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Chair

Mr. James Bezan

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•(0905)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

Today we're breaking from our regular business to deal with the supplementary estimates, and today was the only day that worked to bring in officials from the department.

I want to welcome to the table—no strangers here—Pierre Corriveau, assistant deputy minister of corporate management; Andrew Marsland, assistant deputy minister, strategic policy; Nada Semaan, assistant deputy minister, farm financial programs; and Susie Miller, director general of the food value chain bureau.

Welcome to all of you.

I understand Mr. Corriveau has some opening comments, and then we'll open it up to questions. We're going to spend an hour with them; then CFIA will be up for the next round, and we'll deal with our motions at the end of the meeting.

Please go ahead, Pierre.

Mr. Pierre Corriveau (Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Management, Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning to the committee, and thank you for the invitation to come and meet with you today on the supplementary estimates (B) for 2007-08.

The supplementary estimates (B) for 2007-08 were tabled in the House on February 14 for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. The department represents \$665 million. I understand the officials from CFIA will be here for the second hour.

Of the \$665 million for Agriculture and Agri-Food, the bulk of the funding is related to the AgriInvest Kickstart programs, the agriculture disaster relief framework, an increase in our spending on CAIS, the BRM suite delivery, an increase in our Canadian Cattlemen's Association legacy fund, and the orchard and vineyards transition program. The remaining amount represents a transfer to and from other departments, and is offset by currently available program funding related to amounts being reprofiled to use in future years.

[Translation]

Including these authorizations and Supplementary Estimates, the total budget of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada for the 2007-2008 fiscal year increases to approximately \$3.7 billion, which approxi-

mately corresponds to the actual spending of \$3.6 billion from 2006-2007.

This morning, I'm accompanied by Andrew Marsland, Nada Semaan and Susie Miller. We are prepared to answer your questions. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Who wants to go first?

Go ahead, Mr. Easter. I think we'll go to five minutes.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): We were thinking of seven, Mr. Chair, but we'll go with what you have.

Although we're looking ahead at the estimates, I've had a lot of concerns from producers on the family farm options program. That program was announced late. Then when producers, through their accountants, effective a year ago December 31, wanted to take advantage of that program and felt they would have at that time \$18,000 available to them, the program was cancelled in midstream. In fact, I'm told—and you can tell me if I'm correct or not—that the payout to those who did qualify—those being only the ones, as you know, who qualified the year before—was only 50 cents on the dollar.

That program was a commitment made in good faith by the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to producers who were in financial trouble. They basically were left miserably waving in the wind. It was a Government of Canada commitment that died on the vine, for whatever reason. What are the financial aspects around that?

I'll ask you a couple of other questions as well. I'll move into this particular budget and the announcement of \$3.3 billion in loans to the beef and hog industry.

The government often fails to mention that it's basically the farmers' own money. Can you tell me what the cost of that program will be to the Government of Canada? The only real cost to the government, as I understand it, is the interest relief on the \$100,000.

Finally, I'm sure you are aware that the minister introduced legislation yesterday on the Canadian Wheat Board—illegally, I might add. It is dangerous for one to make assumptions, but if the minister is making a major announcement that will change the structure of an industry, I would assume that the department, if it's being professional at all, has done the proper economic background work on the economic impact on the industry as a whole, the impact on farm incomes, and the impact on the Canadian Wheat Board.

Could the department provide to this committee the economic impact analysis that you did prior to that legislation being brought forward?

• (0910)

The Chair: We are here to talk about the supplemental estimates, not the main estimates for next year's budget. We have to keep the questions directed towards the issue at hand, which is the line votes on the supplementals that we have before us.

Does anybody want to answer those questions?

Mr. Pierre Corriveau: Nada will be answering the first two, and Andrew will take the last one.

Ms. Nada Semaan (Assistant Deputy Minister, Farm Financial Programs Branch, Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food): On the farm families options program, as you know, it is a two-year pilot program. We are in the second year of the pilot. The decision to limit it in the second year was actually not made very lightly at all and was made with a lot of stakeholder input. A lot of producers, actually, were questioning the program.

The program was designed as a two-year pilot to test it out. With the second year, and by limiting the second year to the same participants, we are still going to be able to do exactly what we had intended to do, which is to evaluate the intent of the pilot and see if it does work in terms of allowing producers with that additional money to be able to take advantage of some of the renewal programming to supplement their income in future years. So we will still be monitoring the results after the second year of the program to see if it did help, and we will be providing an analysis. We are also bringing in an external board to review all of this, so it won't be done just in-house.

In terms of the second year and the pro-rating, basically in the first year, in the Treasury Board submission and when it went through, it was already identified that the second year would be reduced by 25%. But in the letter that we sent to producers, we also told them that the second year would be reduced and that would be defined at a further date. That was at the very first point.

The 50% went out because it's a voted amount of money, so we can't exceed that amount. We have received all of our applications and we've processed 99%, so we do have some money now to go back and do the second payment. So the producers will get more than the 50%, and we will start that second payment shortly.

On the \$3.3 billion of loans—and that is referring to all the changes we made with the AMPA, the Agricultural Marketing Programs Act, thanks to all your help in processing that very quickly—what that will cost us is approximately \$22 million more in terms of potential defaults or interest adjustments. That is on top of the actual cost of the AMPA, because as you know from the last committee hearing concerning the livestock, a lot of the emphasis was that the program is there, but with some modifications it could actually be more responsive. So using the dollars of the two allows us to provide a more responsive program.

The Chair: The time has now expired.

Andrew, could you respond very briefly, please?

Mr. Andrew Marsland (Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy Branch, Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food): On the question of the Wheat Board, there are, I believe, many studies that have been done in the past about the economic effects of the monopoly, but in relation to whether the government commissioned any studies before coming forward with the latest legislation, I'm not aware of any specific studies. That's my understanding, that there aren't any specific studies leading up to that, but many studies are available on the issue itself.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bellavance, you have five minutes.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): I'd also like to ask a question about the Options Program. Mr. Corriveau, on May 8, 2007, in response to a question from Mr. Easter on this subject, you told us about the \$230 million that the government had not spent when it decided to withdraw from the program. That \$230 million was to be reallocated to the new program that was to be announced.

Do you have the exact breakdown of the \$230 million that was not spent under the Options Program?

• (0915)

Mr. Pierre Corriveau: Part of the funding was reallocated to certain programs, such as the Orchards and Vineyards Transition Program. Pardon me, I don't have the French name of that program.

Mr. André Bellavance: It's the Programme fédéral de transition relatif aux vergers et aux vignobles.

Mr. Pierre Corriveau: Exactly.

Then there was the funding of a certain number of programs, such as the Community Pastures Program and a program to eradicate the plum pox virus.

Ms. Semaan could give you more details on that.

[*English*]

Ms. Nada Semaan: Basically, there was over \$500 million announced, and some of the options might have come from that \$500 million. There were a number of new programs, as my colleague identified.

[*Translation*]

There was the Orchards and Vineyards Transition Program. However, production costs will increase over the next few years. Every year when there is an increase in production costs, there's a \$100 million increase in the AgriInvest account.

Mr. André Bellavance: So it's spread around virtually everywhere. Is it possible to provide us with a breakdown of that \$230 million, so the committee knows exactly where it went and that there's an explanation for that? I'd also like to know, either for the budget or for the additional funding, whether you receive instructions from the minister or from the government to ensure that the provinces—let's take Quebec, for example, not surprisingly—receive their fair share of the budget and Supplementary Estimates.

I read the Pronovost report that was just tabled in Quebec. Recommendation 49 of that report states that Quebec should receive its fair share of federal transfers.

In the May 2006 budget, the Conservative government promised additional assistance of \$2.2 billion over two years for the agricultural sector, and Quebec has only received 6.8% of that amount. According to the statistics, however, it supplies between 16% and 18% of Canada's agricultural production.

Have you received any instructions in that regard? Do billions of dollars pass, go from one place to another, without you ever having any specific instructions on the share that should go to each province?

[English]

Ms. Nada Semaan: As you know, the programs are primarily demand-driven; however, the total share of the business risk management assistance to Quebec farmers is actually similar to the provincial share of the farm cash receipts when you exclude supply management. When you exclude supply management, it's between 11% and 13%, and that is actually the amount of money that they get in terms of pre-business risk management programs.

Just for example, in \$348 million out of the \$400 million for the cost of production that has already gone out, \$44 million of that was paid directly to Quebec. Out of the AgriInvest Kickstart deposits that went through, the Quebec producers are actually receiving their fair share of the \$600 million as well. On top of that, in terms of the AgriInvest, it was very clear when we were negotiating with all the provinces that when we implement the AgriInvest accounts, no province would lose. It will be cost neutral. So that was ensured as well in terms of making sure Quebec and every other province remained whole.

All in all, in terms of farm cash receipts for non-supply-managed, we do monitor to make sure, and it is consistent.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: So you don't have any specific instructions. Programs are in place, and the percentage of what the provinces receive isn't necessarily allocated based on the percentage of farm income that they bring in or on their farm production relative to Canada as a whole. You don't have any instructions in that regard; you're not asked to be concerned about that.

• (0920)

[English]

Ms. Nada Semaan: It's a demand-driven program, so where the demand is required, the payments are made out. So if there is more in one province or less in a province, it goes to where the need is greatest, but it does actually end up going according to farm cash receipts.

The Chair: The time has expired.

Andrew, do you want to make a comment?

Mr. Andrew Marsland: I just want, if I may, to supplement that answer.

The business risk management programs are in fact demand-driven, whereas other programs that are cost-shared with the

provinces, for example for those under the Growing Forward, the *Cultivons l'avenir*, there is a formula that applies across the country, based on farm production. In that case, where they're not demand-driven, there is a formula that applies for the number of cost-shared programs per province based on agricultural production.

The Chair: Merci.

Mr. Lauzon.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome to all our witnesses.

[English]

Maybe I can start with this. I notice the \$2 million for the Canadian Cattlemen's Association legacy fund. I wonder whether someone can explain to me exactly what's involved there.

Ms. Susie Miller (Director General, Food Value Chain Bureau, Market and Industry Services Branch, Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food): Certainly. The legacy fund was a \$50 million allocation over a period of ten years. For budgetary purposes, we have allocated it on an annual basis of \$5 million. But the restriction actually is between zero and \$10 million in any given year.

The Canadian cattlemen this year are in the process of ramping up their activities under the legacy fund; the first year they used very little money. So it is higher than the average, but they are investing heavily, because there are still markets that they need to get back into post-BSE.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Is it successful? Are we getting back into some of those markets as a result?

Ms. Susie Miller: Success is built on a number of things. One is the ability of the Canadian government to negotiate favourable terms. We certainly are spending a lot of effort, as we have since 2003. The second is then translating that into actual sales, which means going back into the market, re-establishing that reputation, that ability. The third is the transactions by the actual companies themselves.

I think you'll see the payoff several years down the road rather than immediately.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Thank you very much.

We go from the smallest amount to the largest amount. The majority of the funds are for the AgriInvest Kickstart program. Of course, this is a reaction to what the producers asked for and actually almost demanded: that we come up with something for them.

Can you explain to me, whoever is responsible, how—I know it's just beginning—that is working so far, what the uptake is, and that kind of thing?

Ms. Nada Semaan: So far, for the kickstart program, we have sent out a number—actually, well over 150,000—letters to producers telling them exactly what their share is for the first instalment of the kickstart.

We've already been receiving quite a bit of response, some requesting that the money be withdrawn, some requesting that it remain in the account, to save it for a rainy day or when they require it. There has been quite a bit of uptake, in terms of sending a response back. We asked them to respond to let us know what they wanted to do with it.

This was, as you said, very much demanded by the industry and in fact was created with them. Many times we had an industry-led task team that helped us define how the changes from CAIS to the new business risk management suite would come in and that then helped define these.

A lot of the parameters that were identified were basically taken from parameters that they wanted or that other governments also wanted changed from NISA to the new AgriInvest program.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I understand that this is a very quick reaction on your part, and you're to be commended. I understand we have a rather impatient minister who needs to get these programs out quickly.

Of the 150,000, I guess it's too early to know how many people will take us up on these offers, but you said the reaction has been very positive already.

• (0925)

Ms. Nada Semaan: Absolutely. Everybody has been responding. Right now, we're putting the system in place to see how many people are asking for the money immediately and how many people are trying to keep it in. That is also very important, to find out how many are keeping it as an account versus the ones who are needing it right away to address their needs right now.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I suppose, when you design programs that are virtually designed by the people who are going to use the programs, that may be why we got such a great uptake.

Ms. Nada Semaan: We had tremendous input from the industry, and the national CAIS committee was also very instrumental in providing us a lot of input.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: But you're not done receiving.... It's too early, really, to know how many.... You couldn't give me a percentage of how many of those 150,000 you think might....

Ms. Nada Semaan: Might...?

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Might take advantage of this program.

Ms. Nada Semaan: I would suspect all will take advantage of it, because basically, for the start program, the money basically is just up to them. All they had to do was agree that they would participate in AgriInvest. There is no reason not to, since for every dollar they put in the bank, they receive a federal dollar.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: That's a pretty good investment.

Ms. Nada Semaan: Or actually, I shouldn't say "federal"—a "government" dollar.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: How quickly will they be receiving that? How quickly can you turn that around?

Ms. Nada Semaan: We've started sending cheques out.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Really.

Ms. Nada Semaan: Basically, we sent out the letters at the end of December. By January we were receiving requests, and now cheques have started going out to those who requested them. For those who didn't, the money is still there for them.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Time has expired.

Mr. Atamanenko, the floor is yours.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Thank you very much for taking time to be here to answer our questions.

I'd like to ask a question in regard to disaster relief, but I have a quick question on the Canadian farm families options program.

There are some people who have been hurt by the program. We're getting some letters, and we're trying to work with your officials to see if they can get some help. Is there still a way of helping some of these people who may have lost money on the program, or for one or another reason? Are you still open to looking at individual cases to see if we can help some people?

Ms. Nada Semaan: We are always open to looking, and there is an appeal process for producers as well, which would not stop. So, of course.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Thank you.

The next question concerns the \$62.6 million that's been earmarked for grant payments under the AgriRecovery disaster relief program. It's the program designed for producers affected by small or natural disasters but not those affected by cyclical events such as pricing downturns.

Can you give the committee a list of the smaller natural disasters that have occurred this year and that justify the injection of \$62.6 million into the program between now and the end of the fiscal year? Are there some crops or products that have benefited more than others from this program in the current fiscal year, and which ones?

And as a supplement to this question, I'm just wondering where the minister's latest announcement—the modifications to AMPA that we all supported—fits in for the livestock and pork producers.

The overall concern I've had with disaster relief programs since I've been doing this is that often they're there but they don't seem to kick in quickly and there is always a back-and-forth between provinces and the federal government. So I'm just wondering how that's been streamlined and what you have in place to help out those who need it as quickly as we possibly can.

Ms. Nada Semaan: Thank you very much for the questions.

On the AgriRecovery program, a number of smaller disasters have actually happened over the past year. Some of that also includes cover crop. There is the cover crop protection program to help with excess flooding, excess moisture. This year we have integrated that with production insurance in terms of how it gets paid out.

Also, drought assistance was announced for areas of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario. As you know, the AgriRecovery program is a federal-provincial program as part of the suite, so it requires both federal and provincial agreement in terms of a response. So far, British Columbia has taken us up on that, and those payments went out for the drought relief in British Columbia, primarily to the livestock sector.

Also, out of the AgriRecovery program we were able to pay direct payments for the plum pox eradication program.

An additional amount of money went to the Quebec potato nematode producers who were affected by potato nematodes, and that also is there.

• (0930)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: May I interrupt, please? I don't have that much time.

Ms. Nada Semaan: Sure, absolutely.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: In this type of program, is the agreement between the province and the federal government signed ahead of time so we know the formula when the disaster hits? Because in the past, as I said, there has been this kind of back-and-forth. I'm thinking of the case in Saskatchewan between the Saskatchewan government and the federal government in regard to Porcupine Plain, when people were waiting, and they weren't sure. Each government was waiting for the other one to take the lead.

Has that been worked out so that the agreement is there, a disaster happens, and help is on the way?

Ms. Nada Semaan: That's exactly how it was streamlined.

What we actually did was that we took the lessons of the last 20 or 30 years from disaster relief and created a process whereby as soon as anybody—including a producer organization—says they're in trouble, that something has happened, the governments then work together and with interested stakeholders. We cannot have a one-size-fits-all approach, because every disaster is different, but we have a documented process by which we will do the assessment.

In addition, in the federal government we have already gone to cabinet to receive authorities to actually be able to spend these funds, so that we're not going through the cabinet process. In addition, recently we did get Treasury Board approval to be able to react very quickly to smaller disasters just through an order in council.

This now allows us the flexibility to react extremely fast. For example, we are currently working with Alberta on the nematode in their potato seeds. Now that their government has been elected, we will actually be working with them on March 10, and we are hoping to have something that we could recommend by the end of March. That's how fast we can do it. As you know, in the previous years it took months and months because of the time it would require.

The Chair: Merci. Your time has expired.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Steckle.

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To our witnesses here this morning, I have a number of questions. I'll give them, and then I'll expect responses.

The farm families options program was a pilot project, and we understood that it was cancelled before its completion; that was our understanding. I think we're getting some different take on it this morning. People have received a partial payment. I understand it's 50% for the year 2006. What amount might they be able to expect in terms of the full amount they would normally get? How much more can they expect to get?

Second, there was a huge amount of money allocated in that program—I believe it was \$170 million, if I recall correctly, against a \$550 million program—for accountants to do the work. Can you tell us how much money was expended for the servicing of the accountants who actually processed these files?

Can you give us an indication about what kinds of people and crops were affected by smaller natural disasters? How did smaller natural disasters affect the kinds of applicants? Can you give us some indication on that?

Can you also tell us your estimate of the average uptake by those people requesting funding under the AgriInvest kickstart program? Since those have gone out, you have told them, or given them, I understand, the numbers they can expect in terms of a payment. Did I hear you correctly that you have been able to tell farmers, based on the information you have, what payment they might expect? Then it would be up to them either to accept or reject it and leave it in a fund for some other future time. Can you tell us what would be the average uptake so far? You must be able to adjust that to the amount of money that you have, knowing that you have enough—or maybe not enough—to cover that. Can you give us some idea as to where that stands right now?

• (0935)

Ms. Nada Semaan: There were a number of questions. I hope I get them all.

On the options, it was always a two-year pilot. The second year, however, was limited. The scope was changed in the second year to limit it to participants who participated in the first year of the pilot, rather than just allow any producers to apply for the second year. So there was a change in scope in the second year; however, it was always intended to be just a two-year pilot, so that we could do an assessment. There was always a requirement that we actually take a look at it and do an evaluation.

The other part of the question, in terms of how much we think they can expect, we just—

Mr. Paul Steckle: No, there's the other question on how much money was expended or doled out to the accountants who actually did the fee work. Different accountants have told me how much money they got, and if I recall correctly, there was \$170 million in the program to be paid to accountants, because the accountants' fees ranged from \$3,000 to \$3,500.

Ms. Nada Semaan: I can't respond on the accountants' fees. I do know that the program has two elements: one is a direct payment to producers, and the other one is for them to take renewal-type programs, and they can take—

Mr. Paul Steckle: It's the family farm options program.

Ms. Nada Semaan: Yes. The options program has two components. The first component is a direct payment to the individuals, the farm family. With the second one, in order for them to get that payment they must agree to enrol in a renewal-type program, whether it be CASS, whether it be PAVE, one of those. That was what that money was for.

Mr. Paul Steckle: I understand that, but I'm just wondering how much money was expended to help these farmers get the money in the first place.

There were accountants' fees. I know accountants who got \$90,000. I think somebody needs to know, because this was a highly costly program in terms of what the farmers' returns were.

Ms. Nada Semaan: As I mentioned, the programs that this program funds are direct payments that we actually provide to producers.

The other one is renewal programs. They are specific renewal programs that go to a number of different areas. Some of them are administered by provinces; some of them—

Mr. Paul Steckle: Let's not waste time with that. I want an answer to my third question, on the AgriInvest Kickstart program. What would be the average uptake on that?

Ms. Nada Semaan: The average uptake right now in the Kickstart program.... The money is out. If we were to take a look at the cost of production, which is based on the—

Mr. Paul Steckle: What would be the average farmer's take-home pay?

Ms. Nada Semaan: Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you were asking who was going to apply for it.

I believe the average payment on Kickstart was about \$2,000 to \$2,200.

Mr. Paul Steckle: Do you expect that will help farmers out of the difficulty they're in?

Ms. Nada Semaan: That is the average. It goes up to \$45,000 for the large farms, in terms of—

Mr. Paul Steckle: That would be the upper end?

Ms. Nada Semaan: Yes. It goes as high as \$45,000.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Storseth, the floor is yours.

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Sorry, I have to apologize right off the bat. I was up a little late last night watching the tremendous election results in the province of Alberta, as I'm sure everybody here was happy to see. It was 73 out of 83 seats, Paul. That's amazing.

Anyway, back to the questions at hand, I first want to touch base on a couple of the questions my colleagues were talking about.

Don't get too confused. We get this often here, where one member doesn't like the family farm options program, and one does. One thing I heard from the people in my riding is that they absolutely did not like this program. Thank you very much for taking part in cancelling the program when you did.

Exactly how much money went out to AgriInvest? Then I would like to know if you could break that down into how much went to Alberta.

• (0940)

Ms. Nada Semaan: I don't have the numbers per se on me, so we will submit them to you in terms of the provincial breakdown, if that's okay. We can provide all the provincial breakdowns in addition to the full amount.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Absolutely, if you don't mind. I'm interested in Alberta, but I'm sure my colleagues around the table would be interested in the breakdown for all the provinces.

I've received tremendous feedback on this AgriInvest. I know when I did farm consultations throughout my riding in 2006 it was something that many of them wanted, many of them called for. It's something they were very happy with when I did them here in the winter of 2007.

One of the things that I would like to ask you—and I don't know if you have the answer to this either—is how you came about the interest rate you pay for those who continue to stay within the program.

Ms. Nada Semaan: You could ask Lloyd Rosser to respond to that one, if you don't mind. He is actually the person working on all the details.

Mr. Rosser Lloyd (Director, Income Stabilization, Program Development, Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Basically, what we're looking at is a 90-day T-bill rate on the accounts that are left. It's a rate that was provided similarly under the old net income stabilization accounts, so it will be familiar to producers.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you very much.

My next question is on the agri-recovery. Once again, it's a specific question, so I understand if you don't have the answer. Do you know how much of that \$62.6 million has been sent to the province of Alberta and for what kinds of disasters?

Ms. Nada Semaan: In terms of the province of Alberta, as I mentioned, they can still take up the drought assistance program before the end of March. However, we are currently working with them on the potato cyst nematode on the seed potatoes. The government is very engaged with us. That is an issue we are having to respond to, and that package should be coming out shortly as well.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Excellent. Thank you very much.

I will ask you to continue to work with them. I mean, 73 out of 83 seats, but all 39 of the rural seats won. That's pretty impressive.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Thai Thi Lac.

[Translation]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Good morning, and thank you for being here this morning. A number of questions that I wanted to ask have been asked by my colleagues. So I'm going to ask one that is further to that of my colleague Mr. Bellavance.

You said that the payments weren't necessarily allocated by province, but that they were by production. Can you tell us the allocation of payments by production in the case of the AgriInvest program?

[English]

Ms. Nada Semaan: We will provide you with the breakdown for AgriInvest, by province. I don't have it with me, but we will provide that to the standing committee.

On the breakdown by commodity, these programs are whole-farm. Because of the trade implications, we stayed very far from doing breakdown by commodities. That makes them extremely trade-sensitive. The reason we designed them in the design of whole-farm is to make sure they weren't countervailable programs.

[Translation]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac: The Main Estimates for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada totalled \$2.4 billion. With the Supplementary Estimates (A) and (B), available funding now totals more than \$3.6 billion. How do you explain the need to ask for so much supplementary funding?

Mr. Pierre Corriveau: It's a question of timing. When the Main Estimates are prepared, in January or February, we don't have the information enabling us to determine what will be tabled in the context of the budget. In last year's budget, for example, it was approximately \$2.4 billion. One billion dollars was announced in the 2007 budget, that is approximately \$400 million for production costs and \$600 million for start-up costs. That's why we requested an additional amount of approximately \$500 million in the Supplementary Estimates (A) and the rest in the Supplementary Estimates (B). It's simply a question of synchronization in budget preparation.

• (0945)

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac: I have no further questions. Do you have any more, Mr. Bellavance?

Mr. André Bellavance: In 1991-1992, approximately 4% of the total budget was allocated to agriculture. In 2004-2005, that figure fell to 2.5%, virtually half. Do you have any more up-to-date statistics on what Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada receives out of the overall budget?

Mr. Pierre Corriveau: As regards the percentage, we don't have the information to hand, but we can forward it to you, if you wish.

Mr. André Bellavance: You know exactly how much it currently is in terms of amounts of money, but you don't know what that represents in percentage terms.

Mr. Pierre Corriveau: Correct.

Mr. André Bellavance: If you can't give me the percentage, can you tell me how much it represents in terms of money allocated in the context of the budget?

Mr. Pierre Corriveau: It's approximately \$3.7 billion. For the 2008-2009 budget, we're going to come back to the committee shortly to present our Main Estimates. Some elements that were not included in our Main Estimates will be included in the Supplementary Estimates (A) for 2008-2009. So basically it's approximately \$2.4 billion, but that's subject to increases, as is currently the case.

Mr. André Bellavance: Can you send us that information as well?

Mr. Pierre Corriveau: Yes.

[English]

The Chair: Mrs. Skelton.

Hon. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Your supplementary estimates provide \$2 million for the Canadian Cattlemen's Association legacy fund, which we know goes toward developing markets for Canadian beef. What is this additional \$2 million specifically intended for?

Ms. Susie Miller: There's a requirement in the legacy fund that the Canadian Cattlemen's Association provide an annual plan in terms of the money that they want to access. There are three organizations that can access that—the Canadian Beef Export Federation, the Canadian Beef Breeds Council, and the Beef Information Centre.

They have to put together an annual plan. That plan is developed by an advisory committee that is mainly producers but also has some government participation on it. It's also vetted by the Beef Value Chain Roundtable, which includes representatives all the way from the cow-calf producer to the retail sector.

In terms of their overall, I can give you a précis of it. Their activities, particularly for this year, and they do plan to continue for the next several years, are focused on regaining their markets in Asia and Mexico, repositioning the Canadian beef exports as being a superior product, and taking advantage of the unique features of Canada, including the investments they've put into environmental measures, their food safety, traceability, animal identification—that sort of thing.

In terms of the extra \$2 million, it's hard to break it out because it's part of the full \$7 million, half of which is government money. The other half actually comes from producer check-off.

Hon. Carol Skelton: It's a check-off that's taken off when livestock is sold.

So basically it's marketing, then, or a little bit of everything thrown together.

Ms. Susie Miller: No, the activities are solely on marketing, and depending on what you define as marketing, it may include some consumer research, for example, or market research, identification of the positive attributes of beef for their customers.

In essence, it's not for research, for example, or for regulatory activity or anything like that. It's to regain the markets, including working with the producers internationally to enhance the understanding of the Canadian beef production and processing system.

• (0950)

Hon. Carol Skelton: So we go from there. Does it go into the semen and embryos market?

Ms. Susie Miller: As I indicated, there are three organizations that have access to this. The Canadian Beef Breeds Council is an organization made up of the various breeds—Simmental, Charolais, etc.—and that is for semen, embryos, and live-breeding animals, whereas the Canadian Beef Export Federation will work on beef but also on live animals for slaughter.

Hon. Carol Skelton: Thank you very much.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): If there's a bit of time left, I was interested, Ms. Semaan, in comments you made about consultation when you cancelled the farm options, or CAIS, in the second year but with plans to....

It was good to hear that consultation was taken. I think it needs to be noted. The member for Malpeque was very, very critical, both outside this room and in this room, about that program. In fact I remember him calling it nothing but a welfare plan for agriculture. Also, the member for Huron—Bruce made the same comments. I can provide those dates.

I think that maybe those comments were a little stretched on what it was. I know that I heard, and we heard at this committee, from farm leaders that this program wasn't working.

So, again, could you cement that? You did talk to basically members from all sectors when you made the decision or recommendation to phase this program out. Is that a fair statement?

Ms. Nada Semaan: Actually the consultations were on all programs and all policies that we did. We consulted over 3,000 producers in terms of the "Growing Forward" consultations to see where we were going, and we did hear a lot about options at those. There wasn't a consultation per se about options, but people were providing a lot of feedback at those consultations.

Also, when we were doing targeted ones, especially business risk management, there was a lot of feedback at those as well, so it wasn't the national CAIS committee per se, the national safety nets advisory committee. A number of committees made comments and there were always a lot of letters coming in. We did not go and make consultations just on that program, but on all programs, and we did receive on that one program.

Mr. Larry Miller: But the comments you did hear on that program helped to make that....

Ms. Nada Semaan: The comments were very much in terms of questioning its applicability and how it would work, and that was part of why limiting the second year was identified as a potential way of still testing the pilot, still getting what we needed to try to learn whether that will help, without upsetting everybody in terms of the program.

Mr. Larry Miller: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Easter.

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

Just spinning off Larry's comments, I have never had so many complaints about a cancelled government program from accountants as I had from that one. Accountants looked at that program and they

legally, under the law, had designed their advice and recommendations to producers on how to do their accounting and whether to sell cattle in December or January—all above board, all legal—and whether they would qualify for that \$18,000, or close to it. And three months after the fact the government cancelled the program.

I'm not blaming you for that. The minister has to accept full responsibility. But the accountants told me that for a government that lays out a commitment and then breaks its word and violates its word, that is absolutely wrong. He said he has never seen that happen before in terms of programs where accountants give farmers advice and after the fact it's cancelled. What the minister did in that program is a disgrace.

Let me come to the cost of production in AgriInvest. I'll read you two letters, and my question to you in the end will be on cost of production.

Letter number one is from Mary and Wayne Haugh, hog producers. They said:

Our share of the \$600 million Kickstart is \$287.85 for each of us. We'll try to spread this as thin as possible, but really what good is it, as it will only bring us up to the cost of production on six pigs each? Our share of the cost of production money that came in the week before Christmas was \$39.39 for each of us. That equals a total help of \$654.48 for our family farm.

The second letter is from Diamond X Ranch Ltd. in B.C. It reads:

In our mailbox the other day we received a check from the federal government for "cost of production". Now we have, in the past three years averaged one hundred and sixty-seven head of cows to calve each spring. The check was for \$316.32, which works out to approximately \$1.89 per head. How do you figure the cow/calf operator can produce a calf for \$1.89?

In Ottawa we can talk about the big numbers, the \$600 million, which is nothing for the agricultural industry, and when we put out \$1.2 billion, \$1.3 billion, and \$1.4 billion in the previous government it still wasn't a whole lot. The government talks about this \$600 million as if it's the be-all and end-all. It is a good program, NISA was a good program, and AgriInvest will be a good program. I'm asking you this in all seriousness: How do you formulate the cost-of-production program? How do you formulate the cost of production?

In the dairy industry we have a formula in supply management. We have a formula that actually returns to producers the cost of production of the efficient producers in the industry. This one obviously doesn't. So is this program really dealing with cost of production, or is it only a name on a program to confuse the general public?

When somebody downtown hears about this program and it's announced as cost of production, they actually think, "My God, the farmer is getting cost of production", because it's the name of the program. Is it just a name to confuse, or can you unequivocally tell me today that the cost of production is returned to producers?

• (0955)

Ms. Nada Semaan: The \$400 million cost-of-production program was designed to partially compensate producers for the decline in income experienced over the past four years due to the costs of production increasing at a faster rate than the output prices. So the calculation was based on the cost of production to provide a partial....

Hon. Wayne Easter: Ms. Semaan, it isn't, then. Is this program not designed to return the full cost of production to farmers?

Ms. Nada Semaan: No; it's designed to compensate partially for the loss of cost of production.

Hon. Wayne Easter: This is a huge problem, because your consuming public.... We're only 2.5% of the population. I can see this coming out of the Prime Minister's Office, because they spin messages, but for farmers out there who are suffering financially to be told they're getting a cost-of-production program, and it's \$1.89, is pretty sick.

Ms. Nada Semaan: Just to respond to a number of those, first of all, production insurance also has a cost-of-production element to it. CAIS also has a cost-of-production element to it. When you add all those, there are a number of elements that actually respond—

Hon. Wayne Easter: But they're not called cost of production.

Ms. Nada Semaan: No. This was to help support the increased cost of production. It was an additional \$400 million. In addition, just on those numbers—and I can't talk about specifics—when the \$400 million went out from the cost-of-production program, the first payment went out at 90% so we could get as much money as possible out to producers. That leaves only 10%. The cheques they would have received by the December timeframe only—

The Chair: Time has expired.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Chair, could I ask the honourable member for Malpeque to table those letters he read into the record?

Hon. Wayne Easter: It's not a problem.

The Chair: Okay. Time has just about run out on this first round.

I just had a couple of quick questions. One is on the Auditor General's study on the department and the CAIS program. Have most of those recommendations on CAIS been implemented? I know that one of her concerns was the issue of how transfers into the department are dealt with and the tracking of those transfers, especially as they relate to BRM. Has that been taken into consideration?

• (1000)

Ms. Nada Semaan: We actually have all the Auditor General's recommendations, and we do have a management plan to implement all of them. I'm not familiar with that one in particular, in terms of transfers. But if it's with reference to the error rates, we did have—

The Chair: That was just in CAIS. There were error rates in the administration.

A good example is that in the main estimates we voted on \$2.4 billion for the department, and now we're sitting at \$3.6 billion, which is a \$1.2 billion increase above and beyond the mains. But today we're only actually voting on supplementals. The question becomes one of tracking how those transfers come in that are

statutory expenditures and making sure there is accountability so the Auditor General can have a tracking mechanism.

Mr. Pierre Corriveau: Maybe I can clarify that.

If you look in the supplementary estimates (B), I know it says statutory, but there's an amount of \$37 million, basically, that is the best forecast we have now on the CAIS expenditure for this year, which is going to bring it to \$607 million.

Just to reiterate what Nada has said, we have an action management plan that in fact looks at the issues raised by the OAG. As for the main estimates, we now in fact provide the Department of Finance with a monthly update on the cash forecast in terms of the requirements from the treasury on this.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Time has expired. I'll ask that the witnesses leave the table and we'll suspend and allow our next group, from CFIA, to come up.

We are suspended.

• _____ (Pause) _____

•

• (1005)

The Chair: We'll call this meeting back to order.

We welcome to the table representatives from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. We have Cameron Prince, vice-president of operations; Sandra Wing, vice-president, policy and programs; and Gordon White, vice-president, finance, administration, and information technology.

I understand that Ms. Wing will make the opening comments, and then we'll open it up for questions and answers.

Mrs. Sandra Wing (Vice-President, Policy and Programs, Canadian Food Inspection Agency): Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, committee members.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the committee. My name is Sandra Wing, and I am the Vice-President of Policy and Programs. The agency is dedicated to safeguarding food, animals and plants, which enhances the health and well-being of Canada's people, environment and economy.

[*English*]

Food safety is a top priority for the Government of Canada. It is the agency's number one priority. We develop and deliver programs and services to protect Canadians from preventable health risks and to ensure that food safety emergencies are effectively managed.

We live in an era of increased trade and globalization. Our food safety system must evolve to meet the challenges we face, challenges posed by increasing trade, consumer demands, and differing food safety frameworks among countries.

The Speech from the Throne committed the government to introduce measures on food and product safety so that families can have confidence in what they buy. Amendments will be proposed to the Food and Drugs Act to allow this to happen in relation to food.

[*Translation*]

The amendments will also improve the legal foundation for the Food and Consumer Product Safety Action Plan, which Prime Minister Harper launched in December. The plan is intended to enhance the safety and reliability of consumer, food and health products by modernizing our system to better protect Canadians in our global environment.

Through this approach, more emphasis will be placed on verifying that industry measures are managing risks along the food continuum. Rather than waiting for problems to emerge, the emphasis will be placed on preventing problems early on. And, in the case where problems are identified, we will be able to respond quickly and take any necessary measures.

[*English*]

While not specifically a food safety issue, the action plan also includes a commitment to review the government's current policies on the use of "Product of Canada" and "Made in Canada" on food labels and advertising. To make this a reality, we are working with consumers, the private sector, and our partners in government to find appropriate ways of addressing consumer calls for more information.

The Government of Canada is also committed to a new way of managing tax dollars to ensure every dollar spent delivers results for Canadians. A key element of this new approach is to conduct strategic reviews of all program spending on a four-year cycle.

In the fall of 2007, the CFIA was one of the 17 initial departments and agencies that undertook a comprehensive reassessment of its programs. As a result, the agency put forward a series of reallocation proposals that could more effectively support government priorities.

[*Translation*]

As outlined in last week's budget, savings realized through these initiatives will be reallocated to higher priority and higher performing programs. This will enable us to better manage emerging health risks, and ensure the quality and safety of food that Canadians purchase.

Another initiative that we are working on is the Government of Canada's Paper Burden Reduction Initiative, which aims to reduce the paper burden on businesses by 20%. As a key partner, the agency will be identifying areas where administrative and paperwork burden can be reduced. The recent budget confirmed a deadline of November 2008 for achieving these reductions.

• (1010)

[*English*]

Before I talk about our operating budget, I would like to touch on BSE, a significant issue that we have been dealing with for some time now.

As you know, the first case of BSE in Canada resulted in the closing of many important markets for Canadian beef, cattle, and bovine genetics, but in the four years since then, 33 markets have

reopened to Canadian exports, either partially or fully. I'm pleased to say that Canadian exports are now substantially at the levels they were pre-BSE.

Canadian industry remains strongly committed to gaining full access for Canadian beef, cattle, and genetics in all markets. The government continues to work with industry to pursue this objective by all means available. These efforts include ongoing bilateral discussions with potential markets and regular representations in multilateral fora such as the World Trade Organization.

In these efforts, the CFIA leads the work on technical market access negotiations, including organizing incoming and outgoing missions, providing technical information on BSE and Canada's BSE-related measures, and issuing export certificates.

I'll turn now to the agency's operating budget for 2007-08, which has increased by approximately by \$17.8 million. This money will help us to deliver on our mandate in the following ways.

First, a large portion of the money, \$16.7 million, is for a one-time retroactive payment resulting from the engineering and scientific support group reclassification.

The agency will be receiving in supplementary estimates (B) \$575,000 to implement the consumer product and food recall advertising campaign. This two-year campaign will invest a total of \$4.575 million, and is aimed at increasing Canadians' awareness of consumer product and food recalls. It will also point Canadians to the website where they can subscribe to the agency's food recall e-mail list serve.

We will be getting a \$586,000 transfer from Public Works and Government Services Canada. This amount represents savings due to a relocation of CFIA staff into Health Canada facilities. The agency's decision to consolidate staff will increase the efficiency and use of federal government space.

As well, \$15,000 will be transferred to Environment Canada. This money will go toward increasing aboriginal participation in science and technology careers in the federal public service.

Finally, \$12,500 will be transferred to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research for avian influenza pandemic preparedness research, the goal of which is to strengthen our knowledge base and enhance our capacity in pandemic preparedness research.

These additional funds, which bring the agency's appropriations for 2007-08 to \$627.9 million, will help us continue to successfully protect Canada's food supply and safeguard human, animal, and plant health.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, and thanks for staying within the time limit.

We're going to stick with the five-minute rounds, and we're going to kick it off with Mr. St. Amand.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your presentation, Ms. Wing.

I'm looking at the portion of your presentation that talks about the operating budget, which has been increased by approximately \$17.8 million. A large portion of that—frankly, the overwhelming majority of it—is for a one-time retroactive payment resulting from the reclassification of a certain support group. I take it this refers to retroactive bonuses or increases in salary for the support group. Is that fair to say?

Mrs. Sandra Wing: It's primarily salary-related.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand: Right.

How many individuals are in the engineering and scientific support group?

Mr. Gordon White (Vice-President, Finance, Administration and Information Technology, Canadian Food Inspection Agency): Mr. Chair, this reclassification exercise relates to our EG inspectors, our meat inspector group. Approximately 650 positions were reclassified as a result of a long-standing classification discussion we had with our union representing that group. This goes back to the year 2000 in terms of retroactivity. So it's retroactivity on salary and on any overtime that would have been earned in that timeframe.

• (1015)

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand: So 650 persons, more or less, will receive a total of \$16.7 million. Am I correct on that?

Mr. Gordon White: Mr. Chair, if I could correct that, it's 650 positions. Over the timeframe, probably in the area of 1,100 to 1,200 people have actually gone through those positions. So we would deal with 1,100 to 1,200 accounts.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand: Okay.

Juxtaposed against this is the fact that there are 1.1 million, more or less, aboriginals in Canada. Is the \$15,000 being transferred to Environment Canada to go toward increasing aboriginal participation in the science and technology group—\$15,000 among hundreds of thousands of people—not absurdly, embarrassingly puny compared with an overall budget of \$17.8 million?

Mrs. Sandra Wing: The program that we have made a contribution to is being funded by more than the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, as it relates to the aboriginal science and technology careers. I don't have with me the total government investment.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand: Is it \$16.7 million?

Mrs. Sandra Wing: I'm sure it's not.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand: I'm equally sure.

The other item is the advertising campaign, a total of \$4.5 million aimed at increasing Canadians' awareness of consumer product and food recalls. It will also point Canadians to the website.

We all know that there are a significant number of Canadians, particularly in rural areas, who have no acquaintanceship with websites. I appreciate that number is declining, but there are still a number of Canadians who can be pointed at a thousand websites and it helps them not at all. What proactive steps are being taken to ensure that all Canadians, particularly seniors, are made aware of the food recall?

Mrs. Sandra Wing: The program for consumer product and food recall advertising includes more than directing Canadians to the e-mail lists. Of the 2,915 food and safety investigations, there were 246 recalls issued. We do feel it's important that consumers are able to access quickly what is on the recall list. However, in terms of other means, there are written media, in an effort to try to reach everyone, as well as those who access our website quite regularly.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand: If I have time left, I'll defer to Mr.—

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand: All right. That's fine.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Bellavance.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Thank you for your testimony and for being here.

I'm a bit surprised to hear you say that you have a supplementary budget of \$17.8 million and that part of that amount isn't allocated to an obvious food safety need. I know it's very important to conduct audits and ensure the traceability and safety of products manufactured in the country. However, year after year, you come and tell us about problems concerning products from outside Canada, such as melamine in pork, spinach, carrot juice and so on.

Every time, I ask you—and I'm not the only one around this table who does it—whether you have enough resources to verify the safety of products from outside the country containing substances that are not allowed or used in Canada but are elsewhere. We're of course talking about China, India and other emerging economies. I'm surprised to see that part of this amount isn't being allocated to foreign inspections. Do you have sufficient resources to conduct these checks? I always find it a little hard to get an answer to that question.

I'm going to talk about a completely different issue. Did the agency save or spend money when it decided to exclude the Fédération des producteurs de pommes du Québec from the process of allocating departmental exemptions? You decided to offload that responsibility to the Association des emballeurs de pommes du Québec. How can you explain that decision when it's only Quebec that will be proceeding in that manner? The Fédération des producteurs de pommes du Québec has been handling the issue of marketing in the event of shortage. Suddenly the agency decided that this component was the packagers' responsibility. That isn't how it works in the other provinces. Can that decision be attributed to a financial or other reason? That's never been explained to us.

• (1020)

[English]

Mrs. Sandra Wing: I will try to address the first question, which relates to resources for food safety, in particular in relation to imports.

Not showing in our supplementary estimates, which is our budget for this year, are resources that were announced in last week's budget: \$113 million over two years allocated to the Food Inspection Agency and to Health Canada to enhance our ability to deal with food safety issues, particularly focused on imports. So there has been an infusion, or there will be on April 1.

I don't know, Cam, if you want to address the apple question.

Mr. Cameron Prince (Vice-President, Operations, Canadian Food Inspection Agency): I must confess I'm not an expert on the issue; I am aware of it.

My understanding was there had been some consultations around that change, and yes, I'm aware that there was some concern in the industry. I believe it wasn't necessarily done as a cost-saving measure but in the interests of efficiency. I understood there had been general consensus prior to moving to that, but certainly we can get back to you with more information. We don't have someone here today who is totally familiar with that file. Certainly we'll make every effort to get back to you with an answer.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: That would be good, but watch out when you talk about consensus. The Fédération des producteurs de pommes du Québec, which, as I told you, has been handling the matter for 20 years, said that the decision made no sense. Its members were completely shocked by the decision and, moreover, still are.

Going back to food safety, particularly pet food, if I'm not mistaken, Mr. White, it was you who said, when you came and testified, that your agency wasn't directly involved in the matter of the health of pets. For it to be involved, the issue would really have to be related to human health. In other words, there would have to be a case of human contamination as a result of handling animal food.

Where does this matter stand? It's always the same thing: the media got a hold of it at one point, animals were sick, and some had even died. Have there been any changes? Has your agency asked for a little more power in this area, or is there still a legal gap? Does someone handle the matter when it concerns pets?

[English]

Mr. Gordon White: Cam, would you care to answer that?

Mr. Cameron Prince: Yes, I'll try to answer as well.

As you know, we work in pet foods. We continue to provide export certification and inspection of imports for pet food. It's an area that's under study at the agency. We were asked to go back and look at some of the applicants for pet food in the future. That work is not yet complete; I think it will take a number of months before we will be able to get back to you with more clarity on that.

• (1025)

The Chair: Your time has expired.

Mr. Miller is next.

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

I thank the witnesses for coming here today.

I have three questions. The first one is on our inspectors themselves. From hearing from my constituents and from some personal experience, there is no doubt in my mind that inspection standards have got tougher since BSE. I make that comment because over 30 years of shipping cull cows, I've never personally had an animal condemned. The odd time you may have an injury—a shoulder or a back leg or something—and you expect that for whatever reason, but I know of lots of incidents involving a dozen or fifteen cows. I know of one example in which four cows were condemned out of that load. The whole cow was condemned. I'm quite aware of the load. There was one that did have one injured leg.

Where I'm leading with this question is that the load was actually sold to four companies, but one inspector condemned all four animals. My question is basically whether records are kept on every inspector—on how many cows per thousand it is, compared to the next guy on the line. I'd like to see those figures, if possible.

Second is the report that was asked for by this committee last fall in order to do an initial review for the minister on inspection fees at slaughter plants and border crossings and what have you. I understand the first part of that study has been done. I'd like to see the results and maybe hear a general summary today.

You may not get time to answer the third question, but I hope somebody else here will follow up. I'd like to be clear on that \$16.7 million that was basically paid to the inspectors. I'm not clear on this. Were they not inspectors before, and now they are, so we're giving them another \$14,000 or \$15,000? I need that clarified some more.

I'll throw those three questions out there.

Mr. Cameron Prince: I'll do questions one and three.

On consistency and enforcement, I believe you're talking about humane transport regulations. That's what we enforce at CFIA, humane transport regulations.

We do about 30,000 inspections a year at sales, barns, we do roadside blitzes in cooperation with the police forces, and a lot of these inspections are done at slaughterhouses and abattoirs, big and small. Of those 30,000 inspections a year, there are records of what inspectors look at. There are about 200 administrative monetary fines issued per year on humane transport. So we have all those records on how that is done.

We have a quality management system that provides clear guidelines to inspectors on how they're to conduct their business, how they're to do their inspections. The system allows for a checkup on how that's going, how inspectors are doing, to make sure they're consistent in how they approach their work. There's always a challenge in a big organization all across Canada to get consistent approaches on all programs. We have had some challenges, but we've been able to bring a lot more consistency, and we've actually put a lot more effort, in recent years, on humane transport.

Shall I go to question three?

Mr. Larry Miller: Maybe let somebody answer question two, and then we'll come back if we have time.

Mrs. Sandra Wing: I will make an attempt at answering question two.

With respect to our work on a review of user fees, perhaps first as a quick contextual piece, you're all aware that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has been operating under a moratorium for new user fees, for the most part, since its inception in 1997. Meat inspection and animal health related user fees were, at that time, ten years ago, negotiated with industry stakeholders. It was a very lengthy and comprehensive process. The most recent fee changes for meat inspection and animal health were phased in ten years ago. But we have been working with industry since the fall on examining our user fee system that was developed ten years ago. We have worked to compare it to the U.S. user fee system, which is quite different from the Canadian system. We continue to work with them.

You may be aware that the minister announced last Monday that we would consult over the course of two weeks with industry on specific user fee issues that industry has. We have already started. We are in the second week of that consultation period. We've had a couple of meetings and we have a few more. We don't yet have the complete results of that consultation, but it should be available next week.

• (1030)

Mr. Cameron Prince: In clarification on the payment to the inspectors, this is entirely in the meat slaughter sector, so this is the largest inspection group that we have in the agency. Those are the inspectors who work on the line in the slaughter plants. They had been assigned a rating in the hierarchy of salary at an 02 level in that EG grouping back when the agency was created. It had been a sore point, and we went through the very lengthy labour relations process to arrive at a conclusion. What it meant was that all those slaughter inspectors went from, essentially—to simplify it—an 02 to an 03 level. So there was a corresponding salary and retroactive salary change. It has been a very complex issue, but it certainly has helped greatly in the labour relations environment at the agency. It has cleared the air and we're able to move forward. It also reflects the

changes in the meat inspection program, the modernization and the need for more advanced skills for inspectors.

The Chair: Thank you. Your time has expired.

Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Thank you very much for being here and for taking the time.

Ms. Wing, you mentioned in your report that you're looking at the policies of Product of Canada, Made in Canada. As you are aware, our committee made a recommendation that "Product of Canada" labelling should have 51% content and not just the cost of production. Are you recommending to government to adopt that? Is that the line you're following, and will we see that implemented in Canada? That's the first question.

The other concern is that I notice this government seems to have the philosophy of deregulation, privatization, pulling out of certain programs. You mentioned there has been \$113 million earmarked over two years for food safety, and yet there was a concern I raised, and I guess others raised, a few months ago, that the CFIA was one of the 17 initial departments that were doing a reassessment of programs. My concern at that time was whether this will have an effect on food safety.

So I would like to know if any inspections have been cut. Have we moved to some voluntary inspections in certain areas? Conversely, are we hiring more people to deal with the food safety that Canadians are becoming more and more worried about? In other words, does your budget earmark that we're going to hire more qualified people to ensure we have more programs in place to really look at that safety aspect that is a concern to all?

The concern is this. Are we doing enough and are we actually doing more by having professional people there on behalf of us to inspect?

Mrs. Sandra Wing: With respect to question number one, "Product of Canada", "Made in Canada", again, just a quick context so that everyone's aware. The current policy is that you may use the label "Product of Canada" or "Made in Canada" if at least 51% of the total direct costs of producing or manufacturing the goods in Canada is Canadian. So it's actually a calculation you have to do.

Consumers, though, are demanding more and better information about the Canadian content of the products they're purchasing. We're reviewing that policy of the 51% based on total direct costs. We're looking at Australia, the U.S., Europe, and other countries that have recently made changes to their "Made in U.S.A.", "Product of Australia", and developing options, and we're going to be consulting industry and consumers groups, hopefully very soon.

• (1035)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Could I just interrupt? What's your opinion of our recommendation that 51% should be content as opposed to cost of production? The committee made that recommendation. Should government be following it?

Mrs. Sandra Wing: I don't want to prejudge where we're going to end up with an assessment of options that we're examining, and I'll give you an example.

Most other countries have what's referred to as a gold standard, where essentially the entire product, if it is going to use a label, would have...in other words, entire Canadian content. That's one option we're looking at. Another would be an option of 51% Canadian content. The current policy is 51% direct cost.

So we're evaluating all the options, and I wouldn't want to prejudge what recommendation the government may come up with based on that analysis.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: And my second question.

Mrs. Sandra Wing: Oh, right. The \$113 million that was provided for food safety in the budget was for the Food Inspection Agency and for Health Canada. This money is to be used to make investments in food safety, with particular focus on imports.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Are you hiring more inspectors?

Mrs. Sandra Wing: We will be hiring.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: So there is a—

Mrs. Sandra Wing: There's a process to follow. We don't yet have the funding in our reference levels. There's a requirement for a Treasury Board submission.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Is there a danger of farming this out to voluntary inspection by some of the players? I know that was a concern raised by your union a little while ago. Has that been addressed?

Mrs. Sandra Wing: We're not looking to enhance the safety of food imports through third-party arrangements.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: So we are tightening up, then, in a nutshell. We're trying to do what we can to tighten up any problems that may arise.

Mrs. Sandra Wing: Yes, we're trying to do what we can.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Good. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Boshcoff.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Thank you very much.

As Ms. Wing identified, paper reduction is a major goal for the coming year. I'm sure it has been in the past, for your own sake as well as for the sake of the people you deal with.

I have two case studies that I would like to use that perhaps would serve as an example of what would change. The first is a process for a farmer who's been trying to develop a new product for export to the United States. He's received an almost instantaneous green light in terms of his product—it's a jam—in the United States; there are no problems. But in Canada he still has not received the go-ahead from the CFIA in spite of numerous.... Well, the paper buildup on this file has been extraordinary.

How do you see the fast-tracking of product development for export, or even domestic consumption—because I'm sure the product would also be utilized in Canada—as part of your paper war?

The second one is an incident that still has not really been fully resolved. During the drought two summers ago, farmers in

northwestern Ontario were compelled to get their hay from Minnesota, and there was only one source. Of course, a farmer can't take the entire load all at once. He has to go back and forth with a vehicle of limited capacity. Each time, he would be compelled to have that hay inspected, pay the fee, and have the American inspector travel several hours to do the same thing.

When we can see the situation in the field, how is the public service going to be able to adapt so that you can actually understand what is happening to producers and farmers in a reality situation, as opposed to “These are the rules, so can you please just follow them?” Maybe six or seven of your ranking officers were involved, and no one could come to a conclusion that would be reasonably commonsensical.

• (1040)

Mrs. Sandra Wing: Those are two very good examples.

The agency is taking very seriously the paper burden reduction and the target of 20%. Some of what will need to be achieved in this area we can achieve through just looking at what our policies are and doing what we can to streamline. Some of it is regulatory and the process is somewhat longer in terms of achieving real benefit.

Those are two good case examples that we should take a look at within the context of actions on paper burden reduction. We have until November 2008 to identify our immediate 20%. I'm not familiar with either of those, I'm sorry. But we could take a look at those as two potential areas that, if there's policy, we could do quickly, versus regulatory, which might take a bit longer.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: I would be pleased to present the documentation, but it certainly wouldn't reduce your paper flow. It may increase it by a large amount.

When we talk about this, the public in terms of understanding what they have to do, in both cases I believe the individuals involved, on numerous occasions, presented what they felt were direct answers. Then someone else in the department would come at them from a different angle and ask for it in a different way. Of course, it's kind of like people writing exams; no one really wants to go through that whole process and resubmit it from start to finish again.

As a way of relating to the public, understanding that these are business people or farmers—and farmers are obviously entrepreneurs and business people too—even those involved in retail find these things onerous. So I know they would be looking at a 20% reduction as a very good start, with the full understanding that there must be some documentation and protection of the Canadian public.

So I will indeed forward that to you almost immediately.

The Chair: Mr. Lauzon, we're going to give you your five minutes, and then we're going to move to motions.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Thank you very much.

I appreciate you folks being here.

Ms. Wing, in your opening comments you spoke about BSE, which of course was very devastating to our cattle industry. You also talked about how you have worked hard, and the CFIA has worked hard, in the last four years bringing that back. I think you mentioned that 33 markets have been partially restored.

I'm just wondering what the plan is here. Do you have plans for the coming year on how we're going to increase that and be even more effective?

Mrs. Sandra Wing: Yes, of course, we have plans. We work very closely with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada on the trade promotion. Their responsibility is for the trade promotion, and work very closely with industry.

The role of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is more in technical market access. But we do have teams who are negotiating with Mexico, with China, with Japan, and with others to ensure that there are no technical impediments to access in those markets and that we're meeting international standards.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I think that's critical. Our minister is really dedicated to opening up more markets and increasing our world market share. I think the CFIA should be trying to do everything possible to help him, with whatever assistance, to make that happen. Our producers are telling us that's part of the solution as well, to grow our markets.

This might be a loaded question, but you should be able to answer this, and I'll give you an opportunity to do so. How do you think CFIA has improved, for example over the last five years? What are you doing that's more efficient now than over the last number of years?

• (1045)

Mrs. Sandra Wing: Now, that's a very hard one for me, given that I'm fairly new to the agency.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: It seems Mr. Prince is keen to answer that.

Mr. Cameron Prince: In fairness to my colleague Sandra, she's only been with the agency a short period of time. Some of these things go back historically, and Gord and I have been around for a while.

I think the agency is quite proud of what we've done in our fairly short history of ten years. You asked about the last five years. I think one of the big improvements we've made is that although issues don't come out about....

People are confused sometimes about our regulatory frameworks and so on, but I think we've done a better job of reaching out to our stakeholders. I think we consult better. That's very important, because we do important work for Canadians, and it's important that our main stakeholders understand where we're coming from.

We've done a better job in terms of using our inspection resources. We've modernized some of our inspection programs. We've moved to outcome-based types of programs. Rather than being very prescriptive and saying "That wall must be so high and it must be painted white", we're saying "This has to be clean, and it has to be a suitable environment for manufacturing food", and that kind of thing.

I think it's a constant challenge, but we're always modernizing, trying to be as efficient as possible, use taxpayers' dollars as efficiently as we possibly can.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I guess what we're saying is that, as Mr. Boshcoff said, we're applying a little more common sense recently than maybe we had in the past. It's not only the—

Mr. Cameron Prince: We're very aware of the need to explain what we're doing, to communicate to our stakeholders, to help them to understand why we have to do certain things that may impact on them.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: When you said that you consult with the people who are applying the rules, I think you used the magic words there: they are ones who have to live with the rules. I think that's really critical, and I'm heartened to see that you're implementing that philosophy.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm good.

The Chair: Thank you.

I want to thank the witnesses for appearing. You are free to leave the table.

We're going to vote on the supplementary estimates. If you have your books with you, it's on page 92.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Department

Vote 1b—Operating expenditures and the payment to each member of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada who is a Minister without Portfolio or a Minister of State who does not preside over a Ministry of State of a salary not to exceed the salary paid to Ministers of State who preside over Ministries of State under the *Salaries Act*, as adjusted pursuant to the *Parliament of Canada Act* and pro rata for any period of less than a year and, pursuant to paragraph 29.1(2)(a) of the *Financial Administration Act*, authority to expend revenues received from, and to offset expenditures incurred in the fiscal year for, collaborative research agreements and research services, the grazing and breeding activities of the Community Pastures Program and the administration of the Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization program—To authorize the transfer of \$43,620,457 from Agriculture and Agri-Food Vote 10, and \$175,000 from Western Economic Diversification Vote 1, *Appropriation Act No. 2, 2007-2008* for the purposes of this Vote.....\$1

(Vote 1b agreed to)

Hon. Wayne Easter: We wish it was more, but we would go with that.

The Chair: Okay, now to votes 5b, 10b, 12b, and 30b.

Department

Vote 5b—Capital expenditures—To authorize the transfer of \$2,174,489 from Agriculture and Agri-Food Vote 10, *Appropriation Act No. 2, 2007-2008* for the purposes of this Vote.....\$1

Vote 10b—The grants listed in the Estimates and contributions—To authorize the transfer of \$550,000 from Natural Resources Vote 10, *Appropriation Act No. 2, 2007-2008* for the purposes of this Vote.....\$1

Vote 12b—To write-off the projected net drawdown authority used by the Canadian Pari-Mutuel Agency Revolving Fund of up to \$500,000 effective March 31, 2008.....\$1

Canadian Food Inspection Agency

Vote 30b—Operating expenditures and contributions—To authorize the transfer of \$586,000 from Public Works and Government Services Vote 1, *Appropriation Act No. 2, 2007-2008* for the purposes of this Vote and to provide a further amount of.....\$17,241,667

(Votes 5b, 10b, 12b, and 30b agreed to)

•(1050)

The Chair: Shall I report supplementary estimates B back to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We have a couple of housekeeping things.

First is high input costs for farmers. I need somebody to propose that the budget of the committee, in the amount of \$29,800, for the study of high input costs for farmers be adopted.

So moved by Wayne Easter.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Just so you know, we want to encourage members to submit their witness lists for “Product of Canada”, which will be our next study. We want to get going on that when we get back from our break, so get your lists in to Jean-François so he can start lining that up during the break week.

Hon. Wayne Easter: We have two parliamentary secretaries here at the moment. Maybe one of them can answer. Who is ultimately responsible for the “Product of Canada” definition? Is it Industry? Is it Agriculture? Does anybody know?

Mr. Guy Lauzon: That's a good question.

Hon. Wayne Easter: David, do you know?

The Chair: It's Agriculture, isn't it?

Hon. Wayne Easter: I ask because I've been asked myself and I don't know the answer.

The Chair: According to Jean-Denis, it's Industry.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Industry—that's what I thought, probably.

The Chair: That's where the legislation lies.

We have a motion before us from Mr. Easter. I think it's been circulated.

Mr. Paul Steckle: If this is an Industry issue, are we going to have joint meetings with the industry committee? Is the industry committee going to study this as well?

The Chair: According to Jean-Denis, it's a guideline from Industry Canada, so it's provided to Agriculture Canada and CFIA for implementation. This committee can have the hearings on it and make recommendations. It's the same thing we do with PMRA, which is under Health Canada. We have the power to advise on other committee business, as we did with the biofuels bill, Bill C-33, which is under Environment Canada. So we are our own masters. We can make recommendations to other departments and not be in violation of anybody's jurisdiction.

Mr. Easter, you have a motion. I would ask that you read it into the record.

Hon. Wayne Easter: There is a slight problem with this resolution at the moment. It requires amendment. We can agree on the amendment today, or I can give notice for the next meeting. But I'll read it as it should be, given that the government introduced legislation yesterday and we have to wait for the Speaker's ruling on whether it's legal or not.

The Chair: First you'd have to read the current motion you tabled into the record. Then as far as amendment...

Hon. Wayne Easter: I'll read the current motion as it stands:

That this committee call upon the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food to respect the Federal Court of Appeal decision upholding the previous Federal Court decision concerning the Canadian Wheat Board and to adhere to the provisions of section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act prior to any legislation being introduced by the government concerning the Canadian Wheat Board. Any proposed legislation to the Canadian Wheat Board Act which would seek to exclude barley or wheat from the single desk selling authority of the board requires first consultation with the board and second approval by producers in a vote authorizing that specific exclusion.

It needs to be amended along these lines. We can do it today or propose it and do it at the next meeting.

The Chair: Now that you have it on the table, I don't know if you can amend your own motion.

Hon. Wayne Easter: This is what I'd propose, and maybe we'd get friendly agreement here. I would propose that in the fourth line down, where it says “of section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act”, delete “prior to any” and put in “with respect to legislation”, and delete “being”. Therefore it would read “...with respect to legislation introduced by the government concerning the Canadian Wheat Board”, period. Then in the next sentence, where it says “Any proposed legislation”, delete “proposed” so that it would read “Any legislation to the Canadian Wheat Board Act”.

So it would read, starting at the fourth line,

of section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act with respect to legislation introduced by the government concerning the Canadian Wheat Board. Any legislation to the Canadian Wheat Board Act which would seek to exclude barley or wheat from the single desk selling authority of the board requires first consultation with the board and second approval by producers in a vote authorizing that specific exclusion.

The Chair: I'll accept that; it doesn't change the intent. We'll just make that the motion if everybody is okay with that.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Are there any comments?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, just to speak in favour of this motion, there is a requirement under section 47.1. As I said in the House yesterday, we do believe the minister did perform an illegal act. Actually, he violated his oath of office yesterday in his introduction of legislation in the House, in that they have not met the requirement of section 47.1 in terms of consulting with the board and holding a plebiscite among producers on the specific intent of their legislation. The chair at the Canadian Wheat Board said as recently as Saturday that there was no consultation.

The previous minister said while the previous so-called plebiscite was being held that he talked about it sometimes and that it was a consultation, but he did say specifically that it was not binding, and it certainly could be considered more of a public opinion survey.

The current minister has made it clear that he is doing away with the single desk marketing of barley.

The parliamentary secretary to the Minister to the Canadian Wheat Board and the previous minister went to great lengths in the past to talk about how you could have dual marketing in which you had single desk selling and the open market. We argued at the time that you couldn't have both. The current minister, to his credit, has admitted that it's not possible, and he's made it clear that this legislation will do away with the single desk marketing of barley.

None of the qualifications of section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act have been followed in terms of the introduction of this legislation. We believe the committee should pass this motion and report so to the House.

• (1055)

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Anderson.

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

It's really good to be back here with old friends. Some of us are on a couple of committees together, so we can't seem to get away from each other. But it's good to be here, and it's always good to talk about this issue. I'm sure everyone is excited. André looks thrilled again to be here talking about the Wheat Board. But if Mr. Easter has a fixation for it, there's nothing we can do about that.

Just to address specifically the motion today, we want to make the point that the government has certainly respected the court decision, as we have with all other matters. We are adhering to section 47.1. The intent of this legislation doesn't have anything to do with the issues that Mr. Easter is speaking about. It simply changes the government's ability to regulate, and it's within the right of the minister and certainly the right of any member in the House to bring forward legislation to deal with that. So I was a little disappointed yesterday that, before he'd even seen it, he was up on his feet ranting about it and taking a position that is not in the interests of western Canadian farmers.

We've attempted to consult with the board. I was at a meeting, actually, when we sat down with the leadership of the Canadian Wheat Board and tried to talk specifically about this issue. The board themselves came out later and said they didn't feel that they could continue to have discussions. So certainly the minister has been more than open to sitting down with the industry and with the board and talking about this issue. The board doesn't seem to be as willing to do that.

With regard to the plebiscite, clearly Mr. Easter can pretend that we didn't have a vote. But we had a vote, and 62% of western Canadian producers, almost 30,000 of them, spoke and said they do want to have some marketing choice. Certainly that percentage would be higher now, it's obvious, and those of us who are on the prairies can see that. Even the member for Wascana seems to have shifted his hardline position to begin to become a little bit more reasonable on his position. We welcome that and welcome him bringing his caucus along to that position as well.

I think, rather than calling upon the minister here, we really should be commending the minister for the way he's handled this file and actually for the fact that he's adhered to most of the things that are mentioned in the motion here. Clearly we're upholding the court

decision. We're going along with that. Both decisions have been made and we've respected them. We're adhering to the ability of the minister to change legislation. There's nothing improper about that at all. We have consulted with the board, and we've also had approval by producers and a vote authorizing that. So I think the opposition parties need to understand the widespread interest in change in western Canada.

If they'd been at the rally on Saturday, they would have seen that. We had well over a hundred supporters for change out. It was interesting. There were about ten or so pro-board supporters out, and I understand a good number of the pro-board supporters had to actually leave because they had to get back to their jobs in the city. They had brought in a number of people who may not be farmers but who had shown up, and then when one o'clock came, they had to get back to their jobs.

I know from conversations I heard after the rally that a number of the people who were carrying pro-board signs were not farmers, because they were having discussions about that very fact.

I would appeal to the opposition parties to realize that farmers are looking forward to change. They want change. We've acted appropriately, and as importantly, we've acted to support western Canadian farmers.

That said, I would like to call the question.

An hon. member: A recorded vote.

• (1100)

The Chair: Are there any other people wanting to speak on this motion?

Hon. Wayne Easter: I have just one last comment, Mr. Chair.

The fact of the matter is that the consultation or previous plebiscite held was not on this specific proposal, and in terms of the minister's statement on this legislation, there's only 13.8% support in that plebiscite or consultation for this position.

I would say this—and this is what would really clear the air, Mr. Chair, and we'd welcome this—that if the government would go out and hold a new plebiscite on a clear question, do you want the single desk or not, it would settle this issue. If the government thinks it has support, then do it. Hold the plebiscite the way that it's supposed to be done under the law, and whether it's for or against barley under the board, we would welcome that decision.

So if the parliamentary secretary and the minister think they have that support out there on a clear question, then just do it, and we wouldn't have to argue here.

So I would agree. Call the question.

The Chair: Okay. This will be a recorded vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4)

Hon. Wayne Easter: When will that be reported, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: That would have had to be part of the motion.

Hon. Wayne Easter: In my motion I said to report it to the House.

The Chair: It's not in your motion. I'll check the blues, but I don't think it's in the blues.

Hon. Wayne Easter: All right. I'll make another motion at the next meeting. That's not a problem.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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