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# **Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri- Food**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, June 6, 2013**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Merv Tweed**



## Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

Thursday, June 6, 2013

• (1150)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC)):** Good morning, everyone. Welcome to meeting number 86 of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Orders of the day are pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), a study of the subject matter of the supplementary estimates (A) 2013–14 under Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

I will advise our colleagues that this is being televised, so I would ask that you be on your best behaviour.

Joining us today, as he has many times in the past, is the Honourable Gerry Ritz, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board.

I'll advise committee members that there is the potential for the bells to ring again. At that point, because we are in the same facility, I'll ask the committee if we are prepared to extend that 30-minute bell for us by 15 minutes so that we can finish hearing the minister's remarks.

Minister, welcome, and please proceed.

**Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. It's always a pleasure to be here.

I have with me here today my deputy minister, Suzanne Vinet; George Da Pont, president of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency; Paul Mayers, associate vice-president of programs with the CFIA; and Greg Meredith, assistant deputy minister of strategic policy with the Department of Agriculture.

I'd like to thank the committee for your continued hard work for the sector across Canada. As you know, we continue to keep a busy agenda as we work to grow this core economic sector that drives jobs and growth here in Canada—the third largest contributor to our GDP.

It's good to be back at this table and to come with such good news from the supplementary estimates (A).

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's 2013-14 supplementary estimates (A) total more than \$270.3 million. I know there were some questions in question period as to when that money would be tabled. Here it is, Mr. Chair. I'm hopeful that the opposition members will be voting for that.

The majority of these dollars, \$207 million, are for cost-shared, strategic initiative programming under Growing Forward 2. In addition, there is more than \$46 million for business risk management to supplement the BRM funding the department already has in its possession.

Canadian agriculture is a modern, technology-advanced, export-oriented sector that consists of highly capitalized enterprises, coast to coast to coast. The global landscape is ever changing, with growing population and incomes driving demand for higher-value products that our world-class producers and processors can and will deliver.

Capturing these opportunities requires a rethink in our approach to agricultural policy and to how we do business, both in the private sector as well as in government. Governments don't stand still and Agriculture Canada continues to make adjustments to align its resources—the human, financial, and physical assets—to deliver on the priorities of the agriculture industry.

As you well know, this April, federal, provincial, and territorial governments launched Growing Forward 2. This new agricultural policy framework aims to provide the sector with modern programming to seize opportunities and manage the challenges presented by the current economic environment. The goal is working with industry to create the conditions for long-term competitiveness, sustainability, and adaptability, with an emphasis on capacity and self-reliance in the long term.

Growing Forward 2 is an investment of \$3 billion over the next five years to drive sector growth and productivity by: increasing our focus on strategic investments in innovation, markets, and of course competitiveness; working on the development of and increasing the use of private sector risk management tools; improving the regulatory environment for the sector while still maintaining health, safety, and environmental protections; giving provinces and territories greater flexibility to tailor programs to local needs; and agreeing to a medium and longer-term policy agenda that will set the course for sustained progress.

The supplementary estimates (A) include \$207 million in funding to support those initiatives in Growing Forward 2, cost-shared programming that is delivered by provincial and territorial governments. Last night it was disappointing, but predictable, to see opposition members around this table vote against this proactive programming funding that will improve the bottom line of farmers.

Under Growing Forward 2 there's a 50% increase in funding for cost-shared initiatives, compared to the previous framework. Let me say that again, Mr. Chair: a 50% increase compared to the last five-year programming. We're heading in the right direction. These initiatives include programming in innovation, market development, and of course industry capacity. At the same time, governments will continue to offer generous ongoing support for an effective suite of business risk management programs to ensure farmers are protected against severe market volatility and unforeseen natural disasters.

Innovation, in particular, is a critical driver of competitiveness. With this in mind we must continue to align our resources to deliver the best results for the sector and for Canadians. This is why we will continue to invest in more effective collaborations with other governments and of course the private sector.

One recent example of this is the new Canadian Wheat Alliance, which brings together the National Research Council, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the Government of Saskatchewan, and the University of Saskatchewan to advance wheat research across Canada. In total, our government will invest \$85 million over the next five years toward advancing wheat research. This investment was met with praise from groups across the agricultural and academic sectors.

Through Growing Forward 2, we're boosting innovation spending to nearly \$700 million at the federal level. That's a 40% increase over the previous framework.

Promoting our Canadian food products to markets worldwide is an important and integral part of Growing Forward 2. Canada highly values positive two-way relations with our international trade partners. Last year our hard-working food, agriculture, and seafood producers and processors exported a record \$47.7 billion in innovative, high-quality food products to 189 countries around the world. That's a 7.6% increase over the previous year, 2011. That's a great figure, Mr. Chairman, but we can and will do more.

•(1155)

The Government of Canada has concluded numerous free trade agreements, tearing down trade barriers and helping producers compete on a level playing field. We're working with key other customers, like Europe, the Asia-Pacific partners, including Japan and Korea, India, and Morocco, where we continue to build on our good progress to conclude these FTAs to the benefit of our producers.

Thanks to our strengthened Market Access Secretariat, our efforts to promote trade rooted in sound science, consumers in China, South Korea, and even Chile can now enjoy Canadian beef products for the first time in almost a decade since the BSE border closures, while Japanese consumers enjoy an expanded access.

Our government is committed to working with the entire wheat value chain, industry, academia, and governments, to grow the industry and help it reach its full potential as an economic powerhouse in this country. Of course, as I mentioned a few moments ago, we have the new Wheat Alliance, which represents a \$97 million investment over the first five years of this initiative, with government making up the vast majority of those dollars.

We've been creating the conditions to unlock the potential of wheat as a major economic driver again, through marketing freedom, market development, free trade agreements, regulatory reform to spur innovation, modernizing the Canadian Grain Commission, updating plant breeders' rights legislation, and examining how to enhance international property production to incent and reward innovation.

The supplementary estimates also include over \$11 million in support for the Canadian Wheat Board's transition costs programming, where our government has delivered on its long-standing promise to give western Canadian farmers the freedom to market their own wheat and barley on the open market at the time, price, and place of their choosing.

It's clear, Mr. Chair, that our government is on the right track. The agricultural sector in general is in a very healthy state, with net cash income having reached a record high of over \$13 billion in 2012.

According to the farm financial reports for 2012, crop receipts rose by 12%, to reach a record \$29.3 billion, and livestock receipts were \$21 billion, 2.6% higher than the previous year. In addition, farm cash receipts for the first quarter of 2013 totalled \$15.4 billion, which is more than 7.5% higher than the first quarter of last year.

Mr. Chairman, at this time I'd like to take a few minutes to address our government's response to the XL review panel's report that I tabled in the House of Commons yesterday. As you know, last fall our government committed to an independent review of the XL Foods beef recall. As I stated yesterday, the report made clear that Canada's food safety system remains among the world's best because of a commitment to continuous improvement.

As we all know, Mr. Chair, no system will be perfect. However, when a problem occurs, all players involved in the food safety system must seek opportunities to learn and fine-tune the system ongoing. This is why our government launched that independent review.

Let me be clear to this committee that our government accepts and is acting on all of the independent panel's recommendations. I have a document here today that outlines the steps already taken and the steps that will be taken by our government, the CFIA, Health Canada, and the Public Health Agency of Canada to address each and every one of the recommendations. In addition, I have several documents outlining our government's investments in CFIA's budgetary and inspector capacity. With your permission, Mr. Chair, I will table these documents after my remarks in both official languages.

Food safety is not a static exercise, which is why our government continues to take steps to make sure that our inspection system meets a consistent, rigorous standard in meat and other food plants across this great country. The report makes recommendations related to prevention strategies and regulatory oversight, surveillance and trend analysis, incident management and recall response, and of course communications of the above. Our government has already initiated action on items identified in that report.

As you may remember, the CFIA conducted an in-depth review of the XL plant at the outset of the situation last fall. Based on the findings of this review and other lessons learned during the response, the CFIA proactively identified and acted on opportunities for improvement while the panel was conducting its valuable work. These measures are part of the Safe Food for Canadians action plan, which we announced last month. The action plan is closely aligned with the panel's recommendations, a clear validation that we are taking the right steps to keep consumers safe.

● (1200)

Several of the panel's recommendations were fully or partially addressed through enhanced E. coli O157 controls, which we announced on May 17 of this year.

Yesterday we also announced the creation of inspection verification teams. These are additional personnel to ensure that food safety remains job one for industry and the online CFIA inspectors in plants across the country.

Our government will invest nearly \$16 million over the next three years to establish and maintain these teams. The teams will conduct unannounced spot checks of plants across the country, adding another line of rigour to our already world-class food safety system. They will assess a plant's food safety controls and operations, as well as the inspection activities in federally registered establishments.

The aim of the inspection verification teams is to ensure that the overall food safety system is effective, and that the food safety rules and standards are consistently and thoroughly followed and enforced.

The CFIA, Health Canada, and the Public Health Agency of Canada will work together to address all remaining recommendations.

Concurrently, we continue to work with industry, consumers, and other stakeholders to move forward on the Safe Food for Canadians action plan. The action plan aims to further improve the food safety system through stronger food safety rules, more effective inspection, a renewed commitment to service standards, and more information for consumers.

The action plan includes a broad range of initiatives, including the development of an integrated food laboratory network with other partners involved in food safety, such as the provinces and academia. This will help food safety and health authorities respond faster to food-borne hazards.

Let me reiterate that our government is committed to acting on all of the recommendations outlined in the XL Foods report. Canadians expect no less.

Our record is clear. We have taken and will continue to take concrete steps to strengthen food safety in Canada.

As I announced last week in the House, our government has provided CFIA with the resources to hire 20% more inspectors since we took office. Canadian consumers remain our number one priority when it comes to food safety.

Since this recall, our government has passed legislation to strengthen Canada's food safety system, which will improve inspections, strengthen food safety rules, and improve communications with Canadian consumers. As minister, I will continue to make sure that the CFIA has the workforce and monetary resources necessary to protect Canadians' food.

Thank you. I look forward to the committee's questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Allen.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the minister.

Minister, you and I both remember Ms. Weatherill very well. In fact, she wrote a very comprehensive report for your government.

Let me just quote from your new comprehensive report that you received just yesterday—or at least you tabled yesterday—on page 18:

What follows is a summary of Canada's food safety network as it relates to beef and beef products. The reader who would like more information on the subject is encouraged to read Chapter 4 of the Weatherill Report, which describes this intricate system extensively.

Let me tell you what chapter 4 is, Minister: "How does Canada's food safety system work?"

So here we are, four years after Weatherill's extensive report that said there were deficiencies in the system, and we have another report that says to go back and read chapter 4 and find out how the system works.

Sir, do you not find that a scathing indictment of not only your leadership but of the CFIA?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** I think, Mr. Allen, you're perverting the direction that the authors of this report were aiming for in that.

What they're saying is that as a precursor to understanding what they're talking about, go back to take a look at what Sheila Weatherill talked about in chapter 4. That's what this is about.

There's also a quote just above that, which I'd like to have on the record. It's from Dr. John Carsley, the medical health officer for Vancouver, who says:

In all likelihood, none of the individual elements that contributed to the outbreak was sufficient to have caused it alone, so each part of the food safety system must work together as perfectly as possible.

That again builds on what Sheila Weatherill talked about, the partnerships and the work that needs to be done between all of the players, right from the farm gate through to your kitchen table and everyone who is a regulator or who has a part to play in that.

What they're saying is please go back and take a look at chapter 4 in the Weatherill report; that will give you an idea of where we're going with this report.

• (1205)

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** But sir, it says to go back and understand what you're supposed to have already known. Chapter 4 is very specific. It talks about responsibilities of the various organizations. It's a methodical, step-by-step process.

CFIA came here and said they understood the Weatherill report. In fact, Minister, you were here yourself, after the Weatherill report was tabled, and said you would do all of the recommendations—

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** Which we have.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** You said you have done it. We dispute the fact about the audit, but that's a debate for another day. We still believe you didn't do it. In fact, if you'd done the audit as Ms. Weatherill had suggested, you might not be here today trying to have a second report that says you didn't get the job done.

Clearly, with the system that was devised with CVS, which is a compliance verification system, not only were the people not trained appropriately, according to this new report, but Sheila Weatherill said that was a problem back in 2008-09, that CVS wasn't working yet and people weren't trained. Here we are, after all the promises that came before this committee, where you came and said, Minister, you were going to enact it and make sure it all gets done. What it says in Ms. Weatherill's report is that you need to train folks. You said you'd do it, you'd make sure they understood CVS; you said, "Yes, we'll do it."

Now we have the new report, the one you tabled yesterday, that says, no, they are not. How do you answer to the Canadian public, sir, that you didn't get the job done, and neither did the CFIA? They didn't get the job done, after they promised, after Ms. Weatherill's report of 2009, after they said, "We will unequivocally get this job done. We intend to make sure it is done." Here you are, four years later, with another report saying that you didn't get the job done.

How do you answer to the Canadian public, sir?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** I would be happy to have President Da Pont or Mr. Mayers outline all of the actions that have been taken to fulfill the 57 recommendations in the Weatherill report and give you a basic outline on the new training regime that's in place.

Either one of you, gentlemen?

**Mr. George Da Pont (President, Canadian Food Inspection Agency):** Thank you, Minister.

First of all, I would like to say that the agency has put tremendous effort into implementing all of the recommendations in the Weatherill report. You specifically mentioned the issues around training and CVS. At that time, as I'm sure you're well aware and you recall, CVS was a new system that was just being put in place. There's been extensive training around CVS in the system. There's

been extensive training of inspectors coming out of the Weatherill report around applying the new listeria policy.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Mr. Da Pont, with the greatest respect, sir, this latest XL report that this government asked to have done says the inspectors you had at XL—the single-largest beef processor in this country—weren't trained. They weren't trained, sir. You said to Sheila Weatherill that you'd make sure they get trained. That was your first and foremost priority. You intended to make sure that every inspector was compliant with CVS.

Here you are, four years later—not four months, but four years—after you've come to committee on numerous occasions and said it was done, not "being done", but done, and you have a scathing report that says you had inspectors in the largest meat processing plant in this country who were untrained. How can that be?

**Mr. George Da Pont:** With all due respect, sir—

**The Chair:** Excuse me, because of the time limitations, I'm going to go to Mr. Lemieux. If he wants to follow up on that...but I think it would be fair to all members to give them a chance.

Mr. Lemieux.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC):** Thank you for the offer, Mr. Chair. I have my own line of questioning, so I'll pursue that.

Minister, I wanted to ask you a few questions about food safety. Just to round out what the report also said in addition to the recommendations, the expert panel of course recognizes that Canada has one of the best food safety systems in the world. It also notes that E. coli infections have been declining over the past decade, which I think is important, because Canada's population has been increasing. When I think of this in terms of Canada having a population of 34 million, we might be talking about 80 million meals prepared each and every day here in Canada. Yet, the incidence of E. coli contamination is decreasing. I think it's important to provide that information, because it's the same expert panel that's making those comments as well.

I do want to ask about resources for food safety, particularly with respect to inspectors and with respect to finances. I bring it up because it's oftentimes a criticism of the opposition—I think a misdirected criticism—about the number of resources CFIA has with which to conduct its important work.

Minister, could you share with the committee, with respect to front-line food inspectors and funding, what types of initiatives the government has done over these past seven years.

•(1210)

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** We have continued, budget by budget, Mr. Lemieux, to enhance the capacity of CFIA to do the job. From a monetary perspective, there have been hundreds of millions of dollars allocated to bolster the job and add to the rigour of the job that CFIA does. We've also continued to add to their capacity, on the front line, some 20% since we formed government. The announcement that ties into this report now is 30 more brand-new positions. These are highly skilled, highly trained individuals. Some will come from existing human resources the CFIA has, and then they will be backfilled by other people in the line. These will be highly skilled positions. These are the oversight teams we're talking about. They'll add more rigour to the food safety system.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Thank you, Minister.

Can I ask you what types of activities these inspection teams will be conducting? If a food inspector is a member of this inspection verification team, what will he or his team be doing when they show up at a plant unannounced?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** My job as minister is not to run the day-to-day operations, but Mr. Mayers would have an idea of what those inspection verification teams would be required to do.

**Mr. Paul Mayers (Associate Vice-President, Policy and Programs, Canadian Food Inspection Agency):** Thank you, Minister.

The inspection verification teams will complement and support front-line inspection by doing two important things: first, they will confirm the effectiveness of an establishment's food safety controls when they arrive and undertake their in-depth review; second, they will overview the alignment of our inspection staff's activity to those food safety controls.

So it serves as an important audit-like confirmation that the rigour we expect in our inspection staff's activities is indeed being applied to the verification of those food safety controls. These activities will allow us to look not just at individual establishments, but also across all food establishments. This way, we will be able to identify any areas where improvements are required, together with best practices that we want to roll out across the entire system.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Okay.

What authorities will the inspectors on the inspection verification teams have? Will they have the same authorities as the food inspectors already located at that plant? What kinds of activities could they undertake?

**Mr. Paul Mayers:** They will have the full suite of authorities available to inspectors. That means they will be able to halt production, detain product, and compel records. They will have all the tools necessary to probe any issue that they believe might be indicative of a weakness in food safety control.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Minister, I wanted to ask you a question about the Safe Food for Canadians Act, which you presented to Parliament last year. Do you feel the act addresses some of the concerns mentioned in the report?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** Yes, it does. It was tabled about a year ago now, and it was passed last fall. What it does is give those inspectors increased powers to ask for documentation in a more timely way.

That was the weak link—the days it took XL to actually put the package of documentation together that the inspectors were asking for.

It also demands of all federally regulated industries that their documentation is done in a standardized format that's immediately usable. The inspectors will tell you that when they first started asking for documentation, a lot of it wasn't even held on site and had to be brought in from other offices under the XL umbrella. It was like a patchwork quilt. A forensic detective was almost required to trace down and track how it all fit together. This takes up valuable time. Recalls rely on by-the-minute, by-the-hour documentation to get that product off the shelves and make sure that Canadians are aware of what's out there. The standardized format that's now required under S-11 and the increased powers to demand timely access to documentation make a difference moving forward.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Valeriotte.

**Mr. Frank Valeriotte (Guelph, Lib.):** Thank you all for coming before the committee.

Mr. Da Pont, I want to continue the line of questioning that Mr. Allen started.

Recommendation 2 says there must be greater emphasis on training and continuing education of CFIA inspection staff. This just came out yesterday and you're trying to tell us we've already addressed that problem. With respect, I don't believe you have. Mr. Kingston has continually come forward and indicated an inadequacy of staffing that would relieve people on the front lines so that they could go out and get trained in CVS. But you're here telling us we have that covered. How are we expected to believe that?

•(1215)

**Mr. George Da Pont:** Thank you for giving me an opportunity to answer that question again. Since Weatherill, we have made significant efforts in training. We have trained all our front-line inspection staff on CVS. Of course, training can always be enhanced.

In budget 2011, we received \$100 million for continuing to improve our inspection system and to modernize it. About \$17.5 million of that is enhanced money earmarked for training.

**Mr. Frank Valeriotte:** Thank you, Mr. Da Pont.

With respect, Mr. Kingston says otherwise: that not everyone is trained in CVS.

Mr. Ritz, I have to ask you this. In recommendation number 9, it says:

All major stakeholders (both government and industry) should work with academic sectors to encourage continued research on pre-harvest interventions that may reduce the prevalence of E. coli....

That means we need researchers. Just two weeks ago, you cut 675 people—scientists, biologists, researchers—from the very investigation of those pre-harvest intervention studies.

How are we to be satisfied by you that this in fact will be undertaken?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** Mr. Valeriote, first and foremost, your numbers are absolutely wrong. You're ridiculously high with your numbers. The Parliamentary Budget Officer just brought out the actual numbers this morning. We concur.

When you come to scientists and biologists from the Agriculture Canada side, it's some 38 people, most of them through attrition.

There is no gap. There is no lack. When you look at the plans and priorities documents of both Agriculture Canada and CFIA, you will see a bolstering of food safety, no cuts at all.

**Mr. Frank Valeriote:** Mr. Ritz, last Thursday a scientist appeared before our committee. She's a Canada Research Chair. She said your cuts to scientists and researchers have put our scientific programs in jeopardy. That's "in jeopardy", sir, and with respect, Canadians have no faith right now, in you or the CFIA, that any of these things will be done that you have undertaken to do.

If you look at number 4—

**The Chair:** Mr. Valeriote, I have to interrupt.

The bells are ringing. I mentioned at the start of the meeting that we need unanimous consent to keep us here for another 15 minutes. We have the minister here.

I'm asking that if it's agreeable, we'll continue for 15 more minutes

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** Am I part of the "unanimous?"

**The Chair:** You are. We'll let the record show that, absolutely.

Mr. Valeriote, please go ahead.

**Mr. Frank Valeriote:** Recommendation number 4 speaks of an assessment for the effectiveness of the agency's activities related to its meat program; in our opinion, sir, that directly relates to a third-party comprehensive audit that would have looked at the meat system and prevented the very things that happened at XL Foods.

Frankly, a lot of these recommendations aren't referable only to XL Foods; they are referable to the entire system.

Are we waiting for another crisis? Are we waiting for another E. coli outbreak or another listeria outbreak before you do a full third-party audit, so that we know we have the resources that Mr. Da Pont needs to effectively deploy the legislation?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** Mr. Valeriote, I hope you have a change of heart, and when we bring forward moneys and add personnel, you will actually vote for it for a change. That would be very helpful.

In relation to point number 4—this is under the act, when the agency was incorporated in 1997:

(4) The Minister of Health is responsible for establishing policies and standards relating to the safety and nutritional quality of food sold in Canada and assessing the effectiveness of the Agency's activities

Some of those assessments have been ongoing. You would have to ask the Minister of Health when and if she or he plans to do more—

**Mr. Frank Valeriote:** And it has yet to be done. All you tell us in your handout today is that they'll do it.

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** We're not stopping the assessment, Mr. Valeriote.

**Mr. Frank Valeriote:** I propose too, sir, that you have a responsibility to make sure all of this is done. Mr. Lemieux said yesterday that all of these things will be done, so don't pass the buck to the Minister of Health right now. It's your responsibility to take care of Canada's food safety.

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** I will personally write her a letter today inviting her to do an assessment—

**Mr. Frank Valeriote:** When will you come back to tell us what you've done?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** That would be her timeframe, not mine.

•(1220)

**The Chair:** Excuse me, gentlemen. I ask that all comments be directed through the chair.

Your time is up. I'll move to Mr. Payne.

Mr. Ritz, please go ahead.

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** Mr. Chair, on a point of clarification, there are 10 effectiveness assessments done, posted on the Health Canada website, so maybe the member could start with those.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Payne, go ahead.

**Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister and officials, for coming.

My question, through you, Chair, is for the minister.

Minister, of course you realize that the XL beef plant is in my riding. I know that you tabled the independent review food recall in the House yesterday. Your comments were that the government accepts all the recommendations, and we know that food safety is our top priority.

However, I understand also that even before we got the report, CFIA was already on its way to improving some of the food safety in areas where the review recommends improvements. That sort of demonstrates that CFIA is flexible and is prepared to consistently evolve and improve.

Minister, could you inform the committee of the steps that CFIA has already taken to improve food safety as a result of the XL beef recall?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** I could outline those for you, but I think it would be much more effective if the president did it. He's the one who runs the day-to-day operations of CFIA.

**Mr. George Da Pont:** We've done a number of things. In mid May we issued a new E. coli policy that included a number of improvements that strengthen the requirements of plants and strengthen the requirements to inform us when they have high-event days. We have set new limits of 5% as the bar for high-event days. We've increased requirements for testing both by the plants and by CFIA.

In addition to that, one other really important thing we've done is to write to all inspectors, and to reinforce that constantly through messages, telling them that we do expect them to be rigorous in performing their duties, and telling them that senior management will support them if they're encountering issues and feeling that they're being blocked.

We are working very much on both strengthening the specific concerns about E. coli and dealing with some of the issues raised in the report about strengthening the food safety culture.

**Mr. LaVar Payne:** Thank you.

Minister, we know that one of your very significant achievements as the agriculture minister over the past number of years has been to bring us successful negotiations in signing Canada's five-year agreement with the provinces and territories on Growing Forward 2, and certainly you crafted that to modernize Canada's agricultural industry and to put farmers first. I think that's a really important point. Of course, over \$200 million has been invested in Growing Forward 2.

I'm wondering if you could update the committee on Growing Forward 2 and on what this money will be used for.

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** There are a number of envelopes of money involved in Growing Forward 2. There is some \$3 billion to further competitiveness, innovation, and marketing around the world. There is also money for some domestic work that we can now do, which we've never been able to do before when it comes to marketing. We look forward to working with industry on their priorities going forward. We'll continue to fund science and research through the very effective clusters that have been put together by industry. We have reconfigured science and research at Agriculture Canada to be results-based, and we are working with industry towards the results they're looking to attain over the short, medium, and long term, and then putting together a package, sometimes including Agriculture Canada scientists, sometimes not, depending on the expertise required to make sure we deliver the result industry is looking for.

We can continue to build on competitiveness and on driving efficiencies, with new varieties of crops that have a lighter environmental footprint and that require fewer inputs. The major concern for farmers out there today is the cost of inputs, which they don't control by any stretch of the imagination. Transportation has been addressed by this government through the fair rail freight review. I look forward to that being implemented in the near future. Of course, there is the issue of being free to market their own product in western Canada.

We've seen an outstanding year. You know, 2011 was good, but 2012 was even better, and we look forward to exceptionally good numbers going into 2013.

Ninety-eight per cent of farms in Canada are still family owned. There's all this buzz out there that somehow the big corporations are taking over. It's not true. There are incorporated family farms, but 98% are still family run.

● (1225)

**Mr. LaVar Payne:** That's fine.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Allen.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I can't help but find my way back to 2009. I mean, as one New York manager said, it's déjà vu all over again. Clearly the Weatherill report recommendation 7 talks about figuring out how many resources you need. That was the audit that we still think is in contention. So I'll take your word that you did it, at least on face value.

Will you now admit that now you have an IVT team in place—in other words, people who will now check the folks who were supposed to have checked it in the first place—and that you didn't have enough folks? So you either didn't do the audit right, or the audit told you something wrong and maybe you ought to do the audit again. That's a pretty simple question.

You said you did the audit and that gave you the numbers. Now you're telling us you need to have other folks look over the shoulder of the folks who you thought could do the job. Did the audit give you the wrong number, or did you not do the audit properly?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** The Weatherill report called for an effectiveness assessment of ready-to-eat meat, and we did that. Out of that, the government came forward with a budget to hire 70 more inspectors for the ready-to-eat meat sector. Since that time, the government has found the resources, and CFIA has put another 100 inspectors into the meat sector across Canada. The inspection verification teams will bring more rigour to what they're doing on-site. They will also judge how effectively any program changes are being handled at the floor level in the plants to make sure they are effective, they are working, and they are hitting the target, in order to know whether the upgrades that are constantly under way are effective.

Gentlemen, do you want to add anything to that?

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** I'm not interested in having you pass it down. I'm going to ask another question.

Mr. Mayers, we get five minutes and then we have to go and vote. So as much as I'd love to hear from you, if we get a chance to come back, we'd love to talk to you again.

The bottom line, Minister, is this. You commissioned this report. You were the minister at the time of Sheila Weatherill's report, even though there was a subcommittee sitting, of which I was a member. You said, "We've done these." You didn't say "doing". You gave us a report at this committee that said, "We've done all of these." Now we get another report that says no, you didn't.

The second recommendation in this brand-new report this year says: "There must be a greater emphasis on training and continuing education of CFIA inspection staff." You said you did it in 2009, under this report. Sheila Weatherill talks about inspection staff, numbers, resources, training, equipment. You said, sir, "We've done this." No, you haven't, because your report, which was tabled yesterday, said no, you didn't. Now you've actually had to admit—

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** Well, it actually doesn't say that, Mr. Allen.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** —that you don't have enough folks, because you've now got folks checking the folks that you said were enough to do the system, who we find out aren't trained and couldn't do the job. By your own admission, sir, in developing a new team, you've said the folks out there doing CVS for us are maybe not doing it well. Maybe they're not doing it right. Maybe they're failing and we're going to have a team go and check them.

We have checkers checking the checkers. Is this not really an admission that the system has failed, and that you, sir, as the minister in charge of the system, have failed Canadians?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** Well, you're taking great liberties with what recommendation number 2 says. You're extrapolating. They're talking about continuing the training, so that means we're doing it. CFIA is doing it. They're also talking about evaluating methods for training inspectors, to get more bang for their buck—effectiveness of training, minimizing costs, and providing appropriate testing mechanisms to ensure competency. That's exactly what the verification teams will be doing. They'll be ensuring that competency.

So I don't understand how you can miss and pervert what is actually said in point number 2, when it's very clear.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Actually, sir, I read it verbatim. The line is, and let me put it in the record—I'll quote it. I did quote it, but I'll say I'm quoting it. At point 2 on page 45, "There must be a greater emphasis on training and continuing education of CFIA inspection staff."

At the end of the paragraph it says: "CFIA should enhance education support for all inspectors in the Compliance Verification System (CVS) and food safety courses, among others, on an ongoing basis."

Sheila Weatherill told you to do the same thing at page 39 of her report in 2009. You, sir, have come to this committee repeatedly, and we have debated this, whether you did the audit or not. You said you've done all of the recommendations in the Weatherill report.

It says at point 8, "The Canadian Food Inspection Agency should ensure that inspectors receive timely education and training specific to each function which they perform." You said, "We've done that."

Well, your last group says no, you didn't, that you actually have to continue to do it because you haven't done the job. By your own admission, you've now got a group of folks who are going to go out and find out which ones didn't get trained, aren't doing the job properly, because you're going to go and supervise them on spot checks.

Is that not an admission that the system didn't get properly resourced?

• (1230)

**The Chair:** I'll ask the minister to respond, and then we will move forward.

**Hon. Gerry Ritz:** Sure.

President Da Pont would actually like to respond to that.

**Mr. George Da Pont:** I go back to the same point. The minister, I thought, made several important points.

First of all, I don't think you can say the system is failing. Every statistic shows that illnesses are going down significantly and we are having success. Every indication is that we have one of the best systems in the world. We have made significant expenditures in training. We post all of our training expenditures, the numbers of people trained and what they're trained in, on our website. I'll be very happy to provide that information to this committee, because it will show we have made significant expenditures since the Weatherill report.

I take this recommendation that we will obviously continue to enhance training. That's why I indicated that in budget 2011, over and above what was initially provided as part of the response to Weatherill, we asked for and received a further \$17 million to invest in training over five years.

I agree that training is critical, and I think we have made very significant investments in it. We'll continue to make significant investments in it. I have—

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Chair, let me say this. You had the largest beef recall in Canadian history and you're telling me that training is appropriate. I don't get that.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, I have to stop you here now.

The time that we've allocated for this has expired. I suggest to the committee that after the vote we reconvene here, simply as the committee. We have a report that we have to finalize and sign off on.

We've secured the room for that extra few minutes, so immediately after the vote, please return here as a committee and we'll deal with the report before us.

Minister, we thank you and your staff for today. We appreciate the good work. Thank you.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*







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