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

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, April 4, 2019**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Pat Finnigan**



## Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

Thursday, April 4, 2019

• (1100)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.)):** Welcome to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), our study focuses on the perception of and public trust in the Canadian agricultural sector.

Joining us this morning is Tia Loftsgard, Executive Director of the Canada Organic Trade Association.

[English]

Welcome again to our committee, Tia.

[Translation]

Also joining us from the same association is Tyler Levitan, Manager of Government Relations and Regulatory Affairs.

[English]

Welcome, Tyler, to our committee.

[Translation]

We also have Louise Vandelac, from the Collectif de recherche écosanté sur les pesticides, les politiques et les alternatives, UQAM.

Can you hear me, Ms. Vandelac?

**Ms. Louise Vandelac (Director, Full Professor, Université du Québec à Montréal, Collectif de recherche écosanté sur les pesticides, les politiques et les alternatives):** I can hear you very well, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Welcome to our committee this morning.

We also have Thibault Rehn, Coordinator at Vigilance OGM.

Mr. Thibault, can you hear me?

**Mr. Thibault Rehn (Coordinator, Vigilance OGM):** Yes, loud and clear.

**The Chair:** Your first name is Thibault, right?

**Mr. Thibault Rehn:** Thibault is my first name and my last name is Rehn.

**The Chair:** Everyone's here.

You each have six minutes.

[English]

Go ahead, Ms. Loftsgard.

**Ms. Tia Loftsgard (Executive Director, Canada Organic Trade Association):** Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you this morning. My name is Tia Loftsgard, and I am the Executive Director of the Canada Organic Trade Association.

Our membership is national and consists of organic stakeholders from across the value chain, representing everyone from farmers to retailers selling organic products, as well the provincial farmer associations. In addition to the regulatory and trade development work that we do, we also lead on consumer education campaigns about organics at the national level and media relations and research for the organic sector.

We felt it was super important for us to inform the committee today about the issue of public trust as it relates to the organic sector, as the degree of public trust in the Canada organic brand is regarded worldwide with respect and is trusted by Canadians for what it delivers.

The Canada organic logo is owned by the Canadian government, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and was launched in 2009 when the Canada organic regime came into force as part of the Canada Agricultural Products Act. The logo appears on certified organic products originating from Canada and abroad that comply with the Canadian organic standards or equivalent, as recognized through equivalency arrangements.

The organic logo symbolizes a system of strict rules that must be followed and verified by third parties, designated and overseen by the CFIA. It symbolizes a process that's overseen closely by the federal government, and which is enforced under the banner of a government-owned brand and standard.

We believe it is through this system of checks and balances, in which third party certification is obtained and regulated under the auspices of CFIA, that the organic sector has been able to achieve such a high level of public trust. Adherence to internationally respected systems such as Codex Alimentarius, 1S017065 and 1S017011 are all built into the Canada organic regime.

When Canadians see the Canada organic logo, they associate it with traceability; clear standards of production; animal welfare and a clean ingredient list as preservatives, hormones, synthetic pesticides and GMOs are not permitted in organic. As previously mentioned, the Canada organic logo was only launched in 2009 by the Canadian government and already we have a familiarity level of the logo at 66% of Canadians, and 48% of Canadians trust the logo to deliver on what it represents. This is the result of Ipsos' polling conducted in 2017 and highlights the trajectory of growing public trust in organic, as trust grew nine points in only one year.

According to a recent study commissioned by the Canadian Centre for Food Integrity, which analyzed the social media posts of millions of Canadians, 92% of Canadians support organic farming. This was found to be consistent across all age groups. The same study found that half of Canadians oppose the use of glyphosate and 60% believe that GMOs in food are bad.

From our perspective, the most beneficial aspect of organics in garnering public trust and support is the issue of transparency and traceability. The organic label comes backed with a fully transparent system of production behind it, and clear regulations and labelling that ensure that this system of production is verified through strict government oversight, which builds consumer confidence.

Ultimately, this is translating to sales as now two-thirds of Canadians are purchasing organic products weekly, regardless of their income bracket and regardless of the province they live in. The Canadian organic market is now the sixth largest organic market in the world, and in 2017, it was valued at \$5.4 billion in sales. The demand for organic continues to grow not only in sales, but also in farmers converting to organic across this country; 3.2 million acres were farmed organically in 2017. This number only includes those that are organically certified.

While the total amount of conventionally farmed acres declined by 1% in 2017, organic farms grew in Canada by 4%. Based on 2017 statistics, there are now 6,365 organic businesses in Canada, with 4,800 of them being organic farmers—this was a 13% increase over the prior year—and the remaining 1,865 are organic food processors. We gained 100 in one year. Canada cannot keep up with the demand for organic products for export or domestic markets, indicating a huge opportunity for Canadian businesses to start to meet consumer demands in a sector that has already cultivated the public trust of Canadians and our export markets.

It's important to consider the changing views of consumers toward Canada's food system and respecting their demand for products that are more sustainable, transparent and backed by strong standards that they can get behind. According to a 2018 study by Technomic, 41% of Canadians who buy organic breads, grains or cereals do so to reduce exposure to pesticide residues in their diet, and 40% purchase these organic products to avoid GMO food.

• (1105)

Forty-two per cent of Canadians who buy organic meat do so to avoid the routine use of antibiotics or hormones in livestock, and 23% of these buy products to guarantee livestock animals have access to the outdoors when possible.

The rapid speed at which this organic sector is growing is in response to the growing demand for food deemed by consumers to be healthy for themselves and the environment and which aligns with their values.

We hope this study by the committee will lead to a reflection on the part of industry and government about the elements needed to cultivate public trust and recognize new consumer demands and preferences. Public trust really can only be gained through openness, transparency and robust science based on independent research.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Loftsgard.

[*Translation*]

We'll now go to Louise Vandelac, who has six minutes for her presentation.

**Ms. Louise Vandelac:** Thank you very much.

Let me first introduce myself. My name is Louise Vandelac and I am the Director of the Collectif de recherche écosanté sur les pesticides, les politiques et les alternatives. This collective brings together about 20 researchers from all walks of life working on issues related to agriculture, food, health, the environment, public policy, research ethics and the review of public evaluation mechanisms. Our large team includes biologists, toxicologists, ecotoxicologists, doctors, agronomists and sociologists, among others. I am also a full professor in the Department of Sociology and the Institute of Environmental Sciences at UQAM.

I would like to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food for inviting me to discuss the perception of and the public trust in the agricultural sector, particularly in order to examine the challenges and opportunities in the agricultural sector, to open dialogue among farmers and to discuss another issue that is clearly at the heart of the debate—the measures taken and to be taken by industry and government to improve public trust.

As the saying goes, “if it ain't broken, don't fix it”. In other words, what is no longer working and needs fixing? Is this the result of the perception that there is a great deal of public unease about agriculture and that public trust is being undermined or even eroded?

I will speak very quickly, in a few [*Technical difficulty—Editor*], about which a French report has been submitted to the Prime Minister of France. The report is entitled “the impact of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between the European Union and Canada on the environment, climate and health”. The report points out that environmental protection is not yet at the heart of Canadian agricultural policy and that our environmental requirements remain far less stringent than those in force in the European Union. In terms of pesticides, in particular, Canada still allows 46 active substances that have been banned for a long time in other countries.

I will focus on the issue of glyphosate-based herbicides. It is the most widely used pesticide in the world, with applications of more than 800,000 tonnes per year. It accounts for 56% of all agricultural pesticides in Canada and 46% in Quebec. It is important to remember that the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer calls glyphosate a probable human carcinogen. Glyphosate-based herbicides are endocrine disruptors and chelators that affect soil and health. They are also patented as antibiotics, but they have suspected effects on the microbiota, and their co-formulants are up to 1,000 times more toxic than glyphosate alone. This toxicity results from the presence not only of polyethoxylated tallow amines (POEA), a surfactant banned in Europe since 2016 but authorized in Canada in concentrations of a maximum of 20% of the overall weight, but also of certain heavy metals such as arsenic, lead or cobalt.

The number of glyphosate applications worldwide is 300 times higher than in 1974, particularly in North America where they have increased significantly since genetically modified organisms were introduced in 1996. GMOs have been designed in particular to be able to absorb glyphosate-based herbicides without dying from them. These herbicides are therefore used at all stages of cultivation and in almost all media, so that they are now omnipresent in water, soil, air and rain. In addition, 30% of foods contain glyphosate residues. Remember that a farmer never uses glyphosate alone, but in commercial formulations made up of about 40% of this herbicide. It is therefore reasonable to believe that the actual overall impact of glyphosate-based herbicides is significantly underestimated.

In the United States today, more than 11,200 people with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma attributed to Roundup, the most infamous glyphosate-based herbicide, have filed lawsuits against the manufacturer Monsanto-Bayer. In the Dewayne Johnson case, before the California courts, the 46-year-old municipal employee and father of three children, who had been responsible for years for applying Roundup in parks and schoolyards and whose body was ravaged by terminal cancer, saw a jury unanimously sentence Monsanto-Bayer to pay him \$289 million, which was reduced to \$78 million on appeal. Bayer, which was worth 136 billion euros in 2015 and bought Monsanto in the summer of 2018 for 63 billion euros, had the value of its shares plummet to only 52 billion euros, according to an article in *Le Monde*.

• (1110)

In a second trial that just ended in the U.S. Federal Court last week, the jury unanimously sentenced Monsanto-Bayer to pay \$80 million to 70-year-old Edwin Hardeman, who had used Roundup in his own garden.

In fact, not only is the product a hazard for professional and domestic use, but the use of truncated, misleading and manipulated information, as well as the undue influence of firms in connection with the research [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] is also a problem. The thousands of Monsanto internal documents declassified as part of these trials are available on the U.S. Right to Know website.

These issues are very important because they have to do with the manipulation of scientific data. Let me quote a very short excerpt—

**The Chair:** Ms. Vandelac, I have to interrupt you because we're over the six minutes you had. However, you will probably have the opportunity to tell us more about it by answering the questions that follow.

We'll now go to Thibault Rehn for six minutes.

**Mr. Thibault Rehn:** Thank you.

First, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I speak on behalf of Vigilance OGM, which forms a network of associations and individuals from various backgrounds. So we have farmers, environmentalists, consumers and citizens.

One thing we want to make clear at the outset is that public trust is not a public relations exercise. For too long, the industry has been trying to educate farmers and consumers in its own way through aggressive and unethical communication, as highlighted by UN Special Rapporteur Elver in her last report. According to Ms. Elver, this aggressive and unethical type of communication could well also have an influence on you, members of Parliament, and on your political decisions.

People do not need better education, they need better agriculture and, therefore, better food for themselves and their families. To maintain the full confidence of the constituents you represent, you must improve the transparency of the regulatory system.

The first point of my presentation is entitled: transparency for consumers.

Canada and the United States are the last two so-called industrialized countries that have not yet implemented mandatory labelling of GMOs, while 64 countries around the world have done so. Over the past 20 years, through dozens of surveys, 70% to 90% of Canadians have asked you for mandatory labelling of GMOs.

However, on May 17, 2017—so not long ago—when Bill C-291 was voted on, 76% of MPs voted against introducing mandatory labelling in Canada. Only one person on this committee voted in favour of the bill. So she was the only one who listened to her constituents.

How can this difference be explained? How, in a democracy, do you, as members of Parliament, justify going against the people who elected you?

There is an urgent need for Canada to implement mandatory labelling of GMOs, particularly since our country has become the first and only place in the world where people have consumed a genetically modified animal, salmon.

The second point is entitled: independent and transparent science.

Right now, Health Canada, through its agencies, authorizes GMOs and pesticides based almost exclusively on industry studies that are not accessible to the public or independent scientists. Classified as confidential commercial information, this information is not disclosed. Under these circumstances, the government cannot announce that its regulatory system for GMOs and pesticides is science-based, if the science is not transparent and peer-reviewed.

This lack of transparency undermines public confidence in our agri-food and legislative system. The law-makers must prioritize science and put the interests of the people before those of a handful of multinationals. Without a transparent regulatory system, public trust is a lost cause from the outset.

It is your duty as members of Parliament to ensure that the process becomes more, not less, transparent, as the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) seems to want.

The third point is entitled: do not let farmers down.

In May 2018, Canada's Competition Bureau approved the merger between Bayer and Monsanto. This merger means that four multinationals now control the majority of the world's seed and pesticide market. This quasi-monopoly of this group of companies undermines the autonomy of farmers and their finances. The effect of monopolies is well documented: fewer choices and higher prices. This has been the case in Canada for a number of years now, in terms of seed selection and input prices in the agricultural sector.

It is therefore important that the government reinvest massively in independent agricultural research and development for the benefit of farmers across Canada. We also invite you to consult them when new GMOs are marketed. Despite the opposition of many Canadian farmers' groups to genetically modified alfalfa, including the Union des producteurs agricoles au Québec, the government finally approved it in 2017.

The fourth point is: stop funding lobbyists.

Last week, an article in the *National Observer* informed us that the documentary series *Real Farm Lives* was actually a public relations campaign on the part of pesticide vendors. Under the guise of neutrality, this series was in fact carefully developed by an international marketing and public relations agency for Canadian agri-chemical manufacturers. The industry has been developing those sorts of initiatives for a number of years because it can no longer get its misleading messages across to the public.

One of the best known marketing and public relations campaigns is the Canadian Centre for Food Integrity (CFIC).

• (1115)

The home page states, "The Canadian Centre for Food Integrity (CCFI) helps our food system ensure it is doing the right things to build trust by providing research, resources, training and dialogue".

However, on closer examination, this integrity centre is largely funded by pesticide producers and sellers: Monsanto, Syngenta and Dow Chemical, to name a few.

In 2017, the CCFI received \$90,000 in public funds, and the Canada Revenue Agency granted it a charitable number. Is it a

charity to want to sell as many pesticides as possible? We find this outrageous.

Is the government funding tobacco companies to make us believe that smoking isn't dangerous? So why fund pesticide manufacturers who try to make us believe that eating dozens of pesticide residues every day isn't dangerous?

In conclusion, the solution to this crisis of confidence in our agri-food system is simple: transparency. However, it requires a strong political will to deal with agrochemical lobbyists. This desire seems to have eluded the Canadian government for too many years. It is up to you to change course.

The Canadian agri-food system will never have the confidence of the public and citizens if you don't impose transparency in regulation, traceability and research for the public good and farmers in this country.

Thank you for your attention, and I am ready to answer your questions.

• (1120)

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

[English]

Now we'll go to the question round with Mr. Dreeshen for six minutes.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

As we are talking about perception and public trust in the Canadian agricultural sector, just to let our witnesses know, this came out of discussion on the mental health study we did. Many farmers in Quebec, and all around Canada, were speaking to us about the attacks on their industry, because of social activists out there attempting to destroy their way of life. They are speaking about animal welfare. They don't understand how animals are being dealt with. Look at false claims about the hormone, for example, from A&W—going from five nanograms of estrogen to seven, when you have an animal treated, versus the 10,000 nanograms that are in the bun.

All of these types of things are true statements, but they are being expanded in a way that creates fear in the public. We hear from farmers in Quebec and around the country that there are people and groups out there demeaning their life and their activities. It is very difficult for them.

We have seen issues with the neonicotinoids, where people would stand up and say that this is such a disaster that they would be there. It is actually the product that is used on canola. If you want to know where the bees are going to go in Alberta, it is going to be beside the canola crops, because that is what has kept that industry alive.

On the concept of GMOs, similarly, we look at an opportunity to feed the world. That is what Canadians are known for. Our food security and our food safety system are among the strongest that there are.

The statements on glyphosate are, to me, unrealistic. This is a product that, as a farmer, I have been using for decades. I understand how to use it, and how to use it properly, and I recognize things that are happening around the world. We hear from CFIA and so on that there are no problems with it. The statements made against it are difficult for the farmers to hear, because of the need for it. The statements are blatantly false.

That is what courts are for and that, of course, is why, as long as you have two lawyers in the room, there is always a case to be made. Yes, there are farmers who are concerned about the perception and public trust. These are the kinds of things that are being said.

I appreciate the fact that there are groups prepared to put this on the table, and to deal with it, because there are farmers who are hurting. There is a great organic industry that has an opportunity to do well, but to then demonize.... I am not suggesting that the organic community is doing it, but to allow that demonization of Canadian agriculture.... I hope we can work together with the organic industry, rather than allowing people to pile on, and make statements that cause even more problems, as far as agriculture is concerned.

With that, Mr. Chair, I would like us to return to the notice of motion that was presented. There is something else affecting Canadians right now, and it has to do with the Canada-China relationship, as far as our canola is concerned. The committee will meet on Tuesday, April 9, 2019, to hear directly from farmers affected by China's decision to cease its purchases of Canadian canola.

• (1125)

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

Monsieur Drouin.

**Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.):** We just want to say that we heard from industry representatives at the last meeting, and I think it's important to hear directly from farmers. We will be supporting this motion.

**The Chair:** Mr. Dreeshen.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** I'll restate the longer form of this from Mr. Berthold:

That the Committee continue to hear from witnesses on the Study of the official notices of non-compliance from China for exports of Canadian canola seeds; that the next meeting be held as soon as possible; that witnesses at this meeting be farmers and producers directly impacted by the consequences of China's decision to cease buying Canadian Canola; and that the Committee report its findings to the House.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Dreeshen. You can return and you have two minutes.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** Thank you.

I'd like to speak to the organic industry because I have many organic farmers in my riding. Many great friends of mine are involved in it. They also stand up for their neighbours. How closely are you working to make sure that all agriculture is being advocated for?

**Ms. Tia Loftsgard:** I can tell you that in the organic sector in 1989, I believe there were only 600 organic farms. Now it's very high; I've told you the numbers. The approach from the organic

sector is that every farmer out there is a potential organic farmer. The more that we can all work together on improving soil health, and looking at climate mitigation techniques, etc....

Programs exist in regard to doing extension services. It is a recommendation that we have to the federal government. We do not have enough agricultural extension services available to be able to help farmers know how to do proper soil health. We've done testimonies on this topic before. I think it's really important that there is a plan in place so that we can break down those barriers. Nobody likes this "us and them" of conventional versus organic. That is not at all what people want to see happening. We're really interested in full-on sustainability across all Canadian agriculture. Whether you're certified organic or not, we just want to see everybody move towards more sustainable organic production.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** When you make a statement such as "if we do organic we're following climate mitigation" and "we speak about farmers not understanding soil health, so therefore we would like to include them more in that", do you not see that, by taking that particular approach that there are those who...?

I farmed for 50 years and there's nothing more important to me than the health of the land that I have and my family and everyone who is associated with that. We've done the zero till, the min till and all of those types of things. We're looking at new ways for technology, so that any chemical that is being put onto a plant is going directly onto the plant that is—

**The Chair:** Mr. Dreeshen, you've run out of time. Perhaps somebody can follow up on what you were saying.

Thank you, Mr. Dreeshen.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Drouin, you now have the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses before us today.

I will start with the folks from the Organic Trade Association.

[*English*]

I know public trust is a major issue for Canadians when defining what is organic. Does your association work with consumers in terms of understanding what it means when Canadians say they're buying organic and what they actually think they're buying?

•(1130)

**Ms. Tia Loftsgard:** There are a couple of different national associations that work on this, such as the Canadian Organic Growers, as well as ourselves. There are all of the regional provincial associations. Each province has an association, and UPA has a specialist on organic. We, as an industry, are doing public education campaigns in order to deepen the knowledge of exactly what is organic, not only for consumers, but for producers and businesses, so that there can be correct messaging. When we see that there are incorrect claims or over-claims by organic stakeholders, we also correct that. When we see things come out in the media that are alarmist or incorrect, we are the first ones to step in on that.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** That's how you ensure that you're providing consumer trust at the end of the day.

**Ms. Tia Loftsgard:** Absolutely.

Every time that something comes up around consumer health, etc., and organics I would say that we shy away from that because it's so conditional on what product and where it's grown, etc. We want to make sure that there are never over-claims, and be sure to be very specific and quote the science that backs the claim. Essentially, where we build the trust is being honest and humble where we don't have enough research. That is why we have the organic science cluster that's getting funded by the federal government. It's to bolster Canadian organic research.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Thank you.

[Translation]

My next question is for the representative from the Vigilance OGM network.

Mr. Rehn, you made some comments about peer-reviewed studies that are not published. Are you saying that there are no scientists working for Health Canada or the Pest Management Regulatory Agency?

**Mr. Thibault Rehn:** No. What I'm saying is that there are fewer and fewer scientists because of the major cuts by the Conservatives, and unfortunately that is having an effect on independent research.

One of the fundamental pillars of science is that scientific studies must be transparent and verified by independent scientists. Unfortunately, this is not the case in Canada's regulatory system for GMOs and pesticides. This is also true in the United States and Europe.

To regain public trust, transparency is a must. That is what we would like to achieve.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** The scientists who work at the Pest Management Regulatory Agency work for the Government of Canada, not for industry. So I have trouble understanding what you're saying. Are you saying that those scientists work for industry?

**Mr. Thibault Rehn:** No. What I'm saying is that Health Canada has made mistakes before. This has happened in the past and it is still happening today. Many products, such as the pesticide known as DDT and the herbicide Lasso, were approved by many scientists at Health Canada. As a result of subsequent studies, since science is evolving, they realized that they had made mistakes.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Yes.

**Mr. Thibault Rehn:** We would like a transparent system so that our society is protected from these errors.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** I understand but, in my opinion, the system is transparent. It's normal that not all studies are published since there may be commercial reasons for non-publication. A system is still in place, although it may not be perfect. This is a conversation that must be held between scientists. I certainly am not equipped to have this kind of conversation, but I still have confidence in scientists. They are professionals.

Do you recommend hiring more scientists at the agency? Is that what you're getting at?

**Mr. Thibault Rehn:** Yes, it's clear that reinvesting in public research is one of our fundamental arguments. Currently, public research centres in the agricultural sector in Canada are being closed. This opens a door to investment in private research, and the companies involved have interests other than those in the public domain, unfortunately.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** My next question is about the role of Health Canada. I have read several scientific journals. A group reviewed 900 scientific studies on GMOs and, according to these studies, GMOs don't have adverse effects on human health.

If not to protect the health of consumers, do you think Health Canada's role in labelling should be to provide consumers with more information on GMOs? Where does Health Canada's role end?

**Mr. Thibault Rehn:** In Canada, there is already labelling that is not related to health. It may, for example, be a matter of religion. Think of kosher food prescribed by Jewish laws. Uses may or may not be imposed in other cases.

Today, you ask us how it is that the public has lost confidence. They have lost confidence because there is no transparency, either in terms of regulations or labelling.

Mr. Drouin, 80% of your constituents asked you to regulate labelling, and you voted against it in May 2017. This is a problem of democracy and a problem of transparency that undermines the public's trust.

•(1135)

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** What is the role of your organization? If you say that GMOs aren't safe for human consumption, don't you think you have a role to play as well?

**Mr. Thibault Rehn:** I can't tell you if GMOs are good or bad for your health. There is no acute toxicity, otherwise this fact would have been observed. Unfortunately, since traceability can't be tracked, given the impossibility of conducting research, it isn't known whether there is long-term toxicity.

Our role, at Vigilance GMO—

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Scientific studies show that GMOs aren't currently harmful.

**Mr. Thibault Rehn:** They aren't transparent.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Drouin and Mr. Rehn.

We will continue the conversation with other speakers.



Mr. MacGregor, you have the floor for six minutes.

[English]

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP):** I thank all the witnesses for their opening statements.

Dr. Vandelac, I'd like to start with you. You talked about pesticides, and about glyphosate in particular. I remember a case that also had a lot of public debate on it, and that was when Health Canada was dealing with safety code 6. There was a lot of back and forth over the wireless radiation limits and whether or not they were safe. Ultimately, because people didn't trust Health Canada and didn't trust all of the scientific studies out there with all the competing viewpoints, Health Canada went to the Royal Society of Canada and asked them to do an extensive literature review and come out and talk about it.

I normally put a lot of trust in our public institutions, but I'm just wondering; with glyphosate, Health Canada has come out and said they follow a "transparent and rigorous science-based regulatory process" when making decisions on this. We have, of course, the statement by Bayer that it's a perfectly safe product. But this study is on public perception and trust. When Canadians are bombarded by all of this competing information, and they're not quite equipped to sort out the different competing views, then ultimately do we need something like the Royal Society of Canada to weigh in on this, to do something similar to what they did for safety code 6?

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Are you still with us, Ms. Vandelac?

[English]

I guess we're having reception problems.

Would you like to wait or would you like to transfer your question? I'm not directing you in any way.

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Vandelac:** Could you please ask your question again?

[English]

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** I'll repeat the question, but I'll try to be a bit faster.

In your opening statements, you made some comments about glyphosate. I was talking about how Health Canada dealt with a similar controversial issue before, with safety code 6, dealing with wireless radiation. There was a lot of controversy over that. Ultimately what came out as a recommendation was for Health Canada to pursue a fully independent study of it. They got the Royal Society of Canada to weigh in on it. They did a full literature review and independent study apart from Health Canada.

When it comes to glyphosate—and I'm someone who normally has a lot of trust in our public institutions—Health Canada made a very public statement that they followed a "transparent and rigorous science-based regulatory process" when looking at it. We know that the manufacturer has provided a lot of documentation. At the same time, when we're talking about Canadian public trust and perception, and they are bombarded with competing views on this subject, do we ultimately need Health Canada to maybe employ the services of the

Royal Society of Canada to look at this? What steps will we need in order to put this debate to bed, so to speak?

Dr. Vandelac, did you hear my question?

All right. Mr. Rehn, perhaps you're able to offer some comments on that. You've heard the question twice now.

• (1140)

[Translation]

**Mr. Thibault Rehn:** Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

I heard your question correctly.

I may not have the expertise that Ms. Vandelac has on this issue. All I know is that the Royal Society of Canada, where you bring together your best scientists in one field, already studied the issue of GMOs in 2001 and made 52 recommendations to the government to implement, including labelling and more transparent science, exactly the same messages I'm repeating to you today. However, since 2001, the Canadian government has implemented only two of the 52 recommendations. Yes, I think it would be beneficial for the best scientists in Canada to look at this issue, but you still have to listen to them.

In the case of GMOs, they haven't been heard and that's why we're now facing a lack of trust on the part of Canadians and why you are inviting us to appear.

[English]

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** I'm one of those people who has supported and continues to support labelling of genetically modified products. I ultimately believe that the consumer has a right to know. I'll always believe in that. People can make their own decisions, but I'm one of those people who believes that the more information we have on the product, the better.

However, when it comes to genetically modified organisms—food and what have you— when you talk in your research about public perceptions, what are the primary concerns that people come forward with? Are they concerned with ingesting the product? Are they concerned with how it's grown or how it's raised? How would you separate some of the top reasons people list for their concerns?

[Translation]

**Mr. Thibault Rehn:** The primary concern is health, but that doesn't depend solely on plant modification.

Currently, after 25 years, 88% of all GMOs on the market worldwide are designed to resist or tolerate a herbicide. The medium- to long-term consequence is that the use of herbicides in these crops is greatly increased. As Ms. Vandelac said, these herbicides are found on our plates and in our fields. Their effects are well documented, and this is a major concern.

There is also the whole issue of trust. As noted, the regulatory system does not require traceability or labelling. So all we have left is our perceptions. But it's difficult to play on perceptions. However, we are here today to find solutions and, once again, we believe that transparency would be the best solution.

[English]

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** For my final questions, I'll go to Ms. Loftsgard. Thank you for coming today. I appreciate the efforts that your organization is making to reach out and speak with conventional farmers. I ultimately think we need to stop talking at each other and start talking with each other.

I know that you talked about the high degree of public trust that comes into the organic brand because of your traceability and your accountability. There are measures put into place.

One of the things that our committee recently looked at—and we've had our conversation about GMOs.... During our technology and innovation study, we learned that the new technology that's coming on is gene editing. They're not introducing any foreign genetic material but they're looking at, say, the genome of a wheat plant to see if they can make it more resistant to drought-like conditions, if they can increase its protein content and so on.

When we're looking at public perception and trust and if we're able through that gene editing to produce a plant that needs less input to be grown, I'm wondering what the Organic Association's views are with regard to gene editing. Is there a way for your organization and organizations involved in gene editing to start talking to each other and to see if this is maybe a way forward, a compromise where we can reduce fertilizers and pesticides?

**The Chair:** Mr. MacGregor, unfortunately we're out of time but I do know that Lloyd is very interested in that. I'm not putting anything in his mouth but I'm going to give Lloyd six minutes.

• (1145)

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.):** Thank you for asking my question and thank you to all the witnesses.

I was thinking of CRISPR technology. We have studied that. I know there's a blurry line between GMO and CRISPR and gene editing and what really constitutes GMO. I think we did look at that a little bit in our study of GMO.

Could you answer Mr. MacGregor's question as to how that applies to your market?

**Ms. Tia Loftsgard:** Obviously we don't have GE technology in organics. We always refer to GE and not just to GMO because it needs to be a more extensive definition. If the goal of GE technology is to reduce inputs, this is where organic comes in. We have techniques and methods that reduce input, that are phosphate-based or what have you.

We're ultimately looking not just at what we put on the fields but also at the fertilizers and how they're mined. We have a lot of synthetic pesticides. If anybody has been to the art gallery recently, you can see the effects of mining fertilizers on these things and on other aspects beyond agriculture.

I think we're looking beyond the field. We're looking at the earth. We're looking at what is happening on a much larger scale than what's happening for inputs going on to one farm. We all felt the effect of the GE wheat contamination. All sales got blocked by Japan and Korea. This included our products that are organic, that were tested for no GMO.

I really look at organic as a risk mitigation technique for Canadian agriculture and economy. All farmers can be more protected because we can adopt new techniques where we do not to rely on pesticides or GMOs. This is not to be a holier-than-thou discussion but these are tried-and-true techniques that have been around for millennia. GMOs are new. Synthetic pesticides are new.

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** Thank you for the answer. I hope that's okay for Mr. MacGregor.

The University of Guelph is involved in organics. It's also involved in gene editing and in working with minimizing the inputs onto fields through proper use of pesticides and fertilizers, as well as in things around the scientific analysis of maximum residue limits and how that applies to our trade. Last night, I had the opportunity to speak with the ambassador from Italy about Canadian wheat and the situation we're going through there in terms of maximum residue limits of glyphosate.

On the existence of organic in parallel with other markets, could you comment on the public trust in terms of knowing when an organic has been certified organic, how that relates to the rest of the market and whether there's space in the market for organic and non-organic?

**Mr. Tyler Levitan (Manager, Government Relations and Regulatory Affairs, Canada Organic Trade Association):** In terms of how we relate to other markets, we have equivalency arrangements whereby our standards are compared to standards of other markets from our major trading partners. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency does a close comparison to determine whether or not the standards are deemed sufficiently equivalent. Then we go forward with these trade relationships to ease the trade between these major partners.

In terms of the issue of glyphosate, I'll speak to that with regard to what we're dealing with in terms of Italy. I think it's important that organics become a part of this conversation as well, because it's not commonly understood that there is contamination from the conventional farms that gets onto organic products, such as minute traces of glyphosate, which is having an impact on our trade with Italy and other European markets. It's something that we're in communication on with our organic partners and counterparts in Europe as well. It's something that needs to be discussed here in terms of following the label. We recognize that there are label directions, but they have to be followed strictly.

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** And the science behind that....

It looks like we may have Ms. Vandelac back. Is that correct? I have a question for Ms. Vandelac.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Can you hear us, Ms. Vandelac?

**Ms. Louise Vandelac:** I just started hearing you again.

[English]

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** Okay. Thank you.

Just to build on the discussion around glyphosate pesticide, manipulating scientific data and the commercial agreement with the EU, how do we improve confidence there? You briefly mentioned that in your comment. I would like to try to get something from you in terms of building public trust, in regard to our report that we're working on.

• (1150)

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Vandelac:** First of all, I think transparency issues are crucial.

The studies referred to by the International Agency for Research on Cancer, IARC, were carried out by independent researchers and not by industry, which is essentially the case in the evaluation [technical difficulties] the studies, which formed the basis of the 2017 report.

In addition, the IARC study—

[English]

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** I'm sorry, but we're going to run out of time.

Could I ask if I could get your answer in writing if you don't mind sending it in an email? We continue to have technical difficulties.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Ms. Vandelac, we're having a lot of difficulty hearing you properly. Could you send your answer in writing?

**Ms. Louise Vandelac:** Yes, I will be happy to send you an email.

**The Chair:** We'll include it in the background documents of our study.

We'll now go to Mr. Breton for six minutes.

**Mr. Pierre Breton (Shefford, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank all our witnesses for being here.

Ms. Vandelac, we are happy to have you back, and we'll take advantage of the fact that the technology seems to be working again. You were interrupted during your presentation, and you didn't have a chance to finish. You were talking about Monsanto, I believe. I can give you a few minutes to finish your presentation. I think it's important.

**Ms. Louise Vandelac:** Thank you very much.

I think it is important to emphasize that studies reviewed by independent bodies such as the World Health Organization and its International Agency for Research on Cancer are studies that have been conducted by independent researchers and not by industry.

However, recently, a very well-known researcher conducted an analysis to try to understand why the United States Environmental Protection Agency, EPA, has data that is completely contradictory to that of IARC. The answer is relatively simple and here is an excerpt:

[English]

“In the core tables compiled by EPA and IARC, the EPA rely mostly on registrant-commissioned, unpublished regulatory studies....”

[Translation]

In 99% of cases, studies done by industry are negative. In comparison, studies validated by the scientific community are positive in over 70% of cases.

However, I would remind you that the analyses do not necessarily cover the same things. I have already explained that no farmer puts only glyphosate in the fields. Instead, the farmer applies glyphosate-based herbicides, but they also contain other elements such as heavy metals, which has been reported in several studies. In addition, in Canada, the spread mixture may contain up to 20% POEA, the permitted limit. In addition, several independent studies confirm that the co-formulants contained in the spread mixture can be up to 1,000 times more toxic than glyphosate alone. However, if only glyphosate is analyzed, the results will not necessarily be the same as if the whole mixture applied by farmers is analyzed. It makes sense.

Independent research work is therefore essential. This was the argument we pointed out [technical difficulties] to highlight what we thought was abnormal, that is, that there has been no systematic review of the recent literature on these issues to arrive at a research-based decision. This is the kind of problem that arises.

That being said, I would like to point out that the criticism is not directed at farmers at all. I think the Canadian public is well aware of the very serious challenges facing farmers. Your committee was right to highlight the high rates of psychological distress, even suicide, among farmers. According to an OECD report, public support for Canadian agricultural producers was four times higher 30 years ago. In comparison, this aid has only halved in the United States, Europe and OECD countries.

So I think we should look for more on this. In addition, glyphosate-based herbicides are not the only ones making headlines in Quebec. There is also the whole issue of neonicotinoids. Indeed, for the past two years, there has been frequent mention of the lack of independence of public research in this field.

The Quebec media regularly reports all these data. In particular, there have been several articles mentioning a worrying series of resignations within the Grain Research Centre, the CEROM, among researchers working on neonicotinoids in particular. You also know, since it has been widely discussed, that a reputable agronomist was fired for reporting interference from pesticide producers and companies. This question has been extensively documented for a large number of centres.

• (1155)

The agronomist, who is currently running for president of the Ordre des agronomes du Québec, also pointed out that the quantities of fertilizers recommended by Quebec are three times higher than in Ontario and up to six times higher than in American states. However, according to him, Quebec is “the only province where industry representatives sit and vote on the committee responsible for fertilizer recommendations”.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Vandelac. Unfortunately, time is up, but you still had the opportunity to share a lot of information.

**Ms. Louise Vandelac:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Shipley, you have two minutes.

**Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC):** Thank you very much.

I find it interesting, Mr. Rehn, that you said that only one person agreed that GMOs should be listed, and the rest of us don't listen to our constituents. I would have to assume that you know my constituents, which I know you don't. I take offence at your making general statements like that to this group of politicians and people who represent our people. To me, quite honestly, that reflects on the rest of your testimony a bit.

Are you a scientist, sir?

I can't hear you.

[Translation]

**Mr. Thibault Rehn:** [inaudible] materials engineering, and I have a degree in pure and applied chemistry from the University of Glasgow. I'm not an expert in GMOs.

I'm sorry if I offended you. I consulted the surveys, and I saw nothing in your riding, which I don't know.

[English]

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Mr. Chair, what I find in this whole discussion is a lack of respect for the scientists we hire to work independently for the federal government.

There is support for other scientists outside who will come along, certain environmental or animal right organizations, to prove their point. I find that quite disturbing. The comment was that we need more scientists, and I think our farmers would agree with you on that. It's not because they don't know what they're doing. They want to make sure that farmers get access to products that are regulated and safe, so that they can decide whether to use them or not, because we're in a global competitive world.

With that, I am interested to know, Ms. Loftsgard, what do you tell people a GMO is?

• (1200)

**The Chair:** Mr. Shipley, unfortunately your time is up.

We have another panel coming after.

[Translation]

Thank you, everyone.

[English]

Ms. Loftsgard and Mr. Levitan of the Canadian Organic Trade Association, thank you so much for your testimony.

[Translation]

Ms. Vandelac, we finally managed to hear much of your testimony.

Mr. Rehn, thank you for your contribution today.

**Mr. Thibault Rehn:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

**The Chair:** We're breaking for a couple of minutes, and then we're back with the second panel.

Thank you.

• (1200)

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

• (1205)

**The Chair:** We'll start our second hour of the study on the perception of and public trust in the Canadian agricultural sector.

On our second panel we have, from the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network, Ms. Lucy Sharratt, Coordinator. Thank you for being here, Ms. Sharratt. From the Canada Mink Breeders Association, we have Gary Hazlewood, Executive Director. Welcome, Mr. Hazlewood. We have Monsieur Pierre Labonté, Board Member.

[Translation]

Welcome, Mr. Labonté.

[English]

Also, we have Tom McLellan, Former Vice- President. Thank you for being with us, Mr. McLellan.

Finally, from the Retail Council of Canada we have Mr. Jason McLinton, Vice-President, Grocery Division and Regulatory Affairs.

Welcome to all of you. We'll get right to business. You have six minutes each.

Would you like to start, Ms. Sharratt?

**Ms. Lucy Sharratt (Coordinator, Canadian Biotechnology Action Network):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and MPs for this opportunity to share what we have been hearing from the public, and what we have observed and concluded from a decade of public engagement on this issue of genetic engineering specifically, and a decade of our own research.

I work as the coordinator for a national network that brings together 16 groups: farmer organizations, social justice groups, environmental organizations and regional coalitions of grassroots groups.

In the absence of mandatory labelling of GM foods and government tracking of GM crops, and in response to public demand, we track which GM crops, GM animals, GM traits and GM foods are on the market or pending approval. We also monitor, examine and discuss the environmental, economic and social issues that are raised by the use of this technology in food and farming. For example, we just published a report that documents, for the first time in one place, the GM escape and contamination incidents that have occurred in Canada and their impacts on Canadian farmers. In 2015, we published a series of six reports that reviewed the environmental, social, economic and health impacts of GM crops and foods, after 20 years, in Canada.

Our network exists to fill the gaps in information and public debate that many Canadians are seeking. These gaps are created by the lack of mandatory GM food labelling, lack of transparency in the regulation of GMOs and diminishing public research. In filling these gaps, we believe government would be meeting many objectives in the public interest and thereby also taking effective measures to improve public trust.

First is the issue, of course, of GM food labelling, which has already been discussed today. All polls since 1994 have shown that over 80% of Canadians want mandatory labelling and this is a high and consistent support for one concrete regulatory change. This consistency over two decades leads us to conclude that Canadians are not satisfied with the explanations provided for this lack of labelling. Multiple well-resourced education and public opinion campaigns have been implemented over the years. We do not think that a new campaign will change this public opinion. Rather, we believe the solution is to provide Canadians with the clear, accessible GM food labelling they have been asking for.

The lack of GM labelling is just the most obvious transparency issue undermining public trust. Canadians are also asking for more transparent regulation of GMOs and opportunities for public engagement. According to a 2015 Ipsos Reid poll that we commissioned, 57% of Canadians said they were not confident in the government's safety and regulatory systems for GM foods. There is a significant lack of transparency in government regulation of GMOs and a dependence on corporate science. The regulatory decisions that allow for commercial release are based on confidential information submitted by the companies that want their products on the market. Our regulatory agencies do not require that this science be peer-reviewed. This also means that if any testing is done by companies, all or most of it remains confidential.

Our regulators are independent, but the science they are evaluating is not. This situation was described as a problem in 2001 by the Royal Society of Canada's expert panel on the future of food biotechnology, a panel convened at the request of multiple government departments. The panel concluded that the lack of transparency in the current approval process, leading as it does to an inability to evaluate the scientific rigour of the assessment process, seriously compromises the confidence that society can place in the current regulatory framework used to assess potential risks to human, animal and environmental safety posed by GMOs. The panel, in 2001, made 53 recommendations for regulatory reform but none of the recommendations pertaining to transparency and the need for peer review were implemented.

Finally, we would like to flag a new government policy that's on the horizon that we think will create a significant challenge to public trust. The proposal to implement a "low-level presence" policy will mean that the federal government will ask Canadians to place their trust, not just in our regulatory system, but also in the regulatory systems of foreign governments. Canada has recently agreed, via the new trade agreement with the U.S. and Mexico, to implement a "low-level presence" policy. This will mean that the Canadian government will accept food imports from the U.S. and Mexico that contain a small amount of GM foods that have not yet been approved as safe by Health Canada.

● (1210)

If there is a GM food that regulators at Health Canada have not yet assessed but has been approved by the U.S. and Mexican regulators, it will be allowed into our food system in a small amount.

In both perception and practice, this policy will mean that Health Canada's food safety regulation will no longer apply to all the foods Canadians eat. The public's ability to trust the safety of foods on the market will be challenged by this proposal to remove Health Canada from assessing the safety of some genetically engineered organisms entering our food system.

In a democracy, we require the public to be informed and engaged. This is currently impeded by the lack of product labelling and the lack of transparency in the regulatory processes.

We therefore would like to reiterate our long-standing recommendations for mandatory labelling of all GM foods using clear on-package text; government tracking of which GM foods are on the market and which GM crops and traits are grown; funding for more public research; a system of regular peer review of government safety assessments, as recommended by the Royal Society of Canada's expert panel on the future of food biotechnology; zero tolerance for GM foods on the market that are not assessed as safe by Health Canada; and finally, the inclusion of an assessment of the potential economic and social impacts before new GM crops and animals are introduced.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Sharratt.

Now we have the Canada Mink Breeders Association for up to six minutes.

Go ahead, Mr. Hazlewood.

**Mr. Gary Hazlewood (Executive Director, Canada Mink Breeders Association):** Mr. Chairman and honourable committee members, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee as representatives of the Canada Mink Breeders Association.

From Jacques Cartier to Samuel de Champlain, the first nations and the Hudson's Bay Company, the fur trade was and continues to be crucial to our resource-based economy. There are over 60,000 Canadians working in various sectors of the fur trade, including mink and fox farmers, trappers, designers, auction houses, manufacturers, retailers, etc. We applaud the committee for studying the perception of and the public trust in the Canadian agriculture sector. These issues are a top priority for our industry.

The fur sector is responsible and highly regulated, with animal and environmental welfare and sustainability at its core. Our operations are governed by separate codes of practice for the care and handling of farmed mink and fox. The codes were developed under the auspices of the National Farm Animal Care Council and the Canada Mink Breeders Association, in conjunction with veterinarians, animal welfare authorities, animal welfare scientists and industry experts.

Canadian mink farmers are currently being audited by third party auditors, with the expectation of all farms being certified by the end of 2019. This process provides a comprehensive and transparent approach to animal welfare in the Canadian mink farming sector. This certification is recognized by FurMark. FurMark is a global process providing public traceability of fur through the supply chain from producer to consumer. The chain point approach will demonstrate correct animal welfare, environmental safeguards and sustainability of the mink farming sector to both consumers and the general public, a significant demonstration of confidence engaging public trust. In fact, FurMark means confidence: confidence for our suppliers, confidence for our partners and, most importantly, confidence for consumers and the general public. For consumers, FurMark delivers the reassurance needed to confidently buy natural fur raised in Canada, making the Canadian certification system transparent, traceable and readily accessible.

The fur farming sector here in Canada and around the globe is experiencing increasing challenges with animal extremists and anti-animal agriculture groups. The Canadian agriculture community as a whole has been faced with pig farm protests, lamb releases, pet store vandalism, mink releases, truck sabotage, economic sabotage, personal threats and false information. A list of all mink farm incidents has been included in your package for review.

When extremists break in at night and startle the animals with bright lights and manipulate their environment, it's alarming for both the animals and the farmer. These break-ins create poor animal welfare conditions, and expose the animal to biosecurity hazards and disease. For the farmer and his family, it's an invasion of property and privacy. These activities create an environment of fear for the safety of the animals, the farmers and their families, as well as their livelihood.

Extremists encourage other extreme activities. Websites like the The Final Nail show how to get into mink farms and sheds and easy access routes to get away. Farmers are harassed by phone calls, strange letters, texts and more. They're forced to deal with smear campaigns and untrue videos that—even with court-ordered removal—remain online and continue to hurt our farmers and the trade as a whole. With the power of social media, they can go viral in minutes or days, creating an extremely false and damaging impression of our industry.

As fur farmers, we've always been grateful that the MPs in 1913 had the wisdom to amend the Criminal Code, section 460, to make entering a dwelling with a pen, a cage or den with fur-bearing animals an indictable offence. Unfortunately, this law is not being enforced to protect our farmers. We need your help.

We recommend the committee take a look at legislation in the United States entitled the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act.

Allowing animal extremists and anti-agriculture groups to slander farmers' names with untruths and doctored videos hurts all of agriculture. This can easily be remedied with the right legislation.

We also recommend the government stand behind agriculture with supportive ads and language to change the way we talk about fur specifically, but agriculture as a whole.

As this committee is aware, fur farms play an important role in Canadian agriculture, contributing over \$1 billion to the Canadian economy. Canadian mink farmers are proud of their farms and work closely with veterinarians and other experts to ensure optimal animal welfare and care. Mink farming is sustainable and environmentally friendly.

● (1215)

As representatives of the Canada Mink Breeders Association, we appreciate the invitation to speak to you today. Public trust in agriculture is a very important issue.

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

Now we go to Mr. McLinton with the Retail Council of Canada.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jason McLinton (Vice-President, Grocery Division and Regulatory Affairs, Retail Council of Canada):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for this opportunity to discuss with you the public's perception and confidence in the Canadian agricultural sector.

I will make a brief presentation for the Retail Council of Canada, or the RCC.

The retail industry is the largest private employer in Canada. More than 2.1 million Canadians work there. Ninety-five percent of retailers selling food products are members of the RCC. They provide essential services and are important employers in communities, large and small, across the country. They have recognized private label ranges and offer products in all food categories.

● (1220)

[*English*]

I'm the Vice-President of the Grocery Division for RCC. I also manage RCC's food safety and regulatory committee.

Thanks again for the opportunity to talk about public trust in Canada's food system. I very specifically want to talk about food safety in particular being the cornerstone, we believe, of public trust, as well as a recent uptick we've noticed, which is a challenge to public trust. That is the use of consumer notices, which is confusing to industry and to consumers, as we saw recently with the example of romaine lettuce last year and, even more recently although less well known, turkey and other poultry products right before Christmas.

RCC grocery members are a proud and integral part of Canada's food system. Grocery retailers are the final and direct interface with Canadians, providing families across the country with a wide variety of foods that they enjoy every day.

Canadians can be proud of their food system; it's one of the very best in the world. Our system is based on trust, trust that a wide variety of food will continue to be available year-round, despite our climate, at competitive prices, and trust that the food they purchase is safe.

RCC firmly believes that trust is built on transparency, providing consumers with the information they need to make informed decisions about the food they purchase. Our members provide Canadians with this information in a variety of ways, from education programs provided in-store and online to information that is provided on food labels.

Our members have proudly partnered with Health Canada to support important collaborative consumer education campaigns, including the Eat Well and the nutrition facts table campaigns. These programs were successful in educating Canadians both on nutrition fundamentals and on how to use the nutrition facts table.

Specifically on food safety, while information is provided in all areas, there is no question that public trust must be at its greatest in this area. This is no doubt a top priority for us. Grocery retailers in Canada remove recalled food items immediately from store shelves to minimize any impact, but the recent uptick in the government's use of consumer advisories or public health notices instead of recalls or public education campaigns is eroding public trust in Canada's food system. It's causing significant and entirely unnecessary upheavals to grocery retailers, and confusion in the marketplace.

Allow me to illustrate with the two recent examples that I mentioned, one involving romaine lettuce last fall and the other involving turkey and other poultry products immediately before the holiday season.

In the case of romaine lettuce, consumers were advised not to consume it, yet there was no recall issued, leaving retailers to deal with the implications. In other words, government shifted the responsibility of making a public policy decision onto retailers to make the decision of whether or not products should be pulled from the shelves, assuming all reputational and financial risks associated with that.

The issue could have been addressed with open and transparent communication between government and industry, including RCC and its members, to determine the source of the issue more quickly and advise vendors, suppliers and consumers on appropriate actions.

In the case of turkey and poultry, it is a case of the boy who cried wolf, leading to consumers being less likely to take food safety messaging seriously. Immediately before Christmas, a consumer advisory was issued on turkey and other poultry products. When you read the notice, it was essentially about proper food handling over the holidays, such as how to prepare and store turkey. Yet, it was entitled "Outbreak of Salmonella illnesses" and was issued without industry input. Framing a reminder on proper food handling as an "outbreak" erodes public trust in our food safety system.

Furthermore, it failed to achieve its objective. There wasn't very much, if any, public or media uptake on this, yet we can all agree on what the objective is: raising awareness among Canadians about proper food handling—in this case, seasonally. RCC and its members are very supportive of proactive food handling, say around the barbeque season, which is going to be coming very shortly, hopefully, despite today's weather.

This issue with turkey could have been easily addressed with proactive and collaborate government-industry consumer education.

The solution is that government and industry must work together proactively to help consumers understand food handling through consumer education campaigns. In the case of poultry and turkey, this would have addressed that need. In all cases, government must partner with industry, including RCC and its members, to do two things. The first is to get the information it requires in order to make a determination on whether a recall should be issued. The second is to develop proactive consumer messaging. Only after these two options have been employed and the issue is still not addressed should a consumer advisory be considered. When that's done, it should be done in consultation with industry and with predictable form and content.

• (1225)

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, Mr. McLinton, I'm going to have to stop you here. You might have a chance to finish—I think you were very close.

We'll start with our round of questions.

Mr. Shipley, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** I want to thank all the witnesses for coming out.

My first quick question is for Ms. Sharratt. With regard to mandatory labelling, you're saying that 80% of people want to know and have it on there. I thought science determined health, and science has determined that GMOs are healthy. Everybody talks about science, and as a result, quite honestly, nobody believes you. As I mentioned earlier to our witnesses, it's very selective science, depending on what you, I guess in some cases, maybe want the outcome to be.

I always get concerned when you're talking only about GMOs and the health of Canadians. What really bothers me on the other side of this is that we have billions of litres of raw sewage that is dumped into our water system every day. Do you promote that we should label our water as "I'm not sure", "hazardous" or "from a hazardous source"?

**Ms. Lucy Sharratt:** We commissioned a poll in 2015, an Ipsos Reid poll, and it—

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Focus on my question.

**Ms. Lucy Sharratt:** The answers that Canadians gave as to why they wanted GM food labelled were multiple and diverse. Eighty-seven per cent said that they just wanted to know what they were eating, how the food was produced or where it was produced. Many were concerned about issues like corporate control, environmental concerns and ethical concerns. Actually, it's quite a diverse set of reasons as to why people want labelling.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** I have a habit of running out of time.

So, what did they tell you a GMO is?

**Ms. Lucy Sharratt:** Even their answers said that, actually, people are thinking through the issue through different lenses.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** No, no, my question is—

**Ms. Lucy Sharratt:** It's genetically engineered—

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** I know that.

**Ms. Lucy Sharratt:** —so as per the CFIA definition of genetic engineering, where you have—

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** What do you tell them?

**Ms. Lucy Sharratt:** We talk about the science, like the process of genetic engineering, including gene editing.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** The interesting part is that most people say, "I'm afraid of GMOs."

I say, "Really? What's a GMO?"

"Well, I'm not sure, but I've been told about it."

"Then tell me what a hybrid is."

They don't know what that is either, but somebody has misinformed them. We've witnessed some of that today. They've misinformed on some platform based on some sort of science that has actually put fear in without knowledge.

**Ms. Lucy Sharratt:** We would suggest that actually labelling the product of the technology would enable a discussion between Canadians about that technology.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** But you're demonizing the product.

**Ms. Lucy Sharratt:** We are discussing the issues that are raised, which we think are legitimate and necessary—so, the benefits and risks of the technology.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** I want to go to the fur guys. I want to say thank you to Mr. Hazlewood and Mr. Labonté for coming out today.

Mr. McLellan, you've been in my riding. I've visited your farm. You've talked to me about your experience as a breeder of mink with your family because it's a family organization. I know that in your riding you personally faced some of the issues with these extremists.

Actually, I don't know what the definition of "terrorist" is, but when somebody intentionally breaks into a secured place and threatens the animals, which could honestly.... I'm not sure that they have any care about the animals—it's either that or they're totally naive—or they wouldn't be doing what they're doing. At any rate, can you just talk about—because it is a family operation and we sat down in your office one day—what that means? This is about public trust when you have radical animal activists breaking into individual farms and homesteads. What's the impact on your family and your business?

• (1230)

**Mr. Tom McLellan (Former Vice-President, Canada Mink Breeders Association):** For starters, I've been doing this for 40 years, and my Dad before that. As well, my two sons are involved.

It's very difficult. As Gary mentioned in his talk, it destroys the pedigree that you've worked on for years, and disease problems come on the farm and in the animals.

It's so disappointing to me that people who are uneducated are trying to push their values on our farmers.

It's so hard for our family, too. It was a \$500,000 loss, which takes a long time to recuperate from. Since this happened, our sons and their families are involved. We take turns. We drive around our farm every night of the week, because there's no real way to stop these people. They seem to know everything. It's disappointing that they can destroy your business, your company—most importantly, your family business.

Most of the farms in Canada are family businesses, as it has been for our family, for generations. We're Canadians, and we've been proud of the fact that we have a chance to voice our opinion. We've also been proud of the fact that—we thought—we had a chance for choices, not somebody pushing choices down our throat.

It's very emotional for the family. They're raising young kids.

To finalize, if I can really quickly, I'd like to pose a question to everybody here. I'd like to know your reaction—

**The Chair:** Sorry, Mr. McLellan. There might be another opportunity, but unfortunately we're out of time.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Maybe somebody will let him finish his comment.

**The Chair:** Maybe somebody can ask. I have to move on.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Breton, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank our witnesses for being here today for this important study on public trust.

I would like to hear you talk about research and innovation. As we know, research and innovation are very important to Canada's economic growth. They are also essential pillars to strengthen public trust in our Canadian agricultural sector. To this end, Canada ranks seventh in the world in terms of public finance investment in research, development and innovation.



Mr. McLinton, I would like to hear from you about the different initiatives in Canada and the different programs, such as the super clusters or the Seizing Canada's Moment: Moving Forward in Science, Technology and Innovation strategy.

How do you find that these research and innovation initiatives improve access to quality products and food security? You mentioned it earlier.

It is about producing quality products, but also at affordable prices, because it is also an important element, especially in your industries.

So, I'll start with you, then move on to Mr. Hazlewood and Ms. Sharratt.

**Mr. Jason McLinton:** Thank you for your question.

[English]

Absolutely, you hit the nail on the head with regard to competitive pricing in a wide variety of products, making sure that consumers have access year round to innovative products at competitive prices.

In terms of innovation at the production level, I obviously would have less to say about that, but every single one of RCC's members has a private label program, names that you would all recognize. There's a lot of innovation going there, both with regard to the types of products and the formulations, and stuff such as that—and we get some really interesting products that way—and with regard to product packaging, and things such as that.

Our members are very actively involved in that when it comes to their private labels, but also they're very happy to provide the consumers with what they're looking for: these innovative products from Canadian producers.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** Thank you.

I will now hear from Ms. Sharratt and then Mr. Hazlewood.

[English]

**Ms. Lucy Sharratt:** Thank you.

It goes to the heart of the question around genetic engineering, how to introduce new technologies and how to bring new innovation to the fore. This is an important role for not just public research, but public engagement, determining the priorities for innovation and evaluating the social worth both when a new technology is being introduced or discussed and 20 years after the fact. That is why we did our evaluation of six reports in 2015. Without government tracking, for example, of where GM crops are grown and which ones are grown, how can we evaluate the benefits and the impacts thus far?

There's a lot more that could be done to engage the public, meaning farmers and consumers, in evaluating the innovations that we are using at the moment.

• (1235)

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** Thank you.

[English]

**Mr. Gary Hazlewood:** Of course, research is the future, and whatever you have now, you're going to need something different.

We're a relatively small commodity. Regarding your reference to super research clusters, we don't fit on that horizon at all, but that doesn't mean that there aren't programs available. We have been able to access programs through NSERC, in particular for animal welfare research at the University of Guelph. We have established a genomics chair at Dalhousie University, and we work with a number of researchers who have, in the past, worked with nutrition and these sorts of things.

Of course, our biggest problem is generating enough money to be able to do research in some of these other programs, but we have been very fortunate over the years to have a number of people who have been pretty adept at managing the research programs that are in effect. However, superclusters are not in our vocabulary.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** Thank you.

Mr. McLinton, everyone knows that the new Canadian food guide came out a few months ago.

You mentioned food security, which I think is very important. Do you think the new food guide meets the objectives of improving consumer health and food security?

[English]

**Mr. Jason McLinton:** Our reaction and the reaction of our members to the food guide has generally been a very positive one. As I've mentioned, our members supply consumers with what they're looking for. The tastes of consumers are constantly evolving, and what's represented in the food guide is a representation of where we, as a country, are going with regard to our diet.

The reception has generally been positive. The one comment I have heard, though, concerns the notion of affordability. We talked about making sure that Canadians get access to food year round at competitive prices. What's contained in the food guide didn't necessarily take into account what may be affordable for all Canadians. However, generally our members, and I personally, have been very supportive of the food guide.

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

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Breton.

[English]

Mr. MacGregor, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Thank you very much, Chair.

Ms. Sharratt, I'll start with you.

We have concluded a study on mental health, and we heard from a lot of farmers, producers and ranchers about the pressures they feel. They're very legitimate and something that we have to pay attention to, because farmers aren't really separated from their job as most people are. Their job is their livelihood. They often live where they work.

I'm also very cognizant of the fact that some grow GM crops, and some don't. I know with the Organic Trade Association, there's some great research being done at UBC farms, for example, where they are trying to do that research with no inputs.

All of our modern varieties of crops bear little resemblance to their ancient forebears. Through cultivation and domestication, we have produced bananas, apples and wheat. It bears very little resemblance....

As a policy-maker, I'm trying to find a way that people who practise conventional farming and people who practise organic farming can coexist. Through our technology and innovation study, we did trip across Canada and we met some of the people who are involved in the research in gene editing. I came away thinking these are very good people. They are genuinely concerned about trying to solve some of the world's problems. I take to heart also your comments about how there are some gaps in research, and certainly I'm all for more public engagement in this.

Considering what your organization does, the availability of the science, and so on, all the things I've just said, can we arrive at a Canada where the two sides can coexist, where we have genuine respect for what the other is trying to accomplish?

● (1240)

**Ms. Lucy Sharratt:** I think there are several ways in which government infrastructure could encourage this. One is by creating a larger role for public research, because at the moment, regardless of what we see ahead or project, the reality of genetic engineering on the ground is dominated by the largest seed and pesticide companies in the world.

This is not a comfortable position for farmers either. There's a great deal of concern about the high level of corporate consolidation, which means that input costs keep rising. Consultation with farmers on the process by which genetically engineered crops and animals are allowed or approved for commercial release would assist in hearing any concerns that might be more of an issue on the ground.

For example, in the case of GM alfalfa, conventional and organic farmers were largely in consensus that there would be a very high risk of contamination if genetically modified alfalfa were commercially released. Yet it was commercially released, and farmers are left to struggle with that reality in the ground.

With each GM crop, without a consultation with farming communities, if there's a big enough issue, what you see instead is farmers advocating and even taking to the streets on particular issues.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** In other words, if we can get the federal government back into the research game, with more public ownership of this research.... I agree with that. I think there certainly is room for the private sector, but we have seen the pendulum swing quite far towards reliance on the private sector, and if this research is going to benefit all Canadians, I certainly would like to see a lot more public engagement, involvement and ownership of this.

Let me turn to the mink breeders. I have a small farming property myself; I raise sheep, I raise chickens. We use animal products every single day. It's funny that when you look at most people's shoes, they're wearing leather shoes, and they have leather belts and leather

watch straps, and not many people make the connection that the leather came from a once-live animal.

I know that your industry has gone through many trials and tribulations. I just want to know why furs are singled out and other animal sectors ignored.

Also, could you elaborate on the kinds of changes the industry has gone through in response to consumer pressure over the years to alleviate some of those concerns and how you've responded to public pressure over the years?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Labonté (Board Member, Canada Mink Breeders Association):** Given that we produce furs, you might think we can't use the rest of the animal, but every part of the mink is used. The carcass is composted and used for fertilizer, as is the manure. The fat from the animal has multiple uses, including makeup. The fat also helps to keep moisture out of leather made from the hides of other animals so it stays looking good. We use the entire animal. The fur is used to make coats, rugs and coat collars.

People don't realize we use 100% of the animal. That's an important fact. That's why we are coming to you for help. We want people all over the country to know that our products are ethical and that all of our ranches pay attention to the welfare of the animal.

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

[*English*]

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Thank you. We have that on the public record now.

**The Chair:** Now we go to Mr. Peschisolido for six minutes.

**Mr. Joe Peschisolido (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.):** I'd like to thank the witnesses for coming in today to talk about public trust in our agricultural system. Basically public trust, I think, deals with three issues: how our food industry and what we eat deals with our health; environment; and what's becoming more of an issue—and I think we've started to discuss it today and in other meetings—is the whole issue of animal welfare.

Like Mr. Shipley, Ms. Sharratt and perhaps many Canadians are trying to grapple with what exactly GMO is and what gene splitting is. Can you tell us a little bit what a GMO product is?

● (1245)

**Ms. Lucy Sharratt:** The CFIA has a definition of genetic engineering. It uses the term “genetic modification” much more widely than the public and is generally understood. Internationally, the term “genetic modification” is used the same way that the CFIA defines genetic engineering. We thus use the terms interchangeably.

This would be the intervention at the molecular level that is not just about transgenics but about moving genetic material around at that molecular level: the direct intervention, which is something that is new to farming—it's something that happens in the laboratory. The entire history, the diversity of our food supply, comes from farmers working with the restrictions of reproductive capacities of organisms. Now we can go beyond that.

**Mr. Joe Peschisolido:** Why do you believe that is a direction we ought not to go in? I've been at committee here where I've heard competing Ph.D. scientists testify, some saying GMOs are good and some saying they're bad. I want to rely on science, but I'm getting different visions of what science is as it relates to food safety and a variety of issues. What are your main concerns with GMOs and how government ought to respond to them?

**Ms. Lucy Sharratt:** The issue of genetic engineering is a scientific issue as well as a social and economic issue. It's not just about the science itself, which is in dispute. Scientific knowledge is ever evolving. One of our starting points of concern is about how much science examines the individual GMOs that are on the market. We have to talk about this product by product—that's the way the Canadian government regulates. Within the scientific community, however, there are contrasting views or research about whether the process matters, whether there are inherent risks here. That is why gene editing is still an issue for us to discuss. Then there are the issues of who owns the technology, how it is introduced, how it is used and who benefits from it. These are issues that also need to be attended to, and I think you'll find that Canadians—definitely those who want labelling—are very much engaged in that discussion.

**Mr. Joe Peschisolido:** I'd like to follow up a little bit on Mr. MacGregor's line of questioning. In my riding of Steveston—Richmond East, we have both types of farming, if you can define it that way—traditional farming and organic farming. We have folks like Tony Birak and his berry farms, which is traditional farming. We also have new developments with Sweet Digz Farm, where Kimi Hendess and her life partner Kareno Hawbolt are getting into organic vegetables. Steve Easterbrook does organic chicken farming. He's in the egg industry at Rabbit River Farms.

Can we have both types? I don't see why we cannot, yet it seems that the witnesses who arrive here come from one point of view or another. This is for Ms. Sharratt or any of our guests. Can we accommodate both?

**Ms. Lucy Sharratt:** Our new report on GM contamination and contamination escapes shows that some GMOs can be controlled and that some are more controllable than others. When it comes to GM alfalfa, for example, farmers were very concerned about the issue of contamination. When it comes to the GM apple, B.C. farmers were clear that the issue was more about market pressure at that moment in time, although contamination was also an issue. I think it's the biology of the plants and animals that makes a difference in answering that question, though there are other considerations as well. The fact of the matter is that organic production prohibits the use of genetic engineering, but in certain cases, like alfalfa, I think there's a deep concern that, for that particular crop, coexistence is not possible.

●(1250)

**Mr. Joe Peschisolido:** Mr. McLinton, we've talked about the market and government regulation regarding the issue of food security as well as public trust. Is there a role for the market in the evolving products, in GMO and gene editing?

**Mr. Jason McLinton:** Absolutely. As I said, our members provide Canadians with the products they want. It's not only a role for the marketplace; it's driven by the marketplace. There's a role for government regulation as well, clearly on things such as food safety, but to comment specifically about GMOs, when we talk about things like mandatory labelling, we have to be very careful.

**The Chair:** Mr. McLinton, I'm sorry, but I have to cut you off.

Ms. Nassif.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses as well.

I'll be sharing my time with Mr. Poissant.

My first question is for Mr. McLinton, who went to the same university I did. We are both graduates of Concordia University.

Mr. McLinton, welcome to the committee and thank you for your presentation.

The federal government has developed various food-related initiatives, including the Safe Food for Canadians Regulations and the healthy eating strategy put out by Health Canada. Do you think additional measures are needed to meet consumer expectations regarding food safety and sustainability, as well as nutrition quality, in order to improve public trust?

It's often said that not all canned foods have a best-before date indicated and that a standardized approach to quantity is lacking. Sometimes, it's 100 grams, and other times, it's 120 grams, so consumers have to calculate the nutritional value themselves.

Can you answer that question?

**Mr. Jason McLinton:** Thank you, Ms. Nassif,

[*English*]

who is a fellow Concordia graduate.

We have never seen anything like the pace of change in food regulation right now. You touched on the safe food for Canadians regulations. There is also marketing to children, which of course you'll all be aware of, and things like that, and front-of-package labelling, all kinds of regulations, particularly affecting food labels. The pace is incredible.

Canada has the world's envy in terms of food safety. I keep saying that it's a recent study, but the study was done in 2014 by The Conference Board of Canada, which actually had Canada tied in first place in the world for food safety. We have a very enviable system, and we and our members are very supportive of the safe food for Canadians regulations. They were really well developed by the CFIA.

Where we see potential room for improvement is exactly in what I touched on. We've done a really good job with those regulations. We're doing a great job with recalls and investigations because RCC and its members get early communications from the CFIA on that.

On consumer notices, which we're seeing more and more of, we're not seeing those same early communications. If anything, we have inspectors coming in and walking away with two heads of romaine lettuce under their arms and not telling us what they're looking for.

Our members have visibility into global supply chains that government would never have, and we would be able to help determine what the source is, because ultimately we share that same objective. Our members don't want to sell produce or any other types of products to Canadians that are going to make them sick.

With some early communication, I think we could improve our food safety system and ultimately the trust in the system, and not have to issue advisories that are confusing and that ultimately erode public trust.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Eva Nassif:** What about best-before dates? Sometimes they aren't indicated, and that makes people wonder.

[English]

**Mr. Jason McLinton:** Specifically on expiration and best-before dates, I think we need to do a better job.

**Mrs. Eva Nassif:** Why not put them everywhere?

**Mr. Jason McLinton:** I think, as a country, we need to do a better job about public education in that regard, because there actually is a difference between best-before date and expiration date that most—

**Mrs. Eva Nassif:** And sometimes it's none of them.

**Mr. Jason McLinton:** Right, and some people aren't aware of what that is, and in some cases, with things that have a very long shelf life, it would be inappropriate to put that. I'm thinking specifically about remote communities, northern communities where you have to be very careful about putting a best-before date when something may be perfectly safe to consume but may not be at its freshest, or something like that.

It's something that's worth looking at, and consumer education would be part of that, being mindful of communities where there are different circumstances.

• (1255)

**Mrs. Eva Nassif:** How can you make it better? To put the expiration date on every product... I am buying, I am paying and I don't know if I'm eating something that has expired. Not me, but some people have this issue.

**Mr. Jason McLinton:** Food safety is our absolute top priority. Before RCC and its members have any other conversation about anything else with regard to food, it's always about food safety. Our members have programs in place to ensure that the food they sell is safe.

If you're going to a Canadian store and you're buying something that's unsafe, such as something that's past an expiry date, let me know about that because—

**Mrs. Eva Nassif:** If we don't have the expiry date, how do I know what I'm eating? Is it expired or not? We do trust, but if we don't have the expiry date, what should we do?

**Mr. Jason McLinton:** I'm not familiar with any type of product that doesn't have an expiry date on it but should. If that exists, I'd really be interested to know more about it.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Eva Nassif:** Thank you.

I will now turn the floor over to Mr. Poissant.

**Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (La Prairie, Lib.):** Thank you, Ms. Nassif.

Thank you to the witnesses.

I'd like to follow up on what Mr. McLellan started talking about.

Like you, I was a farmer. I ran a dairy farm for 40 years, and I was a grain producer. Emotional distress was an issue in the setting I worked in. That's the reason I'm here: I want to protect Canadian farmers.

Today's topic is public trust in Canadian farmers, but how can we show farmers that we have confidence in them?

Consultations on agriculture and farming are held regularly, but the numbers are alarming. Consider this: only 50 years ago, Quebec was home to 50,000 farms, and today, just 28,000 remain. In Canada, the number of farms has gone from 110,000 to less than 100,000. Farmers are under a lot of stress. Money, the weather, herd health, regulatory requirements and public trust all play a role.

I'd like you to elaborate a bit further on what you started saying earlier.

**The Chair:** Mr. Poissant, it is now Mr. Dreeshen's turn.

[English]

You have two minutes for your questions.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** Thank you very much.

I have just a couple of quick comments. First, there was a discussion on the new food guide. If you take a look at it, you realize that "an egg" will feed a family of four. If you want the meat on that, it's about the size of an eraser. Therefore, I think maybe people are looking at this and trying to make some decisions for themselves. They're saying, "Hey, is this just one more attack on different producers?" because it seemed to work.... The way in which you eat, that's a little different story. All those healthy things should be dealt with. But Canada's new food guide has a lot of people scratching their heads and wondering just where it is we're going on this.

Ms. Sharratt, you have been speaking about GMOs and the discussions about that. You talked about the concern around moving genetics around at the molecular level. You do realize that this is what is done and has been done in Europe. They use a different method, which is radiation. These things have been moved around. However, because it's been done for so long, all of a sudden that isn't a problem. This new technology that is here, though, that we are using, seems to be demonized. So when you speak about labelling, would you put the same efforts into talking about all of the products that are being produced around the world using other techniques, or is it simply the GMOs that seem to be the issue with your organization?

**Ms. Lucy Sharratt:** Well, our organization is a network of 16 groups that are all looking specifically at genetic engineering. It's a technology with enough power and enough applications that it touches on a wide range of really important issues.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** Are they looking, then, at what is happening in Europe? They're blocking us and not allowing us to move our products into Europe because they have their own process that they are using, and it's a non-tariff trade barrier versus this scientific argument about what is good and what is bad. Are they talking about the Europeans?

**The Chair:** I would ask you to give a very short answer.

**Ms. Lucy Sharratt:** Each government has its own regulatory system.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** Right.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

This was a very interesting conversation. Unfortunately, that's all the time we have.

Yes, Mr. Shipley.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Could Mr. McLellan just finish, Mr. Chair, or perhaps send something in?

• (1300)

**The Chair:** If you forward that in writing, Mr. McLellan, we will put it in the study. We will certainly take it into account if you forward it to us.

**Mr. Tom McLellan:** Okay. I will.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** We have to suspend and clear the room. Then members will be back to deal with a little bit of committee business.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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