to outline some of the initiatives under way on a case-by-case basis. Our goal here is to present to you a flavour of what is happening, not an exhaustive list, and because we state that something is happening in one province doesn't mean it isn't happening in another province.

Mike is next.

● (1540)

Mr. Mike Dungate (General Manager, Chicken Farmers of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'll talk for a couple of minutes on bio-security activities we've undertaken as an industry. We're in the process right now, through our AI national coordinator Bob Burden, of doing a comparison of bio-security standards internationally. The initial assessment of the research he's been undertaking is that our poultry sector's bio-security standards compare very favourably with what we see in other countries.

The poultry and egg industries have covered the major components of bio-security within our on-farm food safety programs. I think it's important to note that we in this industry have been leaders in on-farm food safety. Of the four national poultry agencies for production, three have passed the technical review of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. The Canadian Turkey Marketing Agency is going through the technical review with CFIA this week. So we will very shortly have all four, and then the whole poultry and egg production...under approved CFIA food safety programs.

As a result of that, three of us have already had these programs approved by CFIA and have had them in place and at varying degrees of implementation. Since an outbreak in Abbotsford, three of us have improved the bio-security elements of our programs. For the most part, those additional elements will become part of the auditing of our programs starting in 2006. We know right now that the revised programs, in terms of Chicken Farmers of Canada, are being sent out to all producers right now...as well as retraining of auditors so they understand the new components they have to audit.

I think one of the advantages we have in our industry with supply management is that we're able to control all the commercial production of poultry and eggs and bring them within these types of considerations on food safety bio-security. It is a difficult issue in terms of how you enforce bio-security elements on the farm. We use provincial authority, and you can use either a carrot or a stick approach. Some of us, like the Egg Marketing Agency, have chosen to go through an insurance program on types of salmonella. They've used that as the carrot to get compliance on bio-security measures. If farmers aren't up to snuff on the program, they can get the insurance that comes with it. So I think that's an innovative way.

Others of us have used the production regulations we have. For example, if you are not meeting the bio-security standards or the on-farm food safety standards, some provinces have put it down that you cannot market your product. Others just insist that you've been audited on the program. We're moving through that right now.

As a result of the fact that the production is actually being controlled at the provincial level and on the farm, we've got a number of significant activities that are being done at a provincial

level. This isn't exhaustive. As an example of how Chicken Farmers of Ontario manage it, farmers had until September 2005 to register to be audited. If they didn't, they weren't able to produce chickens. British Columbia is following a similar point with the chicken industry. If you're not on and audited by a certain date, you won't be able to market your birds.

As a result of this, at the broiler chicken level, by the end of this year, we will have 68% of all farms audited and verified on the on-farm food safety program. As I said, that will include enhanced bio-security with the next round of audits, and there are annual audits in this program.

On the layer side, they have 96% compliance as a result of the carrot of their salmonella insurance. I think that speaks highly of itself in that regard. On the hatching egg side, the management of the program is evolving across Canada. Ontario, which is by far the largest producing province, is looking at participation and compliance of bio-security, again as that carrot in terms of specified salmonella insurance coverage.

● (1545)

We take our role very seriously on the front lines of making sure we don't allow avian influenza to enter into our commercial poultry flocks. The first line is bio-security, which we've enhanced. We will be vigilant in making sure we keep up with where the science is in terms of these elements, and we'll continue to look and learn from that and evolve as we go forward.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Boyd.

Mr. Phil Boyd (Executive Director, Canadian Turkey Marketing Agency): Thank you, Chairman and committee members.

One thing that has become abundantly clear is that time is of the essence in dealing with any potential outbreak of a foreign animal disease—AI in particular. Through the past several months, our groups, through our coordinator primarily, and with the CFIA, have worked effectively to develop and implement a document that provides a basic framework for dealing with a suspected case of AI. The intent of the protocol is primarily to reduce the time required to determine if a pre-emptive call is necessary or not. This protocol was not in place, but now is. It has been a significant achievement that we've been able to work out together between industry and the Food Inspection Agency.

There are three advantages of this protocol over what had been there before. First of all, it allows test results to be used from a federal-provincial laboratory network, reducing the time required to understand the test results and to issue depopulation orders as appropriate.

Secondly, the protocol divides the CFIA's flexibility to order a flock depopulated on the basis of preliminary test results—typically available in one day—indicating influenza A virus, in conjunction with some clinical signs in the birds. Prior to this, the depopulation order would not have been made until there had been a positive test for influenza A, the isolation of H5 or H7 had been determined, and it had also been determined that it was highly pathogenic. This procedure could take up to two weeks in the past, so significant time advancements have been made through the new protocol. In the event there are no clinical symptoms, a depopulation order will now also be possible based on the virus isolation itself, and it will not be necessary to determine if it is highly pathogenic.

Thirdly, if there are clinical signs observed on the farm while the tests are being performed, prior to actually seeing the results, the farm can and will be quarantined, resulting in restrictions on movement of animals to and from the farm. Once under quarantine, the producer would then respond and inform the provincial board of the situation. Then, as you can see in the notes, the CFIA measures would fall into place following that. This has been a very significant development for our industry in regard to pre-emptive culling.

In addition to that, we've been working with provincial, industry, and government emergency management response groups to ensure that specific trigger points for actions are developed and well understood. These response processes have been developed in virtually every province. We support these activities. Our coordinator, in fact, is completing a very specific emergency response framework that is going to be used to map out management interventions that our stakeholders would need to consider in the event of an outbreak.

This framework is being designed to augment what has been completed at provincial levels by identifying specific trigger points and interventions that need to be addressed during an outbreak. The emergency plans at the provincial level will be tested at a number of tabletop scenario exercises planned over the next few months. In the notes that we've provided, Mr. Chairman, are some examples of those kinds of exercises that are going to happen. I won't detail them, in the interest of time.

Another example of some work that is ongoing and is being completed in our sector is the focus of our stakeholders in terms of GIS technology, so that farm location is easy to map in the event there's an outbreak, or a potential outbreak, and the problem areas can be readily and quickly identified. Again, in the material there are some examples of some of the work going on in this regard in several of the provinces.

So these are positive developments from an industry standpoint. I believe that with the work we've been able to do cooperatively with the CFIA, we've made a significant stride ahead in this particular area.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Halkai.

Mr. Errol Halkai (General Manager, Canadian Broiler Hatching Egg Marketing Agency): Mr. Chair, I would like to speak on the issues of compensation and reimbursement of expenses.

Compensation is a very important aspect of this whole program, and the ultimate purpose of the compensation under the Health of Animals Act is to make sure producers report diseases in a timely fashion. Producers will report diseases in a timely fashion if they're made comfortable or made aware that the compensation they're receiving is fair.

It has become very apparent that activities in the poultry industry related to the AI result in benefits to all of society. This point was emphasized by the World Bank, which stated that you simply cannot separate economics and disease control activities. Economic incentives are critical in the control and prevention of AI.

Since the AI outbreak last year, we've been working with CFIA to address the compensation issue. This process is ongoing and discussions have been taking place for most of this year, but we haven't reached a culmination in those discussions. We are at this point still uncertain as to the outcome of this discussion with CFIA.

The problem we have is that for a large portion of the poultry industry—primarily the egg layers and broiler breeders—there are no market values established for birds. In addition, the fashion in which we produce our product in terms of just-in-time production means that any disruption in this cycle will result in significant delay in being able to replace the birds, which will add additional costs and burdens to our producers.

We understand that your committee has made recommendations regarding the need to amend the Health of Animals Act to allow improved and expanded compensation rules. We support this and feel strongly that this type of change is necessary, as poultry producers need some comfort that they will be appropriately compensated should they experience an outbreak. It also needs to be stated that the compensation paid under the Health of Animals Act covers only one component of the cost incurred by producers during an outbreak.

On behalf of the B.C. industry, we have been working with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the CFIA on reimbursement of expenses covered by the poultry industry during the outbreak in Abbotsford last year. While the farmers of the infected farms did receive compensation under the Health of Animals Act, it is highly unlikely that the rest of the industry will receive any compensation, other than what is provided by the industry itself.

The B.C. poultry industry is seeking the reimbursement of \$4.5 million to cover specified and documented expenses that were required to mitigate the economic losses and get the industry and the regional economy operating as quickly as possible. Our industry is working on addressing many of the other costs, independent of CFIA, and is not relying on government funding. As a result, it is our expectation that we will be treated fairly when it comes to funds available under the Health of Animals Act and for expenses incurred.

•(1555)

The Chair: We went for sixteen minutes. Can we conclude in four minutes, two minutes?

Mr. K.R (Robin) Horel (President and CEO, Canadian Poultry and Egg Processors Council): Indeed we can.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will briefly touch on the national survey protocol, some issues that we have about disposal, and some concerns we have about communication to the public. But prior to doing that I think I'll take just 10 seconds to tell you who we are.

The Canadian Poultry and Egg Processors Council is a trade association. Membership is voluntary, and we represent some 150 Canadian poultry processors, egg graders and processors, and hatcheries all across the country. Our members process over 90% of Canada's chicken, turkey, and hatching eggs; generate more than \$5 billion in retail sales; have invested more than \$1.5 billion in plants and equipment; and directly employ approximately 20,000 Canadians. In a nutshell, my members purchase their agricultural inputs from the folks who these other folks up here represent, and basically we are the team that deals with AI.

Earlier this year, CFIA approached the industry represented by the five organizations here today to endorse a prevalence survey for avian influenza. Now, CFIA believes this survey will provide critical information with regard to subtypes H5 and H7, and although it is not a requirement from OIE, they believe this preparatory work will facilitate the process and provide the first step to fulfilling our international obligations to conduct surveillance for H5 and H7. Over the past few months we've worked back and forth with CFIA to understand and to provide input into this planned survey.

Recently, despite a number of concerns that we've shared with CFIA, we provided our letter of support for the AI prevalence study. The industry believes that the appropriate surveillance is important to our industry and will continue to be so in the coming years. However, as mentioned, despite our support for the principle of the initiative, we still have a number of specific concerns with the process as outlined to us by CFIA. For example, we are still uncertain how long it will take to turn test results around. We believe and we trust that a farm should be under quarantine for no more than two days before a decision to depopulate can be made. However, at other times we've been told there could be some exceptions and it could be up to five days. Two days seems reasonable; five days does not.

The remaining concerns are around communication of results from the survey, both within Canada and to our trading partners. This issue remains outstanding in our minds, and it must be addressed prior to embarking on the survey.

Despite a tremendous amount of working together on surveillance and on the other initiatives that you've already heard about today, there remain some very serious shortcomings in communication between the national poultry groups and CFIA. Clearly, the most recent example of this was the sporadic release of preliminary findings from the wild migratory duck survey over the last couple of weeks. Our customers, and ultimately consumers, have uncertainty, and that's been exhibited by questions that we continually receive. The implications for the poultry industry, if indeed there are any,

have not been outlined to us. We know that in some provinces provincial governments are further testing wild non-migratory birds. We know that some backyard flocks were being tested. We have been told that commercial flocks are not to be tested, but we don't have an agreed-to definition of what constitutes a backyard flock and what constitutes a commercial flock. We were made aware of one case where samples were being taken at a poultry processing plant. Was this routine, or was it being done in response to the findings of the wild duck survey? If it was in response to the duck survey, then this is one case where a commercial flock was tested.

We repeat, the industry believes that appropriate surveillance is important to our industry and will continue to be so in the coming years. Canada, and that includes both government and industry, takes its responsibility to Canadians and the international community seriously. However, when we at the national level cannot determine what's being tested and what action will be taken in the event that avian influenza is found, we are in a position where we cannot plan production or make contingency plans for supply.

It is a terrible pun—I can't resist, though—that we really should have had all of our ducks in a row before we embarked on the wild bird testing program, and we need to have them in a row before proceeding with the commercial prevalence testing.

I quote verbatim from our written text on the next piece:

Ultimately, we understand that it is the responsibility of CFIA and Health Canada to develop a clear message to the general public that poultry and poultry product consumption is safe. Clearly, we do not expect them to take the role of an industry advocate. However, consumers look to public agencies to provide objective information on issues like this. The absence of this type of a public stand by CFIA and Health Canada serves to further confuse the general public.

We've noted the reporting practices of the USDA to those we are working with at CFIA on this project. We have asked for clarification on why our avian influenza reporting practices appear to be so different from those of the USDA. We understand they are complying with OIE regulations. The American industry is provided with all the relevant communication protocols from the USDA; however, to date we are not aware of CFIA communication protocols. We believe our protocols should contain some form of official industry alert notice, again, similar to that currently practised by the veterinary services department of the USDA.

•(1600)

We've requested that we have the opportunity to work together to prepare a clear outline of communication protocols similar to the aforementioned ones by the U.S., and we are meeting again with CFIA—next Monday, actually—to discuss this issue, along with the other initiatives you've heard about that are under way.

As far as developing a plan of action for the disposal of dead stock is concerned, as noted in our written presentation, this issue remains difficult to address at a national level, since it largely falls under provincial jurisdiction. It is very much dependent on the status of the environmental legislation within specific provinces. Not only are there geographic issues, but there are also feasibility issues, which vary by sector. For example, while in-barn composting is an excellent method of disposal for certain types of operations, it doesn't work for caged birds. Clearly, this issue will be a focus for us over the next two months.

Finally, regarding concerns about communicating facts to the general public, once again I will quote verbatim from our text:

We remain concerned about the fact that we have seen limited commitment on behalf of government officials to present a message to Canadian consumers about the safety of eating poultry products. It is our opinion that our message will be perceived as having an industry bias, and we need reinforcement from a viable 3rd party government official regarding the safety of eating poultry and eggs in Canada. This needs to be emphasized, particularly during a highly visible, public event.

Recent events in Europe provide evidence, albeit anecdotal. Italy, we understand, had a 30% drop in poultry consumption overnight. Poor communication was blamed. The message was changed and demand is increasing, but it's nowhere near being back to where it was supposed to be.

I noted earlier, regarding surveillance activities, that we need to have more effective coordination between our industry and CFIA on communication messages. It is critical that the general public gets the information needed in order to make informed decisions. This means we need to work together to ensure that our messages are consistent and are accurate. It is critical that consumers understand that products are safe, that there are measures in place to ensure affected animals, and that their products don't get into the food stream.

Lastly, there's a second component of the communications strategy that we feel is lacking, and that is in the area of travel advisories. We need information to get to farmers, processors, their employees, and allied industry about the advisability of travel to avian-influenza-affected countries. This becomes particularly acute during holiday periods.

When people who have travelled to affected countries return to Canada, there needs to be a more in-depth survey upon their return. Work that we accomplish within our sectors can be quickly undone by these sorts of events beyond our control.

The Chair: We've gone way over. You can conclude, but do it quickly. That last intervention was about nine minutes.

•(1605)

Mr. Peter Clarke: Okay, I will do this quickly.

First, we would like to tell you a little bit about a vaccine program and vaccines from fertilized eggs. This is part of our solution to our industry's problems that we have, and for the country.

Vaccines come from fertilized eggs. The Canadian Egg Marketing Agency and the provincial boards in Quebec and Ontario have established a vaccine program to designate certain flocks for egg fertilization, to supply eggs through the pharmaceutical company in Canada that supplies about 75% of Canadian human influenza vaccines. These vaccines play a significant role in preventing a potential mix of human influenza and avian influenza genes.

In addition, the infrastructure is in place to produce vaccines in the event of a pandemic in Canada. Canada leads the world in this, and we are proud to say we are very much part of this plan. In addition, we have recently been approached by CFIA regarding the supply of fertilized eggs for laboratory network testing samples for, among other things, avian influenza.

Mr. Chairman, we are part of the solution. Millions of private and public dollars are being invested in pandemic preparedness. A relatively minor investment is required for a few additional improvements. These include providing appropriate compensation for quarantine and depopulation; expedient turnaround times in laboratory tests; the development and communication of protocols related to surveillance, within both domestic and waterfowl flocks; and improved messaging regarding food safety. With these in place, we've mapped out a very sound strategy for prevention and containment. The public can only benefit from the resolution of these outstanding issues.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clarke.

We're moving to our first questioner, Mr. Ritz, for a five-minute round.

Mr. Gerry Ritz: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'll probably split my time with one of my colleagues here.

Robin started it with these terrible puns, but I have one too. Is there a clear-cut pecking order? Who's in charge? You had some concerns about communications, and that generally means no one is in charge and communications either come out early, late, not at all, or with the wrong information, as you said happened in the Italian example. Have you gentlemen been given assurances that there's a protocol?

Mr. K.R. (Robin) Horel: Let me take a first stab. First of all, I think it's only fair to suggest that the media reports I have seen, that have picked it up, and the communication that has come out over the last two weeks from CFIA have been really quite balanced and we have not seen, thank goodness, any consumption declines yet, that we can see. We're doing testing and we will check that out.

However, we do believe that we need to potentially be able to go on the proactive offensive, if you will, with some media messaging around food safety for the next time something happens that is not within our control. There are still three provinces with wild bird tests yet to come, and we will see what happens.

Mr. Gerry Ritz: By the end of the month, they're telling us in meetings we've had already.

I understand from your documentation that some good did come out of the report we tabled from Abbotsford. You're starting to gain some ground on some of those recommendations, but of course not nearly as quickly as we or you would like to see.

You can do a cull quicker, but there is still no protocol for disposal, I take it from your information here, and that is as critical, I think. If there is an AI outbreak, what do we do with the diseased birds? I understand you're working on that. Have you been given assurances that the CFIA is also taking it as seriously as you?

Yes, Peter.

Mr. Peter Clarke: Absolutely. We've been given those assurances, but as indicated in our presentation, there are issues relative to provincial jurisdiction and even county jurisdiction in regard to some issues around disposal.

Mr. Gerry Ritz: That goes back to the whole question of who is in charge. If you've got one person who's in charge, they can say, "This is done, this is done, this is done", and they supercede all those other little bureaucratic silos that tend to slow things down. That was the argument we had with the CFIA and the other government officials two days ago—who is in charge?—and they couldn't really seem to tell us. So I'm hoping you can.

Mr. Peter Clarke: I can't specifically say who is in charge of giving the ultimate decision that these birds will get disposed of here and in this manner.

Mr. Gerry Ritz: Okay, good. I'll turn it over to one of my colleagues.

The Chair: Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): One of the things you were talking about was compensation, and as a producer, I'm very big on proper compensation to farmers, and you're still not making any headway on that. Where are we at with these discussions? There was a recommendation that this committee came forward with.

Mr. Errol Halkai: Yes, we've had initial discussions with CFIA with respect to compensation, and as I indicated, the issue of compensation, the problem with compensation, is primarily focused on egg-laying birds—the CEMA birds and broiler hatching eggs.

The issue is, first of all, that there is no definition of a fair market value for these birds, especially if you have to replace these birds if they're in the middle of a production cycle. In our instance, for

broiler hatching egg producers, the only market for a replacement bird is a day-old chick, and these birds can produce to 60 weeks. So if you've got your flock that's ordered to be destroyed at, say, 30 to 35 weeks, the only replacement you have is a day-old chick and you've got to wait that 30 to 35 weeks to get back to where you were when you had compensation.

So we're in discussion with CFIA to take that into consideration and to take the actual product that the bird produces as part of its market value.

• (1610)

Mr. James Bezan: So you've got market value loss; you've got loss of business over a 35-week period, at least. So none of that's been addressed yet?

Mr. Errol Halkai: Up until now the CFIA has come back and said the compensation is for the loss of the bird itself.

Mr. James Bezan: One of the things you had in your brief is that there is still \$4.5 million in compensation that you're looking for. Is that specifically the loss you're looking for, or are there other business losses that were associated with AI?

Mr. Errol Halkai: No, this is separate from the compensation discussions we've been having with CFIA with respect to the value of the birds. There is \$4.5 million—

Mr. James Bezan: It's still not paid.

Mr. Mike Dungate: Can I comment, Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Dungate.

Mr. Mike Dungate: This is in regard to specific expenses. There were 42 infected farms. One thing we have thrown around is that there is no obligation on those people who receive compensation to actually clean and disinfect their barns in any timely manner, but until all those barns are clean and disinfected.... And we had a problem with one farm in particular.

The industry went in and spent the money, brought in the resources to clean and disinfect all these barns, even though they weren't getting any compensation. So this was a cost to get the rest of the industry...there were 500 farms, three processing plants, three hatcheries, numerous egg-grading stations that were all out of business until this got cleaned up. The industry, in order to kickstart that and to get it going—and I think we probably saved two to three months of downtime in the industry—went and spent that money itself to get that done.

What we're doing is just asking for recovery of those costs. We'll document them. Receipts are there. It's not an issue of loss of revenue or anything; it's just money paid out.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move to Mr. Bellavance for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Thank you very much.

Thank you for your testimony and thank you for coming. This is a very important topic, which the committee must deal with. I would also like to thank you for the work you are doing for the agricultural producers who are affected or who are worried about the present world situation.

Let's begin with the principle that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Some countries vaccinate poultry. Mr. Clarke, you spoke just now about how you are co-operating with authorities to produce a vaccine that would be effective with humans. Have you set up a program in co-operation with the provinces and the federal authorities, or have you asked them to study the possibility of vaccinating poultry, while continuing to create vaccines for humans?

I know it can be very expensive, but there is an article from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations saying that it would be less expensive to vaccinate poultry than to vaccinate humans in case of a pandemic. So I wondered if, from the industry's point of view, you thought it might be feasible. At least, would it be thinkable to study this possibility?

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Clarke: Thank you for those comments.

From our industry's point of view, we would rather not have to go to a vaccination for our poultry industry. By far, we feel the best way is, if in fact we have another outbreak of avian influenza, to contain it and to destroy it versus going to a vaccination. We just don't feel this is the best way for our industry to go. Based on information from other countries and so on, we just don't think that's the best way to approach it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: What information do you have? I know that it's done in Vietnam. I have a newspaper article here with today's date that talks about China, where 14 billion birds are to be vaccinated. What information do you have that leads you to believe that this would not necessarily be a good idea?

• (1615)

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Clarke: In the case of the OIE, they would like any country able to be a trading partner to be free of avian influenza in regard to their products that go back and forth in their countries. One of the issues that often comes up with a vaccination program is what we call a false positive. When that presents itself, the trading partners will really wonder whether or not that truly is a positive or whether it is a false positive. So that could really inhibit trade with us in other countries.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Yes, sir.

Mr. Mike Dungate: May I add something?

The situation in China is completely different from the situation prevailing here in Canada. Production in China occurs outdoors. There's no biosafety there like what we have here in Canada. So there is no defence there other than vaccination.

We have self-contained poultry buildings, so we can shelter our poultry and provide a space between wild birds and our production. For us, biosafety is of greater importance than vaccinations in protecting our birds.

Mr. André Bellavance: You raise an interesting point. There is indeed a lot of outdoor production in China.

The Government of Quebec has recently decided, in co-operation with the industry, to ask poultry producers to keep all their birds indoors. Obviously, this will involve costs for some people. For example, in the area of organic farming, there are those who had to raise their geese outdoors. All this is intended to avoid contact with migratory birds.

Do you think this will spread through the rest of Canada? Are the other provinces beginning to follow suit?

Mr. Mike Dungate: We are not sure that other provinces will follow Quebec's lead and keep all birds indoors.

We don't oppose the Quebec government's decision. But there will be difficulties, especially in the case of turkey production in the Saint-Gabriel-de-Valcartier region, because the decision has to be implemented in such a hurry.

The problem is rather the absence of feed grain programs, for example, in each province. Of course, we would prefer there be something throughout the country. We would also like the program implantation process to be sufficiently flexible and we would like businesses with commercial operations outdoors to have a chance to construct buildings. The Quebec regulations will come into force on January 1. So this may cause the industry some problems, but we agree on the intent of the regulations.

Mr. André Bellavance: You're not promoting it. You say you are not against it, but there is no movement on behalf of the industry saying that the other provinces should do the same thing. In the meantime, you give the authorities free reign to decide what they intend to do.

Mr. Mike Dungate: Yes, that's where we are today.

[*English*]

The Chair: Your time has expired.

You may be wondering whether we've been invaded. No, we haven't been invaded. Guests have come to visit us today, and they are visiting various committees in Parliament.

These people are here from Bangladesh. They represent themselves as members of parliament of the Government of Bangladesh, and they also represent themselves as various chairs of the various committees within their government. I had the special privilege yesterday of meeting with them, and we had an extensive period of dialogue.

We want to welcome you here today as we participate in this discussion in regard to avian flu. We talked about that briefly yesterday. We want you to be able to understand and listen.

They have also been given a copy of the report that we did on the Abbotsford visit. These people have been briefed on some of the work that's ongoing today.

Thank you very much for being here. Feel free to listen, but you can't ask any questions yet.

We'll continue.

Our next participant is Mr. Eyking for five minutes.

• (1620)

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank the group for coming here.

Following the Fraser Valley outbreak, we've learned a lot. I commend the actions of CFIA and the industry for working so well together on that. I think that bio-security on the farm and in processing facilities is one of the best in the world, and we can be proud of that.

My concern has already been raised, but it's not about your actions. I'm concerned about migrating wild birds. We learned the other day that the Asian flyways and North American flyways connect. There is often a mixture of these birds, as they go over the Arctic Circle or whatnot, as well as free-range birds and fancy birds.

My question is this. Are your organizations communicating and working more closely with the groups responsible for these birds, like the Canadian Wildlife Service and Ducks Unlimited, people who own free-range birds, and people who own fancy birds? Is there a kind of meeting of the minds in dealing with this, instead of working separately? That's my question.

Mr. Phil Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'll comment on the segments about the fancy birds and some of the small lots of birds in dooryards and so forth around various parts of the country.

I think the most well-organized group that would represent the kinds of individuals who have the fancy birds or the backyard flocks is probably in British Columbia, after they lived through the early part of 2004. I know the industry there has been working as closely as possible with representatives of that group.

I dare say that in the other provinces there's probably no group like that for the marketing boards to work with. That's an area of ongoing concern.

In terms of the wildlife survey group and Ducks Unlimited, there have been discussions. Obviously, the recent release of the reports on the testing of migratory wild fowl has created some discussion. I think Mr. Horel made a point in his earlier comments that it was launched, and it's probably in the text as well.

The coordination of the flow of that information needs to be better handled. I think that would go a long way towards improving the relationship.

My other colleagues may have something to add, but I think that would be all I have to say, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you.

Hon. Mark Eyking: We learned from the Fraser Valley that, of necessity, the groups had to somehow come together. My hope would be that there's a protocol in the Annapolis Valley, or in other concentrated areas where you have all these different types of birds, and that the groups are all working together.

Mr. Peter Clarke: Thanks, Mark.

With the processes of communication among our producers and members, we have kind of kicked it up a notch in regard to all these issues. In doing so, I think our bombardment of the producers to get it out to the general public in the respective communities is far greater than it was before. I think that has aided quite a bit to raise the public's interest, ideas, and information in regard to this whole issue.

Even in doing that, I think we're able to reduce risks. I think people have a better understanding of the issues and of what they can do within their own communities to address those concerns.

Hon. Mark Eyking: So if there is another outbreak in another part of this country, it comes back to who takes the lead: who takes the lead in getting these groups of people together? Are there town hall meetings right now with some of these groups? For instance, Peter, in your area, would you have a town hall meeting where CFIA would come in with Ducks Unlimited, go through some of this stuff with some of the fancy breeders, and say if this outbreak happens, we'll have to do what we did in B.C., it's better to be more precautionous, and we might have to destroy your birds? Would you have that kind of communication?

• (1625)

Mr. Peter Clarke: To the best of my knowledge, in my area that type of communication isn't actually happening. It's definitely happening within our industry with CFIA and others who are front-line people, but as to speaking specifically to the groups you've suggested, I'm not aware of it. That's not to say it isn't happening, but I'm not particularly aware of it.

Hon. Mark Eyking: Do you think it's something we should foster or try to help with from our side to make that work better, or do you think such communication is important?

Mr. Peter Clarke: I think any communication that could lead to reducing risk or reducing another outbreak in this country couldn't help but be positive.

The Chair: Is there something you want to add there?

Mr. Phil Boyd: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

It's just in addition to what Peter has said. Let's remember that as communications have been kicked up a notch, the emergency response plans and the attention to those have also been kicked up. We've pointed out several examples as to where that has been a priority locally in the province. Those emergency response plans are intended to be comprehensive and to encompass the kinds of things you've raised.

Are we in a better position from an industry and a government standpoint to deal with these things? I would think we are. Are we perfect? No, because this is a continuous improvement program, essentially, on this whole question, but we're in better shape now than we were in December 2003, I would argue.

The Chair: Mr. Miller, five minutes.

Mr. Larry Miller: Thank you.

I may split some of my time with Mr. Anderson.

Some of these questions, gentlemen, I think can be answered fairly quickly, if you could.

Mr. Clarke, you talked about setting aside so many flocks or whatever for the pharmaceutical industry and what have you. What percentage of the whole industry would that comprise?

Mr. Peter Clarke: I won't give it percentage-wise, but in 2003-04 there were approximately 175,000 birds dedicated for vaccine production. As that industry ramps up as the demand increases, they're looking at approximately 375,000 in 2005-06. Of course, with escalation after that as the demand is there, that would increase.

Mr. Larry Miller: Basically it's a small percentage, then, overall.

Mr. Peter Clarke: It's basically a small percentage of our overall bird numbers in the country but a very significant and important part of a vaccine program for our people.

Mr. Larry Miller: Oh, I realize that.

Thank you.

There's another thing. I'm not sure, but I think it might have been Mr. Horel who talked about there being commercial testing on backyard flocks but basically nothing on the commercial side. This is just for my clarification. You mentioned backyard flocks, but there are still a number, especially turkeys, emus, ostriches, and that kind of thing that are housed outside. Is that part of your definition of a backyard flock?

Mr. K.R. (Robin) Horel: First of all, I must not have been clear enough, and I am sorry for that.

The surveillance program we are heading toward will be commercial, for commercial flocks indoors, the stuff these folks produce, not the backyard flocks. My reference to the backyard flocks was this. During this period of time when we're dealing with what we're finding in the wild migratory bird survey, once you've found something, what do you do about it? Now we're hearing from CFIA that we will not be testing commercial flocks, that we may be testing some backyard flocks, etc., and we're not exactly sure what's happening. Long-term, the surveillance program will be on the commercial industry.

Mr. Larry Miller: That's where you want to see it?

Mr. K.R. (Robin) Horel: Absolutely.

Mr. Larry Miller: Going back, then, to the backyard ones, am I taking it as well that you don't think they should be tested?

Mr. K.R. (Robin) Horel: We're not sure and we need to work that out. Again, that goes to my very poor, I admit, pun about needing to get our ducks in a row before we do this. We need to decide what we're going to do if and when we find what it is we're looking for. We don't have that figured out.

Mr. Larry Miller: I'm not the expert on it—you are—but it would appear to me there should be a certain amount of testing on both sides.

You also mentioned the two-day versus the five-day time period for depopulating; it's a matter of three days. You're quite in favour of one and not the other. I wondered if you might be able to comment a bit on that.

Mr. K.R. (Robin) Horel: It took an amazing amount of work between a lot of the technical folks who work for our organizations, and of course the technical folks at CFIA, to get to turning results around as quickly as possible and being able to make a decision in two days. It's not just the inconvenience of having a flock sitting there for five days that you don't know what to do with. It's the issue of bio-security, containment, how big a control zone you put around it, and what happens to the allied industries.

If we can get this done in two days, and we think we can—you heard about the provincial labs and that sort of thing—we need to make those sorts of decisions. That's the point.

● (1630)

Mr. Larry Miller: Okay. It's more or less just getting the ball rolling, so to speak.

Mr. K.R. (Robin) Horel: Yes, it's getting the ball rolling. The other thing is that if indeed there is a positive, and that is why we're going to depopulate, the faster we depopulate so it doesn't spread, the better off we are. That's just obvious. So it has to be quick.

Mr. Larry Miller: I have one more quick one, and this is for Mr. Halkai.

We talked about compensation. Mr. Bezan asked someone about it. I think you have the damage to the industry, which is outstanding, but on the other hand, where there is compensation made directly to producers, do you feel that what's proposed, or what happened in B. C., is enough, basically, to make the producer want to report? And is it getting out, or can it get out, in a timely enough fashion? Just give a short answer if you can.

Mr. Errol Halkai: I believe the compensation that was paid reflected the fair market value for the different sectors.

Mr. Larry Miller: Did it get out?

Mr. Errol Halkai: Specifically for our sector, for broiler hatching eggs and egg layers, where it's not the bird that you market, it's the eggs they lay that you market, it wasn't sufficient. As a matter of fact, one of my members was a producer that was infected, and he was provided compensation and then asked to repay some of that compensation after CFIA redid their calculations.

So, no, that issue with respect to fair compensation values for our sector and the egg-laying sector has not been addressed.

Mr. Larry Miller: I'm a livestock producer, too, and I think it's an important part.

Is that it?

The Chair: Your time has expired for this round.

Mrs. Ur.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, Lib.): Thank you for your presentation, and I thank you for meeting earlier.

In your presentation you indicated all the work that's done with bio-security on farms and within the industry, and you didn't seem as concerned about the backyard flocks.

I was privileged to be one of the people out in Abbotsford when the committee travelled there, and what I saw and heard there indicated to me that it certainly is a grave concern, and I don't hear the same presentation here today. It's pretty hard to get a wild bird into a building, unless your ventilation is quite open.

Mr. Peter Clarke: If I may, please, I hope we're not showing too much of a diminished concern with regard to the backyard flocks, because those are an issue for us as well.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: I would think so.

Mr. Peter Clarke: Any birds that have easy access to wildlife, wild fowl, and so on, become an issue in regard to possible contamination. So if we've come across as not concerned about backyard flocks, well, I think I should apologize, because we are.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: Another part of your presentation was regarding the disposal of dead stock, and it falls largely under provincial jurisdiction. Would it be a benefit, if there was an emergency situation, if we could have some kind of legislation or rule that it would be a federal issue to look after that rather than looking at a provincial jurisdiction to rule on it?

Mr. Peter Clarke: Again, I'll give you my opinion. As you could see in B.C., there were several issues in regard to the disposal that took place. Composting was one that worked very well. Other issues came about when people tried to dispose of birds in other manners. People started to say, "not in my backyard," and then you're dealing not just with officials, but with the public and public pressure.

Anything that would help us in regard to an avian influenza outbreak, where we needed to dispose of birds in an appropriate manner and needed to do so in a very timely manner, would be helpful.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: I'll turn my time over.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair, and thanks for the presentation, folks.

Both Mr. Boyd and Mr. Horel talked about the need to coordinate on the information side, and we talked about this the other day with CFIA. If wrong facts get out there, you're done; you can never get them corrected. I shouldn't say "never", but it's very difficult to get that perception turned around, so it's extremely important on these kinds of issues that create fear in people's minds.

Can you give us an example, like on the survey that was done? Do you get a heads-up as an industry because you're an integral part of the industry? Do you get a heads-up from CFIA before that information comes out so you're not reacting in the wrong way? That's number one.

Number two, Mr. Horel, you mentioned the reporting practices; they're so different in the United States with the USDA. What do they do differently, and do they meet OIE standards?

• (1635)

Mr. K.R. (Robin) Horel: Thank you.

First of all, on the heads-up, in the specific case you mentioned we got a heads-up, but it was hours, simply hours, before the rest of the world got the same information. It wasn't enough; it wasn't adequate.

As to part of your second question, in the USDA protocols they have a protocol such that they will give the industry the heads-up they need so we can have our messaging the same as the government messaging.

You are right, and it's what we learned anecdotally in Italy: wrong messaging equalled a 30% decline in consumption. Right messaging is picking it up, but it's not back.

I can get you—it's a public document—a copy of the USDA protocol. We've given it to CFIA. We're not sure they've got it completely right, but it does seem to address some of our concerns.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Thanks. We'll get that.

The Chair: Monsieur Lapierre, five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Lapierre (Lévis—Bellechasse, BQ): Thank you for providing us with all these details. It is often said that the past is the guarantor of the future. So, an epidemic was contained in one province in 2004. I understand that since then relations and communications between the provinces and the federal agency with the mandate to control it have greatly improved.

According to what I understood earlier, action is still being taken in isolated fashion in certain provinces. In other words, not all provinces are taking the same approach to prevention. It was mentioned that some birds were raised in confinement while others were outdoors.

I have perhaps misinterpreted what was said, but I would like to know if there is a common policy constituting a nation-wide consensus with regard to action to be taken in a crisis. Or do we have a situation where everyone is marking time before arriving at a consensus?

Mr. Mike Dungate: There's an agreement between the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and each province called

[*English*]

FADES agreement, the foreign animal disease eradication support plan.

[Translation]

This kind of bilateral agreement is needed because the situation varies from one province to another, or even from one region to another within a province. For example, in the Fraser River valley or in a place like Saint-François de Madawaska, in north-western New Brunswick, the concentration of production means that different emergency programs must be applied. Therefore, although a Canada-wide program has to be created, its implementation must be adapted to each province, or even each region.

• (1640)

[English]

Mr. K.R. (Robin) Horel: I think you're right when you say that relations have improved. I think they have. As much as I've been here talking today about communications that have to get better, etc., they have improved. I think you're also right that there are some silos. When Mr. Boyd mentioned the pre-emptive call in the first 24 to 72 hours protocol we have, it's an example of something that is pan-Canadian. It has enough teeth that it will work in every province, but it has enough flexibility inside it that you can adjust a little bit if you're in New Brunswick, or the Annapolis Valley in Nova Scotia, or in the Niagara Peninsula, or in the Fraser Valley. That's an example of what we need to do in every one of these five different categories, and we're working towards it.

The Chair: Mr. Anderson, just one question, if you can.

Mr. David Anderson: I think it's the same thing, but there are two parts to it. One is, you talked a little bit about Italy and the disaster they had there. Have you taken any time at all to study the beef industry and their response to their problems, and the fact that they actually were able to create more demand for consumption? I'm wondering if you've done anything on that.

The second part of it is, has the industry self-insured itself in any way? Mike talked about the fact that you had to dig into your own pockets early on to self-fund some of these things to get back on the ground again. I'm wondering, do you have a program or project to be able to do some of that again if you're in that situation?

Mr. K.R. (Robin) Horel: I'll start on the beef industry. I have not looked at what they did. You're right, that was a remarkable story. It's the only place in the whole world that had BSE and an increase in consumption. I know there's got to be some lessons learned there; I've just not gotten there yet. It's a remarkable story.

As for the second, I'll pass to a colleague.

Mr. Peter Clarke: Yes, we do look at insurance programs vis-à-vis different diseases, but you have to take into appreciation when you do look at those programs that they want to become rather specific in regard to what actual peril you're trying to address in regard to an outbreak of a particular disease. That can become very expensive as well, but we're looking at insurance programs as part of our overall program, in our risk management type of a program. All of us have very similar types of programs of bio-security, of Stay Clean—Stay Clean, that are very similar across the country. We're looking at possibly having insurance as part of those programs.

Mr. David Anderson: Have you looked at a check-off type of thing, where you actually do self-fund, not just self-insure? If you're talking about being able to contain this very quickly to a small area,

somebody's going to pay a price for it, and government is usually fairly slow in reacting. So have you considered that?

Mr. Peter Clarke: In looking at any insurance program, we would be looking at a check-off to producers.

The Chair: We've pretty much expired our time for this session. Just before we terminate this session, I'm wondering, when we did the Abbotsford report, I felt it was a very meaningful time spent out there. We had seven recommendations, but would there have been other recommendations that you would see us having included that were missed? I know you've addressed some of the issues today—the compensation and a number of other issues—but is there something that comes off the top of your mind at the moment that we should have addressed but we didn't? We addressed the issues as we heard them. Have we addressed the issues? Is it simply now a case of seeing those recommendations adhered to?

If we had it right... It's not often the government gets it right the first time, but we'd like to think we did it as best we could.

Yes, Mr. Clarke.

Mr. Peter Clarke: I'd like to respond, if I may, Mr. Chairman, and my colleagues perhaps want to respond as well. What was done in B. C. and the work that you and others on the team did was very admirable. We're not suggesting, from my point of view, that there are another two or three more to add to the list. I think trying to get the list complete and get it done is, as you suggested yourself, very important to us, and anything you can do to help us bring these things to fruition would be much appreciated.

The Chair: Thank you very much for appearing today. It's been insightful, and we thank you for your presentations. As you take your departure and the other members take their places at the table, we'll just suspend for a few moments.

While we do this, we might want to just introduce ourselves to our guests from Bangladesh.

• (1644)

(Pause)

• (1650)

The Chair: We're ready to go. We have a quorum at the table and we will continue our meeting. We are in our second phase of this meeting this afternoon.

We have with us now witnesses from the Canadian Association of Veterinary Medicine. At least one member is no stranger: Dr. Gordon Dittberner has been with us many times. He's their senior adviser on government affairs. We also have with us Paul Boutet, president-elect of that association, and Jean-Pierre Vaillancourt, a veterinary poultry specialist, and director of the Poultry Research Centre, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Montreal.

Can you get all of that on a business card?

Dr. Jean-Pierre Vaillancourt (Veterinary Poultry Specialist, Director of the Poultry Research Centre, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Montreal, Canadian Veterinary Medical Association): Yes, but it's small.

The Chair: Dr. Dittberner, are you first, or is Dr. Boutet speaking?

Dr. Gordon Dittberner (Senior Advisor, Government Affairs, Canadian Veterinary Medical Association): We're doing one presentation, and Dr. Boutet will be doing it.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

We have 45 minutes or thereabouts. We want some time for questions.

You're on, Mr. Boutet.

[Translation]

Dr. Paul Boutet (President Elect, Canadian Veterinary Medical Association): Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen.

My name is Dr. Paul Boutet and I am the President-Elect of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA). I am a veterinary graduate from the Ontario Veterinary College, University of Guelph and I am a veterinary practitioner in the city of Moncton, New Brunswick. I have with me Dr. Gordon Dittberner, Senior Advisor to the CVMA. Dr. Dittberner is based in Ottawa. Also with us, is Dr. Jean-Pierre Vaillancourt, a veterinary poultry specialist and the director of the Poultry Research Centre at the Faculty of veterinary medicine of the University of Montreal.

Mr. Chairman, we wish to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the views of our Association regarding Canada's preparedness to deal with an outbreak of Avian Influenza (AI) or 'Bird Flu'.

I will first of all provide this committee with a brief background of our organization. Then I will present our perspective with regard to AI disease prevention, control and elimination of the disease in the event of an outbreak, our reflection on the lessons learned from the 2004 outbreak in British Columbia, and a few specific recommendations.

The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association is the national association representing the interests of Canada's 10,000 veterinarians. We are a non-government, non-profit organization. The veterinarians of Canada are committed to excellence within our profession in the promotion of animal health, animal welfare, food safety, public health and environmental health. Our profession involves all aquatic and terrestrial animal species. While many veterinarians restrict their practices to companion animals, almost half of our members are in large animal or mixed animal practices.

Our Association, the CVMA, is directly and actively involved in the animal production, public health and food chain industries and we are members of several national coalitions and committees fulfilling our commitment to society and the agri-food sector. For example, we are members of the Canadian Animal Health Coalition, the Canadian Coalition for Public Health in the 21st Century, the Canadian On-Farm Food Safety Working Group, the national Farm Animal Care Council, the Canadian Livestock Identification Agency, and numerous federal government stakeholder committees with the

Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, Health Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada, Environment Canada, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, etc.

[English]

The Chair: We have about seven pages in your document, but we have a little more than half an hour left and we need to have some questions. Your document, of course, is going to be part of the meeting's record today. Could you summarize it as quickly as you can, rather than going through the whole document? We won't have time for questions otherwise. I apologize, but we are simply running out of time.

• (1655)

[Translation]

Dr. Paul Boutet: That's no problem.

We have read your April 2005 Report on the Avian Influenza Outbreak in BC and compliment you, Mr. Chairman and your committee for the excellent work. The Report has brought about positive changes. As you move forward, the CVMA is pleased to offer our thoughts and suggestions for strengthening the health protection of Canada's animal and human populations from the threats of diseases such as Avian Influenza.

The current media hype about the imminent Pandemic Bird Flu has brought about significant public attention resulting in greater awareness and federal support funding to increase disease surveillance, particularly for migratory waterfowl. This is positive. You have already heard from CFIA officials and the Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre about the increased monitoring that is being carried out so I need not belabor the point, suffice to say, it is about time! We strongly support the efforts being made. The more information we have about the prevalence and distribution of the various forms of the disease and the avian species implicated the more effective Canada's preparedness and preventive measures will be.

On the negative side of this hype, is an unnecessarily fearful public of imminent and significant human health risks. Attention is being focused on remedial action for human infections, rather than on the mitigating measures to prevent the incursion of this disease into our human population through our domestic poultry flocks. Furthermore, the increased testing is straining the capacities of Canada's diagnostics centers, which in turn brings into question how we would cope with a serious outbreak of this disease and/or any other serious zoonoses.

[English]

Mr. Chairman, the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association has been, and continues to be, a strong supporter of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the regulatory function it carries out on a daily basis. We also strongly support the competence and abilities of the chief veterinary officer, Dr. Brian Evans.

The concerns we have centre around the dilution of authority for the position of chief veterinary officer in CFIA. The office has only three or four staff positions and a small budget with no line authority. Certainly it is a senior position in the agency, but the role is advisory in a matrix organization. When the Public Health Agency of Canada was recently created, the chief public health officer was established as the head of the agency, with full accountability and all its resources at his disposal. Without the authority, the chief veterinary officer cannot lead and cannot be accountable. The governance issue in CFIA must be considered and addressed.

For expedience we'll go straight to our recommendations at the end of the document. These, therefore, are our key recommendations.

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada should establish a joint industry-academic-provincial-federal funding drafting team to provide a national animal health strategy by mid-summer 2006.

Parliament should ensure that additional and targeted funding is allocated through AAFC and/or other funding departments or institutions to the Canadian veterinary colleges for infrastructure development—for example, level 3 biocontainment laboratories, animal disease research, and human resource development—to meet the gaps identified above.

Parliament should ensure that additional funding is allocated through AAFC to assist animal health partner organizations that are developing bio-security protocols for animal production units, developing emergency disease disaster management plans, establishing animal welfare guidelines for large-scale euthanasia, training and development of diagnostic and veterinary service reserve teams, training of producers and animal handlers in the appropriate public health precautions, etc.

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food should review and restructure the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to strengthen the authority and support of the chief veterinary officer to provide the necessary national leadership in animal health.

The president of CFIA should establish a formal and relatively small—20 members—advisory committee involving the key players from the animal industry, production to distribution, the veterinary profession, academia, and related sectors to provide balanced and independent guidance to keep abreast of changes needed for executing a superior level of preparedness in the face of these new threats.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

We have outlined some constructive means for positioning Canada ahead of the wave of the ever increasing biological threats facing the Canadian human and animal populations. The CVMA believes that historically the CFIA (and its predecessor organization) has done an excellent job of protecting Canada's animal industry and food supply, given the various legislative authorities under which it works and within the limited human and financial resources provided.

Our health experts and our trading partners have come to rely on Canada's integrity, expertise and surveillance capabilities. However, their reputation in animal health management is slipping both nationally and internationally as a result of ever increasing demands and a continuing dilution of the intellectual and financial capital. If the recommendations we have made are not acted upon, Canada is doomed to repeat the lessons of history (Foot and Mouth Disease, BSE and AI) with consequences for human health, trade and animal welfare far exceeding those before.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Boutet.

We apologize, but we have the document. It has been distributed, and it becomes part of the record, even that portion you didn't read.

Mr. Bezan, you have five minutes.

Mr. James Bezan: Gentlemen, thank you for coming in and sharing your ideas with us.

Dr. Dittberner, you've been here before. We've talked about the national animal health strategy. This committee has actually passed recommendations in support of the national animal health strategy to direct the Minister of Agriculture and CFIA to work with the Canadian Animal Health Coalition in implementing the strategy. How is that discussion going?

Dr. Gordon Dittberner: Thank you very much for that question.

I know there's some discussion going on between the minister and possibly someone at CFIA, but unfortunately, as far as the industry and the profession are concerned, we don't know anything. We haven't been involved. We get sort of briefings that there are discussions, but what we're saying is we need to be part of it. I think your recommendation earlier was that we all be part of it and draft this. So far that hasn't happened.

Mr. James Bezan: That's very unfortunate, because I believe what you're saying here is that the national animal health strategy can augment and work alongside CFIA to ensure that there aren't any gaps. Can you go into some detail for us as to how the strategy will diminish the gaps we have on research infrastructure and resource shortfalls?

Dr. Gordon Dittberner: Maybe I'll take that question right now. A lot of the industry has asked for a national strategy, the idea being that we need to have some focus on where the animal health resources should be placed, where the critical areas are, and what are some of the gaps we've identified. They are there; they need to be addressed. Without a strategy, we're going to be reactive all the time to incidents as they occur, rather than getting ahead of the situation—in other words, being proactive.

Many of the items that have been identified are clearly there. We have to think back 25 to 30 years ago when this country was very focused on trying to eradicate brucellosis. We had a strategy that we wanted to get rid of that particular disease. We worked collectively with the industries, with the governments, the provincial governments, or the profession. Everybody had a focus, we had a measurement, and we knew exactly what the level of infection was. We had some difficult debates going on with the industry, but we were targeted and we were successful.

I think that's what is really lacking, and that's how we will overcome a lot of the burdens—by having a strategy so that everybody knows where we're headed. If we don't know where this train is going—and I can assure you, it's happening within the agency and within many other parts of the organization.... Nobody knows where we're going.

Mr. James Bezan: So it becomes very imperative that discussions get under way, and maybe it's this committee's role that we should be calling for a conference of industry stakeholders and government to nail this down, so that we have a strategy. Is there an international model out there that we can use as the basis?

• (1705)

Dr. Gordon Dittberner: There are some models. The Australians have a model. The U.S. Animal Health Association is another model. There are several versions of the model, and I think we need to look at those and maybe incorporate them into what we would like to have. But I don't think the strategy we're looking for is necessarily something we can import from somewhere else. We certainly should be considering them, but we need to have our own for Canada because I think we're in a unique position. We have some real strengths, and I think we should capitalize on them.

The Chair: You have time for one more question.

Mr. James Bezan: I think we'll try to work towards having some recommendation out of this that we need to do this. Beyond avian flu, we're talking about other possible outbreaks, like foot-and-mouth, which is definitely a disease that has been in Canada, and one we don't want to see again. We can have another BSE outbreak. We'd hate to see it happen, but the reality is that it can. With all the experiences we've gone through recently in Canada, you'd think we'd be running to embrace this rather than taking the more passive role of just hoping the problems go away.

With that said, I'll pass it on.

The Chair: We'll move to Mr. Bellavance.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Thank you for coming here today and giving us your evidence. It is always useful that people are working in the front lines. As veterinarians, you are well placed to understand the impact of this scourge.

Monsieur Boutet, there is a passage in your testimony that leads me to think that we should talk about certain facts in a little more detail. At one point, consumers were panicking after reading newspapers. They read that the bird flu was spreading all over the place, particularly in Europe. Chicken producers and even restaurant owners were becoming very concerned after hearing people say that it was dangerous to eat poultry, whether chicken, turkey or any other type of bird.

Christmas is coming, and it looks like we will all be eating our turkey in the midst of an election campaign. The public must not be left thinking that it's dangerous to eat. However, I would like one of you three to provide us with evidence that it is quite safe to eat poultry.

Dr. Jean-Pierre Vaillancourt: There are a number of reasons for saying that there's no risk. First, the AI virus is not present in domestic flocks in Canada. Secondly, we are speaking of a relatively sensitive virus, which means that it can't survive in the environment without a host. Let's assume that the virus is in a bird and that it's not picked up in the inspection. This virus won't be in the final product because the animal will be mechanically plucked and eviscerated, and then cleaned. For all practical purposes, the virus will no longer be present. But, if it did happen that it were still present, it would be eliminated in cooking. The virus is destroyed at 70 or 77° C, but everyone cooks chicken or turkey to a higher temperature.

I must also point out that to date, it has been very difficult for this virus that originated in Asia to infect humans. At present, no avian influenza virus is easy to transmit. This aspect in itself is reassuring. It is particularly reassuring because the way production takes place in Canada and the way these products are shipped to grocery stores and restaurants eliminate the slightest risk for all practical purposes.

We must also not forget that a highly pathogenic influenza appeared in Texas. It also occurred in British Columbia and in Pennsylvania. The H7 virus and in particular the H5 virus have appeared in Virginia, Maryland and North Carolina. We estimate that about 100 million people may have been exposed. However, in none of these cases did the infected birds transmit the virus to consumers.

This was a crisis, because the virus did indeed appear. In our case, the virus is not even present. So I'm not worried out the Holiday season.

• (1710)

Mr. André Bellavance: Thank you.

We know that the virus can be transmitted to humans. What is the explanation of why cases have been discovered in Asia? Is it because people there live closer to their poultry? Is this indeed the case?

Dr. Jean-Pierre Vaillancourt: That's correct. First of all, the culture in Asia is different. People buy live birds. They slaughter them themselves and pluck them by hand. They eviscerate them with their bare hands and then place them on the table they use to prepare food. In short, they do everything necessary to propagate the infection. Despite all this, over a period of three or four years, only 122 infection cases have been officially reported in Asia, even with a population of over one billion.

In biology, nearly anything is possible, but these are exceptional circumstances. The previous speakers mentioned vaccination. In Asia, it is starting to be taken seriously. They have to take these measures because their situation is completely different from ours.

Mr. André Bellavance: You are speaking of vaccinating poultry.

Dr. Jean-Pierre Vaillancourt: Yes, poultry. In 1999 or in 2000, in Italy, a flu vaccine for poultry was created that could be easily differentiated from the wild strain. The Italians decided to use it, but, without wishing to insult anyone, I would say that the production in southern Europe is an older style that comes closer to what we see in Asia. This is really not the case here.

[English]

The Chair: Your time has expired.

Mr. Smith, for five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. David Smith (Pontiac, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will share my time with my colleague, Mr. Easter.

Mr. Vaillancourt, after reading the papers, I thought I would stop eating chicken and stay away from our Quebec rotisseries. I wouldn't like to catch this disease. But after hearing you, I feel like going back. For me, this matter is settled. However, I am concerned about the people we represent, our fellow citizens. They don't have access to the message I heard today. I have difficulty understanding. People have testified before this committee on other days. Those other doctors delivered the same message as you did, but this is not what the general public has understood. Most people think it's dangerous and that there are problems. When I meet people working in public health and discuss it with them, they tell me that what's happening is serious.

In your opinion, what is the probability that it will come here to Canada? Is there a high probability?

Dr. Jean-Pierre Vaillancourt: We have to pay attention. The probability that an influenza virus of the H5 or H7 subtype will be found in Canadian flocks is low, but it is possible. Such a virus has never passed from domestic birds to humans and infected them. In British Columbia, some people fell sick and had flu symptoms, but those were frontline people, as you said. The virus acted directly on living birds. Our consumers are not on the front line. In Vietnam, they are.

Mr. David Smith: You are an expert. Don't you think it would be important to communicate this information to people? We don't want to say it's not dangerous. It's like other viruses or diseases we may fall victim to because we travel all over the world.

Dr. Jean-Pierre Vaillancourt: I can say that things are being done. You spoke of the St-Hubert Bar B Q in Quebec. I helped prepare the text the company uses, which it sent to all its rotisseries to answer consumers' questions. We give them information.

I also took part in a meeting before coming here. We are planning information days for farmers. We also want to approach municipalities and veterinarians in all fields. I work in the poultry field; there are few veterinarians like me, but there are small-animal veterinarians and veterinarians in bovine medicine who would be prepared to provide this information, because they are pillars of their community. We are putting in place—this has not been done yet—a training program for these veterinarians so that they can speak directly to their clients and communicate through local newspapers.

● (1715)

Mr. David Smith: Don't you think that it would be important for the industry, experts like yourself and other pillars of agencies to transmit a joint message?

Dr. Jean-Pierre Vaillancourt: They are doing so. Industry representatives often ask me to speak, because they realize that, since they are selling the product, their credibility with consumers may be reduced and that if they say it's not dangerous...

Mr. David Smith: That's not what I'm saying. You are a third party, you are neutral, you are an expert in this field, and you have nothing to gain or to lose, unlike the industry.

Dr. Jean-Pierre Vaillancourt: That's right. However, that requires money, not a lot, but it does require some money. I am going to give you an example.

When I was in the States—I have spend a lot of my time there—I produced a CD on biosafety that today is available in 101 countries. There are 3,000 copies of it in Canada. This is the result of the efforts of an American association. It is trying to obtain funds from the US Department of Agriculture for a second version. It is only if we have such tools that we can manage to get anything done. I am a teacher, so I can speak, or appear here before you. I speak to Radio-Canada almost every other week. But I don't have the money to do anything. Someone has to provide us with these funds.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Gerry Ritz): Thank you, Mr. Smith.

We'll move to Mr. Miller for five minutes.

Mr. Larry Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think it was you, Mr. Boutet, who read your recommendations. On the first one—and I know we talked a little bit about what you'd like to see, and I agree with it—is getting this together by the middle of next year a reasonable timeframe, seeing how slowly the bureaucracy and government usually work?

Dr. Paul Boutet: I think it is. I don't think this is a huge undertaking, plus there's the fact that with our specifying a timeline and putting down specific dates, there's a lot more effort made to try to meet those. If you just leave it open, it tends to stay open forever. By specifying a date and putting in specific objectives you have in mind, I think that...

This is not an issue we should let ride forever. This is something that's important for the health of Canadians, for our health, and for world health. It's not something we should be just putting off and putting off and putting off. I think there has to be a collective will to do it, and I don't think it would take an awful lot of effort to bring these people together in a relatively short period of time.

Mr. Larry Miller: I am not disputing it; I think it would be a great thing too. I was just asking if you really thought it was realistic.

The second one is, in your recommendation 2 you talk about funding being allocated for departments or institutions, colleges and what have you. Have you any idea of what dollar amount that may entail? It's just for my information more than anything.

Dr. Gordon Dittberner: Well, there was a submission that was put forward several years ago, and colleges at that time estimated they would be needing in the order of \$80 million to \$100 million for level 3 bio-security facilities. There had also been a recommendation based on 2000 figures that the initial restructuring for the vet colleges would be about \$180 million. The expectation was that the provinces would contribute part of that, and we know the federal government did provide \$113 million in 2002.

Now, that arrangement has been done, but in terms of the laboratories and getting ahead, no funding was provided for that, and we are looking at a minimum of \$100 million to get that under way. That is for all the colleges.

I'm not saying it has to be done at all colleges at the same time, but I think we have to do something beyond having only level 3s at the CFIA labs. The majority of the research is being done at the universities, and they don't have the facilities to do the research that's needed for this country.

• (1720)

Mr. Larry Miller: That's good, Mr. Dittberner.

The next one I had was on developing bio-security protocols and what have you; you mentioned that in there. There must be a dollar amount. It's just the same question, basically: have you any idea?

Dr. Gordon Dittberner: No, I don't have a particular response. I know that the Canadian Animal Health Coalition made a presentation last year to Agriculture Canada for funding, and it was then in the order of less than \$1 million. It was probably in the order of several hundred thousand dollars. That request was denied at the time.

Mr. Larry Miller: My last one is this. You mention in there that this committee should review and restructure the CFIA—and I couldn't agree with you more—but you wanted to strengthen their authority, basically in support of the CVO. Do you think the CVO is a credible alternative to the CFIA, or just where were you leading with that?

Dr. Gordon Dittberner: I'm not suggesting that it be a separate organization, but I think the structure of the governance that exists within the CFIA needs to be looked at. We have one agency, the regulatory agency, which deals with food and animal and plant health, but the majority of the work revolves around veterinary activities. In order for the government, and in order for the country, to have the chief veterinary officer leading and being accountable for the operations, he needs to have the organization; he needs to have the resources with which to carry out those responsibilities. This is what happens with the chief public health officer, but it's certainly not the case with the chief veterinary officer.

Something has to be done to re-address this change and this weakness of the chief veterinary officer. When they're dealing with the chief veterinary officer of a country, most countries expect that he has the ability and the authority to carry out the commitments he makes at the international meetings.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Gerry Ritz): Thank you.

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

Hon. Wayne Easter: I guess I beg to differ on that last point. The CFIA is structured differently than the Public Health Agency. It has

different responsibilities, and really, the chief veterinary officer is accountable and responsible within the system. We might be able to argue over the budget...but I disagree with you on that point, because he is responsible and accountable. Yes, in the agency, there's the president above him.

If you get any other comment on that, I'm wide open to hearing it.

Regarding the advisory committee, which you mention in your recommendations, there is an advisory committee now. In fact, in Bill C-27, we have recommended that there be a further advisory committee. But are you talking about one that is specifically related to the animal industry instead of the kind of broad advisory committee we're thinking about?

Dr. Gordon Dittberner: Yes, we are very much specifically looking at the animal industry and the food industry. I think those parts need to be combined. We need an advisory committee that's going to address the issues that come up. If the president has a working advisory committee, then certainly the veterinary colleges and the veterinary profession are excluded, because we're not aware of anything. We're not part of that and I think we should be. I think there are others who are probably feeling that they're not part of this either. I think this has been a fairly widespread concern, that there isn't really an advisory committee at the president's level.

I will take just a moment to come back to the CVO. You're quite right that the CVO has the responsibility and the authority, but you cannot hold a man accountable if you don't give him the resources and the tools with which to do the job. That's our concern.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Rose-Marie...to save time.

• (1725)

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: Yes, thank you.

In your presentation you indicated there was a concern for human infection re the poultry flocks. We've had some research and it was indicated to us that in order for recombination to be possible, the person has to have both the avian flu virus as well as the human flu virus for it to come to fruition. In Ontario, I think the requirement is such that farm families in the poultry industry all have to have a flu vaccination to try to stop this from infecting human beings. Is that something you're aware of? I realize you are veterinarians and not people doctors.

Dr. Jean-Pierre Vaillancourt: I've been vaccinated for free by the Quebec government because I'm a first responder. You're right that growers in Ontario are being offered this so that it's less likely these two viruses will—

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: They're required?

Dr. Jean-Pierre Vaillancourt: Yes, that's right. That's what I myself am recommending in Quebec. Right now, that's not happening.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: Okay.

One last question. You spoke to Mr. Easter's question—which was one of mine—and indicated that because of the increased testing, there's a real strain on the capacities for the diagnostic centres. How many are there now, where are they located, and how many do you need to reduce the strain?

Dr. Gordon Dittberner: There's a lot of pressure on people to get the tests completed, to get all the surveys done, and to get the results out very quickly. They are scrambling in trying to deal with the huge volumes and the degree of testing that is required. It's right across the country; it's everywhere.

I think what is required is just a little more time for these people to do their job. A lot of very committed people are working extremely hard trying to do this, and I applaud all the CFIA people who are doing this.

It's not really that they need a lot more people. What we need are some arrangements, flexibility, and cooperative efforts with other institutions, organizations, provincial governments, and other federal agencies that can do some of the diagnostic work. We need to be building the capacity so that we can help out in these situations. That really is the issue right now. We need to not force and put more onto the CFIA to try to get more testing done right now. I don't think they can cope with it.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: Are you suggesting more federal-provincial regulated laboratories be made available?

Dr. Gordon Dittberner: That's part of it, and I would say the universities and the Public Health Agency as well.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: Do you think the expertise would be there at the universities to handle the diagnostic tests that would need to be done?

Dr. Gordon Dittberner: The capacity is there. The capability and competence certainly are. What they need to do now is make sure they all have the same protocols. They are doing some networking, but it needs to be expanded.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Gerry Ritz): Thank you.

We'll now move to Monsieur Lapierre, *pour cinq minutes*.

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Lapierre: At the beginning of the session, we met with producers, and their interpretation seemed a little different from yours, with respect to vaccinations for example. We were told that in Canada a nation-wide policy to combat this invasive disease would not work because each region has its own particular problems. I would therefore ask you whether, in the light of these various problems, we could say that regionalizing health practices could be part of the solution.

Dr. Jean-Pierre Vaillancourt: That's right. When there's a problem at the local level, it has to be treated at the local level and according to the circumstances. We must not adopt a nation-wide one-size-fits-all plan of attack. The principles are the same from one province to another. But a plan must be created in very close liaison with local industry and local government. This is what that we're

doing in Quebec and this is what's being done in Ontario and everywhere else. The federal government's task is to find a way to become involved in these plans, especially since it has a legal duty to control any emergency that arises. This control must be exercised in very close liaison with local industry and local government. We are speaking about the municipal level and not only the provincial level. This will require approaches that vary somewhat from one region to the next.

• (1730)

Mr. Réal Lapierre: In another connection, a friend of mine manages a St-Hubert Bar B Q. As you may suspect, I have had to answer a lot of questions. We have already alluded to bird migration. In the present context, human travel cannot be considered a possible vector of this problem. Have measures been adopted to counter it?

Dr. Jean-Pierre Vaillancourt: With respect to the industry, the answer is yes, but with respect to the general public, the answer is no. This is a virus that can survive for several days outside its host. When we come home from Asia by plane, the flight lasts only a few hours. So there is a possibility that a human being may be a vector. And as for the migratory populations, they are carriers. However, we must pay attention. Avian influenza has been present within migratory bird populations in Canada for a very long time. The state of Minnesota has been posting guards near lakes and finding traces of avian influenza for more than 20 years. If it has been there for 20 years, it has also been here for 20 years. The important thing is that it not get into our domestic livestock. That we can prevent.

Mr. Réal Lapierre: I would like to ask one small final question.

In this case, can I tell my friends that with the safeguards currently in place, things are so safe that we can tell people that, not only is there no risk at the present time, but also in the future we will continue to be able to eat chicken without putting ourselves at risk?

Dr. Jean-Pierre Vaillancourt: This is certainly the case in Canada, no problem. Eating chicken is not a problem. That is not where the risk is located. The danger is that at some point a flock may become contaminated. There is a certain risk that this may occur.

The other risk is that at some point, the virus may mutate, because it may change into a human virus, but it may also mutate by itself. That would be a completely different problem.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Gerry Ritz): Thank you so much, gentlemen, for your participation here today. It will all become part of our report that we'll be working on in the days and weeks to come.

I want to thank the committee members for their kind attendance today.

This meeting now stands adjourned to the call of the chair.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

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

**Also available on the Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le réseau électronique « Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire » à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.