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Chair: Mr. Pat Finnigan



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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 37 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, March 10, 2021, and the motion adopted by the committee on April 15, 2021, the committee is resuming its study of Bill C-205, An Act to amend the Health of Animals Act.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of January 25, 2021, and therefore members are attending in person in the room and remotely by using the Zoom application. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. So you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind all participants in this meeting that screenshots or taking photos of your screen is not permitted.

[Translation]

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute your mike. For those in the room, your microphone will be controlled as normal by the proceedings and verification officer.

Just a reminder that all comments by members and witnesses must be addressed through the chair.

When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

[English]

Now I would like to welcome our witnesses.

As an individual, we have Mr. J. Scott Weese, professor, University of Guelph. Welcome, Mr. Weese.

From the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association, we have Dr. Henry Ceelen, veterinarian. Welcome, Mr. Ceelen.

Also from the CVMA is Dr. Brian Evans, retired veterinary deputy director, World Organisation for Animal Health, and former chief veterinary officer for Canada.

We value certainly your experience.

From the Chicken Farmers of Canada, we have Nick de Graaf, first vice-chair, and Lisa Bishop-Spencer, director of brand and communications.

We will start with the opening statements. Everyone will have a five-minute statement.

We will start with you, Mr. Weese, with your five-minute statement.

Dr. J. Scott Weese (Professor, University of Guelph, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will be brief. I will just give my background and will be happy to answer questions, which I assume will be directed from the biosecurity and infection control standpoints.

By way of background, I'm a veterinarian internal medicine specialist who focuses solely on infectious diseases. I'm a professor at the Ontario Veterinary College at the University of Guelph. I direct the University of Guelph Centre for Public Health and Zoonoses and I'm chief of infection control at the Ontario Veterinary College Health Sciences Centre, our teaching hospital.

I worked nationally and internationally with various groups on infectious diseases, infection control, and biosecurity, aiming to optimize animal health and, by way of optimizing animal health, human health. I have participated in numerous biosecurity and guideline development ventures. Overall, my work involves a range of infectious disease topics but focuses on matters that would potentially relate to this bill in terms of emerging disease, antimicrobial resistance and diseases at the human-animal interface, as well as broader topics of infection control and biosecurity.

With that, I will be brief. I will be happy to answer any questions you have on this area pertaining to this bill.

• (1535)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Weese.

We will go to the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association for five minutes.

Whoever wants to take the floor, it's yours now for five minutes.

Dr. Brian Evans (Veterinarian, Deputy Director, World Organisation for Animal Health (Retired), Chief Veterinary Officer of Canada (Retired), Canadian Veterinary Medical Association): Thank you, Mr. Chair and good day to all the members of the committee.

I am Dr. Brian Evans, as the chair has indicated. I am the current treasurer of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association. As such, I also serve as an ex officio member of the CVMA executive and the CVMA council. It was my honour and privilege to previously serve as Canada's chief veterinary officer for 15 years, as well as Canada's chief food safety officer and executive vice-president of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency prior to my retirement from the public service in 2013.

I was subsequently very fortunate to serve for a number of years as the deputy director general at the World Organisation for Animal Health, known globally as the OIE, based in Paris.

I'm pleased to be accompanied today at the committee by Dr. Henry Ceelen, the chair of the CVMA's national issues committee and a highly respected food animal practitioner from eastern Ontario. It's our pleasure to lend our collective experience and perspectives to assist you in your consideration of this private member's bill, Bill C-205, an act to amend the Health of Animals Act.

Briefly, the CVMA was incorporated by an act of Parliament in 1948. Our association is the national and international voice for Canada's approximately 13,000 veterinarians and 9,000 veterinary technicians and technologists. We provide leadership and advocacy for the veterinary medical community. The strategic priorities underpinning the work of the CVMA include leadership on national and international veterinary issues, animal welfare advocacy and support for members in building successful careers and maintaining balanced lives.

Canada's veterinarians make critical contributions to support the well-being of Canadians and the Canadian economy in a wide variety of roles. This includes the health and welfare of aquatic, terrestrial farm and companion animals; food security and food safety inspection; policy development in animal and public health domains in federal, provincial and territorial governments; scientific research; laboratory diagnostics; technical support for the animal health industry; and many others.

Canadian veterinarians embody the real-world application of the principles of One Health—that is, we work to address risks that emerge at the interface of animal health, human health and ecosystem health. We are qualified to assess and advise on the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and response to animal and zoonotic diseases, which are those diseases that affect both animals and humans, including those of livestock that have the potential to spread rapidly and widely, affecting herds and flocks over vast areas, often with significant adverse welfare, social and economic impacts.

Likewise, we understand the role of the environment as a potential source of disease and exposure to contaminants of many sorts, and the ability of hazards to spread through environmental contamination from affected premises to others in the surrounding area and beyond.

Overlying our roles and responsibilities in One Health is the essential role veterinarians play in contributing to the Canadian economy through trade and market access by working with producers and in close collaboration with the CFIA and provincial governments to produce healthy animals and safe food, respecting societal values and meeting consumer expectations.

In the area of animal welfare, Canadian veterinarians work through the CVMA with the National Farm Animal Care Council to develop and maintain codes of practice for all farm animal species that fall under animal care programs managed by industry.

In the area of animal and public health, Canada's veterinarians are trusted advisers in designing and implementing strict on-farm voluntary biosecurity protocols that are focused on managing natural, incidental and deliberate threats and are specifically aimed at prevention of disease and illness in animals. Veterinarians are well aware that prevention of an animal or zoonotic disease outbreak is much more cost-effective than managing the consequences.

This proposed amendment to the Health of Animals Act would “make it an offence to enter, without lawful authority or excuse, a place in which animals are kept if doing so could result in the exposure of the animals to a disease or toxic substance that is capable of affecting or contaminating them”.

The CVMA acknowledges that authorized or unauthorized entry of individuals onto premises where animals are raised or housed is one way that diseases or other contaminants could be introduced onto the premises. It is for this very reason that many livestock operations have strict entry and exit controls, in many cases including decontamination shower-in and shower-out protocols.

● (1540)

Biosecurity procedures incorporate controls to mitigate risk from other potential disease entry points as well. For example, strategies are used to ensure that herds are closed to the introduction of live animals, vaccination programs are in effect, and wildlife and insect vector populations are controlled—

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Evans, can you please conclude, because we have...?

Dr. Brian Evans: Certainly.

Today, Dr. Ceelen and I would be pleased to speak to our local, national and international expertise in animal health, especially as it pertains to the mandate and activities of the CVMA and the role of Canadian veterinarians in on-farm biosecurity. We trust the testimony can help inform your study of this proposed legislation, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Evans.

Now we'll go to the Chicken Farmers of Canada for five minutes.

Whoever wants to take the floor, go ahead.

Mr. Nick de Graaf (First Vice-Chair, Chicken Farmers of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name, as previously mentioned, is Nick de Graaf. I am a third generation chicken farmer in the Annapolis Valley in Nova Scotia. I'm also first vice-chair of Chicken Farmers of Canada. I'm joined here today by CFC's director of brand and communications, Lisa Bishop-Spencer.

For several years now, farmers like me across the country have feared the possibility of activists trespassing on our properties and into our chicken barns with the intention of what they think is saving the animals and protesting our commitment to carefully raising safe chicken. Therefore, we appreciate that the aims of Bill C-205 are twofold for our sector: It aims to protect the farmers and the animals in our care from activist threats while maintaining disease prevention and biosecurity on the farm.

Ensuring the appropriate care and welfare of the birds raised by Canadian chicken farmers is a top priority for our sector. We take pride in our long-standing, progressive and innovative approach to animal care, as demonstrated by the third-party-audited and mandatory Raised by a Canadian Farmer animal care program that safeguards our flocks. The animal care program for Canadian chicken has a solid, credible and science-based foundation. CFC's animal care program is third-party-audited and is mandatory on every farm. The program uses enforcement mechanisms in cases of non-compliance, and we are pleased to say that 100% of farmers are compliant.

Chicken Farmers of Canada also has an FPT-recognized Raised by a Canadian Farmer on-farm food safety program, the OFFSP, that guarantees that the highest standards of biosecurity and disease prevention are in place on the farm. Of our farmers coast to coast, 100% are certified and compliant. This on-farm food safety program employs strict measures on the farm to prevent flock infections from outside sources, including top-notch requirements for biosecurity, disease prevention, feed and water management and testing, and mandatory record-keeping. Simple acts like registering visitors to the farm, wearing designated or new coveralls and booties inside the barn and careful flock reports are some of the many steps guaranteeing safe chicken for Canadians.

These programs, coupled with the trust Canadians have in farmers, are some of the many reasons that chicken is Canada's number one meat protein. The difference between the two programs is their assurance programs. The OFFSP has an FPT recognition protocol, whereas the animal care program does not.

We are calling for the development of an FPT recognition protocol for animal care programs in the next agricultural policy framework. Such a protocol would help government convey the proper message to consumers about how their food is being raised and strengthen consumer trust in farmers' messages over activist rhetoric. I am proud to follow these programs carefully in order to raise food for Canadian families.

You also have to remember that farming is my business, and I operate it no differently than any other business person does. I have procedures and protocols in place. I mitigate and manage risk and I work hard to provide a high-quality product for Canadians.

As part of my business practices, I have good security policies and procedures in place to ensure overall security against any threat or multiple risks. An invasion rattles a farmer's sense of security and privacy and creates deep concern about biosecurity and what seems like an ongoing attack on our livelihoods. It is likely that outsiders entering a farm or private property that raises animals do not know about the biosecurity requirements on Canadian chicken farms and, in the case of activists, do not respect them.

Biosecurity is critical to the prevention of disease in flocks. On my farm, I track visitors and know who is on the property to mitigate the risks of introducing a domestic, reportable or emerging disease on the farm. Should a trespasser expose the animals to an unknown substance or disease or to an element that may compromise food safety, this may impact my ability to market that entire flock.

I know this legislation might bring up questions about people's right to protest or laws that are already in place to prosecute trespassers, but when you are considering this bill, I want you to think about me and the thousands of other poultry and livestock farmers across this country who work hard every single day to ensure that the food we are raising for Canadians is safe and raised with care.

Thank you for your time and consideration of Bill C-205. We hope you will support this important defence of farmers and the on-farm practices that protect our food system so we can keep feeding Canadians.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. de Graaf.

With that, we'll go to our first round, with six minutes of questions each. We'll start with Warren Steinley.

Go ahead, Mr. Steinley.

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for being here today on Bill C-205, which we believe is a very important bill.

Mr. de Graaf, you mentioned the fact that you guys have already implemented the Raised by a Canadian Farmer animal care program. We know that it's credible and science-based, but is it static or is it ever-changing and evolving as your industry evolves? Can you answer that for me?

Mr. Nick de Graaf: Yes, I sure could. The program is reviewed on a regular basis. We do make changes. It's quite an involved process. It is absolutely not static.

Mr. Warren Steinley: Would it then make sense that we always review and maybe make changes to the Health of Animals Act and bring in some new regulations to ensure that there are more on-farm safety procedures? Would that make sense for a review of the Health of Animals Act and maybe adding some regulations to that?

Mr. Nick de Graaf: It would make sense to have a review. It's the same thing that we do, so yes.

Mr. Warren Steinley: I know your producers and people within your industry group have had some instances of activism on their farms. Have they seen an increase in—I wouldn't say “aggressiveness” of—some of the activism that has happened on farms?

Could one of the reasons that this bill could be so important be that there needs to be more regulation put into place so that people realize there are consequences to their actions when they go on farms and put animals' health in jeopardy?

Mr. Nick de Graaf: I'll let Lisa answer that one, if you don't mind.

Ms. Lisa Bishop-Spencer (Director of Brand and Communications, Chicken Farmers of Canada): It's no trouble at all.

We have seen an increase in activist activity on the farm, as you noted earlier. This is very disruptive, not only for farmer's way of doing business but also for mental health and other considerations.

I think it's important to remember that farmers have a right to be able to run their business in peace. More importantly, the animals in their care are the ones we need to ensure stay healthy and stay well. This is something that is put at risk every time there's an invasion or a takeover of a farm. We have to make sure that we're doing everything we can to prevent that as much as possible.

Mr. Warren Steinley: A couple of witnesses and Mr. de Graaf had mentioned that maybe sometimes activists aren't aware of the harms they could be perpetrating on the animals when they're coming into barns and the stress they're bringing.

Do you think Bill C-205 would actually help educate some of the activists on some of the dangers they do bring forward with some of the activism that's taken place on farms across the country?

Ms. Lisa Bishop-Spencer: Nick, did you want me to answer that?

Mr. Nick de Graaf: Go ahead.

Ms. Lisa Bishop-Spencer: I think anything that helps people understand how important it is to maintain flock health, in our case, or animal health is going to be valuable. We need to ensure that people understand that farms are not the farms of old. These are well-established operations with on-farm food safety protocols that need to be adhered to.

• (1550)

Mr. Warren Steinley: Thank you very much.

Maybe I'll jump over to Dr. Evans, with all his expertise.

We heard a very emotional story about a young farm that had just started. They had activists come on their farm. It actually led them to get out of farming, because not only did they have some animal concerns, but also family concerns and some biosecurity concerns.

Do you think a bill like this helps with maybe taking some of that mental stress off of the farmer so that there is something in place to ensure that not only the family but also the animals are going to be safe from activists coming onto the farm, or do you believe this is just something that is going to educate activists as well?

It's a question similar to what I asked Ms. Bishop-Spencer.

Dr. Brian Evans: I thank you for the question.

From my perspective, speaking from my collective experience, I think anything that allows for the application or the implementation of accepted standards in written protocols and can be auditable in terms of maintaining flock or herd health is to everyone's advantage. I'll let Henry speak to his experience at a private level, but I would say most producers in this country are, as has been mentioned by the industry, in the business of producing safe food in line with societal values and consumer expectations.

Henry deals with this on a daily basis, particularly with dairy and other herds in eastern Ontario. With the permission of the chair, perhaps Henry could add his perspective.

Mr. Warren Steinley: Yes, Henry, please do so. I grew up on a dairy farm. I'd love to have your perspective here for the last 25 seconds.

Dr. Henry Ceelen (Veterinarian, Canadian Veterinary Medical Association): Again, I'm primarily a dairy veterinarian. I'd like to make everybody aware that there are formal biosecurity protocols happening at all dairy farms. They're mandatory, and veterinarians are tasked with doing a biosecurity audit and also tailoring a biosecurity program and making recommendations that are very specific to individual farms. It's not a cookie-cutter protocol at all. It's a very farm-specific one. I think the veterinary profession is well situated to provide those protocols and to provide input for our clients.

Mr. Warren Steinley: Thank you, Henry. Do you—

The Chair: Thank you.

Before we move on, I'd like to welcome Mr. Morrissey to our committee. I also like to welcome the sponsor of the bill, Mr. Barlow. Welcome back to the committee.

With that, we'll go to Mr. Louis for six minutes. Go ahead, Mr. Louis.

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all of our panellists for being here for this important discussion. I appreciate your time.

I would like to start my questions with Dr. Weese. Being down the road here in Kitchener—Conestoga and having a child at the University of Guelph, it only seemed fitting.

We're here today primarily to talk about animal health and safety and farmers' health and safety. Biosecurity issues are prevalent, and you're obviously an expert on those. Can you explain to us the major causes of biosecurity issues and maybe list them in order of prevalence from your experience? What types of biosecurity issues are being faced?

Dr. J. Scott Weese: Are you asking with respect to people coming on the farm?

Mr. Tim Louis: No, I am just asking in general. Dr. Evans touched on it. I might ask him as well about herds being closed, wildlife vectors and other things like that. I am just asking in general about biosecurity.

Dr. J. Scott Weese: I'm not sure exactly what you're asking. One of the things we're concerned about is that the biosecurity aspect is preventing movement of things onto the facility that aren't there or letting them spread within a facility. A pathogen or an infectious agent will come into the facility through various routes. That could be people coming in, such as farmers, veterinarians, visitors and people bringing in feed, or it could be other animals brought into the facility, to the farm. It could be wild birds. It could be things that come in through air, which is very unlikely, but it's in close proximity. It could be things that get in through water, through runoff from pastures. There are various ways things can get in.

The relative risk of those will vary greatly with the type of animal, the type of farm and the pathogen we're talking about, but something that is new has to get onto the farm, typically, for us to be worried about a biosecurity concern.

• (1555)

Mr. Tim Louis: Thank you. You just summed it up there with the term “relative risks”. It depends on many factors.

What recommendations can you give our committee to help our agricultural workers make the protocols they're working with easier? What kind of resources can we offer? Would it be enhanced funding, education or communication? How can we help? What can we recommend to help mitigate those relative risks?

Dr. J. Scott Weese: For biosecurity in general, the industry has done a very good job. There are very good national standards for all our industries. There is varying implementation of biosecurity by the different sectors. How they run chickens, for example, is very different from beef cattle, dairy cattle and pigs. They all have different risks and different ways they approach them, but the different industries have developed quite good standards. The industries themselves collaborated with the CFIA on national standards and with veterinarians on developing biosecurity programs and preventive medicine programs and the like.

I think you'd have to ask the industries themselves what they would like for support, but in the era we're in now, there is quite good information and quite good support for what to do. Implementation can be a challenge, depending on the industry, but overall we're in a much better position than we were 10 years ago.

Mr. Tim Louis: Thank you.

Dr. Evans, I know we're talking about biosecurity and stopping diseases and that we're in the middle of a global pandemic, but in your experience with trying to protect the physical and mental health of both animals and farmers, are we learning? Would you say we're learning from the lessons of the global COVID pandemic that we're experiencing? Are there applications and lessons we can take moving forward to protect our farmers and our animals?

Dr. Brian Evans: Thank you for the question. I think it offers a number of insights.

Certainly, as Scott has touched on, the reality of disease emergence is constantly changing, and it's emerging on an ongoing ba-

sis. We see up to five new diseases emerge every year, and 60% of those have an animal base or an animal origin to them that can affect human health as well.

I would like to say that lessons get learned, but I would be remiss if I said that with sincerity, because I think that while often there are lessons noted, our reality is that history tends to repeat itself all too often.

Canada itself is not immune to the introduction of diseases on farms, obviously, like all nations. The committee might recall two of the more memorable ones. One was foot-and-mouth disease in Saskatchewan in 1952, which obviously predates the vast majority of the committee members, I'd suggest. It was concluded that the foot-and-mouth disease in Saskatchewan was ultimately related to a farm worker who moved from West Germany to Saskatchewan in 1951. The area in West Germany where he resided and worked with livestock was suffering from an outbreak of foot-and-mouth type A, which was the same type of foot-and-mouth that emerged on farms in Saskatchewan over the subsequent time period. It's postulated that it may have been the result of boots and clothing that he brought with him that were not cleaned and disinfected. Obviously those issues of disinfection and cleaning weren't as prevalent in industry at that time as they are today. Again, that was an incident that was determined to be caused when a farm worker actually introduced the disease.

More recently, in 2009, we dealt in Canada and globally with the outbreak of H1N1, which unfortunately picked up the misnomer of “swine flu”, which was totally inappropriate, given it was a triple-reassortant virus. In this situation, Canada was one of 22 countries around the world where infection with H1N1 was finally detected or confirmed in swine populations. Again, in the vast majority of those circumstances, it was determined that these pigs had been infected by people—

The Chair: Thank you. Sorry about that, Dr. Evans. We'll have to move on to the next questioner.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Perron, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for taking the time to join us today. We are grateful to them.

Mr. Evans, I will start with you in order to take advantage of your great expertise in the field of biosecurity.

Can you tell us about specific cases of intrusion, where people go on to a farm, for example, to sit next to cattle for a few hours and then leave without doing any damage? What are the impacts of those types of visits and for how long should we be afraid of negative consequences? It's not just about the intrusion, but about the potential contamination.

Do you have any data about that or is it a complete unknown?

• (1600)

Dr. Brian Evans: Thank you for your question.

[English]

Thank you very much for the line of inquiry.

I can't provide, off the top of my head, a statistical analysis of where activist activity on a farm has resulted in consequences without penetrating to the livestock-holding or poultry-holding area where issues have occurred.

As Dr. Weese has indicated, the pathways by which animals can become infected are quite varied, so even if they do not access the barn or the housing structures themselves, contamination of the water supply or grazing areas can also be a way by which animals can be exposed to food safety issues in terms of toxic substances.

Again, to be fair to your question, honourable member, I think it really comes down to intent. These incursions can result in accidental, incidental or deliberate threat. Those are three distinct types of threat that can occur, and I think a lot of that has to be assessed by looking at the true intent of the intruder.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you.

As an expert in animal health, how do you respond to those who are telling us not to pass Bill C-205 because it will silence whistle-blowers, meaning people who suspect mistreatment on a farm?

What processes are in place? How do you respond to them?

[English]

Dr. Brian Evans: Thank you again, honourable member.

I would make two points. One, as has been referenced by a number of witnesses today and previously, is that part of the answer is in the issue of education and information. Again, I think there are those with deliberate intent who, regardless of how well-informed they are, will still make efforts to disrupt agricultural production based on values that are disconnected from where agriculture is today.

Beyond education, the other component of your question largely has to be answered by considering how you would enforce the provisions of this bill. Many witnesses have spoken about the challenges of enforcement. Dr. Ceelen has spoken about the role that veterinarians play on farms in Canada, and I would have a concern if the bill is envisioned as requiring more veterinary resources, whether they be federally with the CFIA, provincially with provincial governments, or from the private sector. We are already experiencing a significant shortage of veterinarians in Canada, and I would be concerned that in order to enhance the CFIA resources, those resources are going to come at the direct expense of veterinarians who are currently in private practice or in other types of practice. They'll move to the CFIA, which then creates vulnerabilities. It's a "rob Peter to pay Paul" scenario.

I think the issue isn't so much around the big area. It's around the enforcement construct.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: To simplify things in terms of procedure, is there not a way to establish a partnership with local police forces? Basically, Bill C-205 sees simply being on the premises as an offence.

[English]

Dr. Brian Evans: Very briefly, I would say that if we're talking about a disease or situation evolving on a farm that's been compromised because of an intrusion, the investigation of that type of disease outbreak is significantly different from the investigation of a natural disease outbreak. The forensic aspects of it and the issues around chain of custody and evidence leading to prosecution are an area that Scott could speak to, but I don't think it's part of the regular veterinary teaching curriculum. It is a different type of investigation, and the use of individuals who are better trained in those types of enforcement and investigations would, from my perspective, be beneficial.

• (1605)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much.

I would like to hear what Mr. de Graaf, from the Chicken Farmers of Canada, has to say about the previous question. Some are asking us what methods currently exist to register suspicions of mistreatment on a farm. Can you tell us about the methods currently in place?

[English]

Mr. Nick de Graaf: Absolutely not. Chicken farmers are stewards of the animals. We care about them. When they do well, we do well. That's really what it all comes down to.

There's nothing in this bill that I think would create a false alarm and hide any wrongdoing. Chicken farmers are trusted because we are good people and we know how to take care of our flocks.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perron.

[English]

Now, Mr. MacGregor, I believe we lost you for a while. It's good to see you back. Hopefully the sound is good.

You have the floor for six minutes. Go ahead, Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I beg the committee's pardon, because I missed all of the opening statements and questions, so I'm kind of flying blind here on what's already been discussed. I beg your pardon on that.

I'll start with the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association.

When you look at existing provisions of the Health of Animals Act, specifically under the prohibitions in section 8 on the concealment of the existence of a reportable disease and the keeping of diseased animals, and then under section 9 on bringing diseased animals to market, you see that these existing provisions of the federal statute broadly refer to anyone. It could be a person. It could be the farmer. It could be an employee. Bill C-205 is expressly making reference to a person “without lawful authority or excuse”.

I'm wondering what you think about the language of Bill C-205 when you compare it to existing sections of the parent act that it is seeking to amend. Do you have any comments on that?

Dr. Brian Evans: Very briefly, I would state that it has to be borne in mind that the Health of Animals Act and its relative enforcement relate to a subset of diseases. It talks about reportable diseases. Canada benefits from a framework whereby agriculture is a jurisdiction shared between the federal government and the provincial governments. The provincial government deals with a number of diseases that are not dealt with under the Health of Animals Act because they are not reportable federally. It is that integration, I would say, that is very valuable in Canada because it gives a much broader coverage than this particular act does in isolation.

The existing provisions of the act, as you say, do take into account issues around contamination and toxic substances, but do not speak to how they are introduced. It's back to a comment I made, perhaps before your arrival, that when we look at the risk pathways that are involved and whether these risks in fact are low-probability events with high consequences, the vast majority would fall into that category. Therefore, again, we have to ask whether adding this additional tranche, if you will, of risk mitigation is going to be sufficient to mitigate those who advocate on the farm from introducing—inadvertently, accidentally or deliberately—a situation to the farm that's going to be detrimental to animal health or animal welfare.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Professor Weese, can I turn the same question to you and ask you to compare what Bill C-205's language involves to the parent act? In the parent act, it's quite broad. It says “no person shall”, full stop, whereas in this existing Bill C-205, it says “No person shall, without lawful authority or excuse”.

Do you have any comments on the differences in language?

Dr. J. Scott Weese: Sorry, Mr. MacGregor; we have a fire alarm here, so I had to find a spot outside the building where I could hear. Hopefully my audio is okay.

When it comes to some of the specific language of the bill and how that would impact things, that's not really my area of expertise. I can comment on the biosecurity, the risk aspect, and how that would change the risk aspect.

From a risk aspect, if you change people's behaviours, you obviously change the risk. It comes down to, as Brian said, a low risk with a potentially high consequence. Overall, there are many good reasons that people shouldn't be trespassing on farms. Biosecurity is at the lower end of that risk for me. It varies quite a bit with the situation.

Right now, the biggest issue would be COVID and mink. Trespassers on a mink farm would be a substantial concern about

COVID. As Brian mentioned, influenza coming in would be a potential concern. Beyond that, there aren't many people walking around in the street carrying a high-consequence animal disease that they're going to track in. We'd be worried mainly about people going farm to farm, if there was a trespassing event that went from one farm to another farm. You get into these scenarios where we can't do a cost-benefit assessment very well because we just don't have the information.

I'm sorry that I've gotten off topic from your question, I believe. The language of the bill is outside of my realm.

• (1610)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you for contributing in any case.

I'll go back to the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association.

When Bill C-205 makes reference to the entrance to a building or other enclosed place in which animals are kept, do you think there might be some confusion if, say, farm protesters made it onto a farm but did not come anywhere close to where animals are kept? I'm trying to find a possibility of where federal jurisdiction might run into provincial jurisdiction if no one really knows where they're in charge.

Dr. Brian Evans: Henry, did you want to start on that one?

Dr. Henry Ceelen: Brian, I have absolutely no expertise to answer that question.

Dr. Brian Evans: The point I would come back to again is the facts we have talked about. There are multiple pathways by which diseases can be introduced onto the farm, and it's not always through direct contact with the animals. When we talk about other enclosures for animals, such as abattoirs or those types of situations, the importance of biosecurity globally cannot be overstated. From an economic protection standpoint, we have moved the world miles down the road, away from a country having to be free of a disease to a region or zone being free of a disease to what we call a compartment or compartmentalization.

What this means is that the biosecurity at the farm level must be linked to biosecurity in transport and at the point of slaughter and through processing. Doing that mitigates the significant economic impact that Canada and other countries have seen—

The Chair: Thank you—

Dr. Brian Evans: —when diseases break out. The linkage of those biosecurity elements allows the rest of the world to continue to trade with you at a much more restricted level.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Evans.

Dr. Brian Evans: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Hopefully things are good, Mr. Weese. I'm glad this is June and not January outside. Thanks for sticking with us.

We'll now go to the second round.

Go ahead, Mr. Epp. You have five minutes.

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses.

Dr. Evans, I'll come back to that point in a bit. I want to start with the Chicken Farmers of Canada.

Canada received its negligible risk status for bovine spongiform encephalopathy, BSE, from the OIE just recently, 20 years after an outbreak. Of course, we're quite familiar with the economic harm that occurred. I assume that a similar harm could occur with our swine industry with either African swine fever or PRRS.

I know that chicken isn't traded to the same extent, but can you comment on the impact of an outbreak of avian influenza on our trade relations, and even on our domestic industry?

Ms. Lisa Bishop-Spencer: Back in 2004, Canada suffered one of its most significant avian influenza outbreaks. I remember Dr. Evans from back then, and also from the one in 2009.

It was a very significant outbreak. It wound up that our producers in British Columbia were not allowed to restock their barns. Most of the broiler chicken, the chicken raised for meat, was able to get to market, but those farmers were not allowed to restock their barns for several months afterwards, not until we were sure the virus was under control. As a direct result, approximately 4% of the Canadian market was not served by chicken. Fortunately, under the supply management system, we were able to augment production in the rest of the country and ship it west. That wouldn't always necessarily be the case.

For us, the impact domestically is quite significant. As you indicated earlier, we don't export as much as we produce for the domestic market. We have to be very cautious with respect to animal disease. Avian influenza would probably be the most notable example in recent years of a disease that could possibly have far-reaching implications for the industry.

• (1615)

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you.

I'll move now to the topic that's already come up in several lines of questioning, because it's so important for us as committee members to understand this. We heard testimony from Dr. Komal that really there's a negligible risk of transmission of pathogens or transmission of disease with incidental contact. There would need to be prolonged contact between humans and animals for that to occur on-farm. We heard contradictory testimony from Dr. Jean-Pierre Vaillancourt, a professor of veterinary medicine at the Université de Montréal. We are hearing today that there are multiple pathogens.

I will ask our veterinarians to weigh in on this issue, starting with you, Dr. Weese, and then going to the CVMA. If you have contradictory positions, I'd like to hear from you both. This is important

for us to understand as a committee. There are such huge implications to the potential of this risk. I think it's something we need to understand.

Scott, please go ahead.

Dr. J. Scott Weese: There's no absolute with infectious diseases. That's the big issue. We can't say zero. I could say that the risk, apart from mink and COVID, is probably very low. We're not going to see avian influenza introduced by someone walking onto a farm.

There are potential risks; the infectious disease risk actually is much greater to the person who goes on the farm, who may pick up something there. There are risks, and there are always going to be risks when people come in. They're going to be higher if somebody is going from farm to farm. They're going to be higher depending on the type of contact. You don't need long or prolonged contact; you need the right bacteria and virus parasite for transmission. However, the odds of a person bringing that in are really low.

We're certainly not going to say it's zero; I'm going to say it's quite low. There are other more important reasons for preventing trespass than biosecurity, even though I think biosecurity still is an important issue.

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you.

We do know that farm-to-farm movement of activists did occur, from an Abbotsford hog farm to an Alberta turkey farm. That is something that we have already experienced.

Dr. Evans or Dr. Ceelen, would you like to weigh in, please?

Dr. Brian Evans: I would echo to a large degree what Scott said. We talked earlier about lessons learned. One lesson everyone should learn when you're talking about infectious diseases is that you never say "never" and you never say "always". That's the reality of the species interaction with various pathogens.

Again, I believe that what we're talking about from a biosecurity and animal disease perspective is what we refer to as a low-probability, high-consequence event. As I say, we had the experience in Canada of foot-and-mouth in Saskatchewan. Whether it was infected clothing or boots that introduced the foot-and-mouth virus in material adhering to the clothing or whether, as has also been reported, an infected sausage got dropped into a feed trough and was consumed by pigs, either way, the individual was on the farm for reasonable periods of time working with those animals.

I gave the example of influenza in 2009 and the 22 countries that had it in swine populations, and the five countries that ended up with it in turkey populations—

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you. For mink, I think it would be the same thing. Mink and COVID would be along the same lines.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Epp. Thank you, Dr. Evans.

We'll move on to Mr. Blois for five minutes.

Go ahead, Mr. Blois.

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

I'll start with Mr. de Graaf because he's the hometown fella on the committee, being from the Annapolis Valley.

Nick, let me thank you for your leadership here locally through Chicken Farmers of Canada. You talked about some of the work that's already ongoing.

I know that we have a good relationship. Maybe we're fortunate that there haven't been some of these events in our neck of the woods. Has there been a high incidence of these types of sit-ins that you've alluded to, or have we largely escaped that in this area right now?

Mr. Nick de Graaf: If you're talking specifically about Nova Scotia, I would say that we've probably sidestepped that. That's why this interests me so much. At the end of the day, if it's across the country, there's no easy spot to go to, so to speak. That's what my concern is, for sure.

Mr. Kody Blois: I know that we're fortunate in the sense that there haven't been a whole lot of incidents of this, but when you speak to your other producers across the country, do they explain what they do? I can only imagine that I'm a farmer and that I look out my window and see that there's a large group of people who may be going into my barn, not knowing what this could do to my livelihood.

Do they explain what they normally would do? Do they call the police? Do you have any experience that you might have offhand from your fellow members?

• (1620)

Mr. Nick de Graaf: Yes, just from conversations.

The first thing is that there are plenty of signs about biosecurity on a chicken farm. They're there. They're loud. They're right in front of you at the driveway. What's happening here? Why are these people ignoring the signs? Most people obey signs.

Then, from what I understand, it's to call the police, and then the police don't know what to do, really. I think that's probably the answer to your question right there.

Mr. Kody Blois: Just for your benefit, Nick, we've been hearing different testimony. Part of the challenge, of course, is understanding that although it is laudable to try to avoid the spread of a biosecurity risk resulting from the activity of individuals who are trespassing on a farm, the question, as Mr. Evans has talked about, is the compliance and how we enforce it and what tools might already exist. We've heard from other members that perhaps police may or may not have the tools available to them.

Can I ask about the CFIA? This has been a key piece of the testimony, as well—its ability to enforce this. I know that the CFIA, for example, would go to Victor Oulton's farm because there's a processing element. How often does the CFIA show up at your particular farm, or would it be more like at Eden Valley, at the processing side?

Mr. Nick de Graaf: With regard to the CFIA on my farm, as a chicken producer, I don't think they've ever been here in person. I do also have an on-farm feed mill, and they do come to audit that, so they are on farm for that, for a different reason. Mostly they are at the processing facility. They are not hands-on here.

Mr. Kody Blois: Okay, I appreciate that. One of the things that I think could be a recommendation from this committee in the days ahead is how we can educate people about some of the biosecurity risks.

I want to go to some other witnesses, but first I'll go on record and thank you, Nick, for your leadership locally.

Mr. Evans, you talked about compliance. We just heard from Mr. de Graaf that the CFIA is more at the processing level. You spoke about this a little earlier, but can you just...? I have 35 seconds here that I want to allocate to you. Can you talk about some of the challenges you see in terms of having that handled through that agency?

Dr. Brian Evans: Thank you, honourable member.

Quite quickly, I would say that it would be a challenge for the CFIA at two levels.

First, as I say, the type of training that you're looking for in investigating a potential situation related to a trespass is an entirely different set of skills than what is normally applied in either a food safety investigation or an animal health disease investigation because of, as I said before, the difference between a deliberate threat versus something that's accidental or incidental.

The other component—the challenge for the CFIA—has been mentioned. The CFIA is not on farms every day. Unfortunately, the CFIA's normal situation to be on a farm is usually as part of an investigation. Coming back to what Henry and others have testified, so much of this is about private veterinarian involvement with producers at the farm level to sculpt their plans specifically to the risk and hazards that are known to exist on that farm.

Mr. Kody Blois: Mr. Evans, I have about 15 or 20 seconds left. I guess I would say, if I could table this, is that part of the element is strict liability versus absolute liability. Where this is a strict liability offence, there has to be some level of intent, notwithstanding Mr. de Graaf's comments about some of the signage and awareness. I think that's an important element. Perhaps you can speak on that if someone else asks the question.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Unfortunately, we're out of time.

Thank you, Mr. Blois, and thank you, Dr. Evans.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Perron, the floor is yours for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much.

Ms. Bishop-Spencer, I believe you mentioned earlier that you are seeing an increase in incursions on farms. Could you confirm that for me?

Then can you tell me why current legislation does not seem to be effective in combatting the phenomenon?

[English]

Ms. Lisa Bishop-Spencer: Yes, there has been an increase in on-farm protests, and it's new. It's something that's a new kind of phenomenon with respect to protesting. We believe wholeheartedly that people have the right to protest and to peacefully demonstrate in a public space, but once these actions start to breach private property, these kinds of protests and demonstrations need to be illegal and punishable, because they threaten the health and safety of our farm animals, our producers and other stakeholders.

I think the answer to your question is yes, there are more protests, and I think the reason that we're not prepared for them is that it's a new kind of phenomenon. It's something that we hadn't seen within the sector or within our industry until the last few years. We're trying to figure out what tools we need in order to be able to deal with it, and this is one of them that we believe will allow people to ensure that our farms are protected.

• (1625)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Okay.

Basically, Bill C-205 would be of use to you and would give you an additional inspection tool.

Could you now tell us about the effect that this has on the producers who are victims of these incursions? You say that the number of incursions has increased. How do the producers who are victims of them behave after the incursions? What are the consequences?

[English]

Ms. Lisa Bishop-Spencer: Nick, do you want to talk about the impact that you've heard about from our farmers on that or did you want me to answer?

Me? Okay.

We have had experiences of farms being trespassed upon. It's a very emotional experience. You're a farmer and you have your daily life. Imagine waking up and finding 30 protesters in your barn. The first question becomes, what is the biosecurity? What are we going to be doing about the health of my birds? What do I do and how do I handle it?

It becomes a very stressful event for the farmer, and the farmer doesn't know what to do. Usually the first step there is to try to call the local law enforcement to see what they can do. We've had—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bishop. I'm sorry. We're out of time.

Ms. Lisa Bishop-Spencer: That's fine.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. MacGregor for two and a half minutes.

Go ahead, Mr. MacGregor.

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

I'd like to thank all of our witnesses for helping to contribute to our study of this bill.

I will turn my question to the Chicken Farmers of Canada.

When you look at federal statutes such as the Criminal Code or even the Health of Animals Act, you see that they always come into play after the fact. They are reactive laws. Someone has to have committed an offence and has to have been found guilty, and then the appropriate punishment is applied. I agree very much that people have to be held accountable for their actions and that there has to be a level of punishment that is appropriate to the crime, but I guess what I'm interested in is if you have any ideas on how we can be proactive.

Are there things the federal government can be doing to help bridge the divide that exists between a certain section of the Canadian public and our hard-working agricultural community, so that there's a more proactive attempt to educate on how farms operate, how important biosecurity is and the very strong standards of care that are in place because farmers depend on healthy livestock in order to have good incomes in the end? Are there any ideas that you could contribute on this?

Ms. Lisa Bishop-Spencer: I have one. I think what Nick talked about at the very beginning of the presentation was the concept of having FPT recognition of our animal care programs. Many of the animal care sectors throughout Canada, if not most, have very vigorous and in many cases mandatory on-farm food safety programs that do have an FPT protocol to back them up.

If we could have something similar for our mandatory animal care programs, that would give us a lot of leverage and a lot of powerful messaging to consumers that the story of animal care in Canada is not the nightmare that they think it is, and that in fact we have an excellent system in Canada that is not only mandatory but enforceable and is something that has teeth. That FPT recognition would allow us to do a great deal of that.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you so much.

I think I'll end there, Chair, in the dying seconds of my time. Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks.

This will end our first panel.

I'd really like to thank Mr. Scott Weese from the University of Guelph; Dr. Henry Ceelen, veterinarian; Dr. Brian Evans; Nick de Graaf, first vice-chair of Chicken Farmers of Canada; and Lisa Bishop-Spencer.

Thank you all for this very interesting testimony and your insight on the bill we're studying now.

We'll suspend for a few minutes to bring in the new panel. We'll be right back.

Thank you all.

• (1625)

(Pause)

• (1630)

The Chair: Welcome back, everyone.

Welcome to our new panel.

[*Translation*]

In our second group of witnesses, we will be hearing from Jorge Correa, Vice-President, Market Access and Technical Affairs for the Canadian Meat Council.

Welcome to the committee, Mr. Correa.

From the Turkey Farmers of Canada, we have Darren Ference, Chair of the Board, and Phil Boyd, Executive Director.

Welcome, both.

From the Union des producteurs agricoles, we have Marcel Groleau, General President, and Annie Tessier, Assistant Coordinator, Marketing and Group Support.

Mr. Groleau, it is a pleasure to see you again. Ms. Tessier is also joining us today. Welcome to you as well.

Each group will have five minutes for your opening statements.

We will start with Mr. Correa, from the Canadian Meat Council.

Please go ahead, Mr. Correa, you have the floor for five minutes.

● (1635)

[*English*]

Mr. Jorge Correa (Vice-President, Market Access and Technical Affairs, Canadian Meat Council): Thank you very much.

The Canadian Meat Council, or CMC, would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on private member's Bill C-205, introduced by member of Parliament John Barlow. It would address the issues of safeguarding the biosecurity of Canadian farms and the safety of the food supply.

For over a century, the CMC has represented Canada's federally licensed meat packers, meat processors and goods and services suppliers for the meat industry. The Canadian red meat industry represents over \$20 billion to the Canadian economy and supports 280,000 jobs across Canada.

We agree with the premise of this bill that protecting Canada's food supply is critical. Viruses such as African swine fever; classical swine fever; bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or BSE; foot-and-mouth disease and avian influenza pose a real threat to Canadian agriculture. These biosecurity threats can decimate herds and flocks and devastate our industries and economy. Strengthening biosecurity measures for trespassers is something farmers, ranchers, food processors and farm groups all support.

The safety of food is vital to all consumers and food businesses. For the meat industry, food safety is a priority. We want consumers to be confident that the meat they buy and eat is what they expect and that it will cause them no harm.

Food safety starts at the farm and continues through the whole harvesting process so that manufacturing companies can ensure that the meat has not compromised food safety. Providing any unsuitable foods or liquids to livestock at any stage of the harvesting process may result in intentional contamination of a food product that may cause harm to the consumer or to a private company.

There has also been a series of provincial legislation that addresses the safety risks of people interfering with livestock in transport by prohibiting stopping, obstructing or interfering with a motor vehicle transporting farm animals. Some provinces have in place, or are in the process of adopting, a trespass and protecting food safety act to protect food supply, farmers, agri-food businesses and farm animals from the risk of trespass activities.

The Canadian meat industry is the most intensely regulated and inspected industry in the world, and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency inspectors are present during every minute of operation to ensure compliance on the handling of livestock, from unloading and through the harvesting process, to make sure that food safety regulations are followed. The meat industry is exceeding animal welfare and food safety regulations, as those are essential for the sustainability of our industry. If CFIA identifies humane handling or food safety problems, it may result in the issuance of corrective actions required, or if any significant problems are flagged, they can pursue plant operation suspension and administrative monetary penalties.

Meat plants not only work to meet federal regulations but also support the on-farm codes of practice under the National Farm Animal Care Council. Its employees are trained and certified under the Canadian Livestock Transport certification program or other similar U.S. certification programs. The supply chain from farm to slaughter has guidelines and certifications to maintain high animal welfare standards and the necessary biosecurity and food safety practices to protect those food animals from disease or contaminants under the on-farm food safety programs.

Animal agriculture production is the basis of our industry, and the biosecurity of these farms and ranches must be protected. Protestors interfering in the operations of farms, transporters or food processing businesses can lead to serious unintended consequences that endanger the animals they seek to protect. It's important to ensure that the animals that enter our supply chain are healthy and not exposed to outside factors. This ensures that our members can continue to safeguard the meat we produce and continue to provide the world and Canadians with the safe, nutritious meat they expect from our industry.

In brief, the Canadian Meat Council and its members are in support of Bill C-205 and the proposed amendments that would provide increased security to allow our members to operate without the danger of outside interference by well-meaning protestors or activists. Such interference is a danger to the food animals, the professional workers in the supply chain, the food products and potentially the protestors themselves.

I will finish with that, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Correa.

Now we will go to *Les Éleveurs de dindon*.

Whoever wants to take the floor for five minutes, go ahead.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

I am now turning to the Turkey Farmers of Canada. Who wants to take the floor?

[*English*]

Mr. Ference or Mr. Boyd, you have five minutes to do your statement.

Mr. Phil Boyd (Executive Director, Turkey Farmers of Canada): Mr. Ference will speak.

Mr. Darren Ference (Chair of the Board, Turkey Farmers of Canada): Thank you. On behalf of the Turkey Farmers of Canada, I'd like to thank you for the invitation to appear before the House of Commons standing committee regarding Bill C-205.

I'm Darren Ference, and I own and operate a turkey and chicken operation in Alberta. I also raise cattle and crop about 3,500 acres of crops. I have represented Alberta at the Turkey Farmers of Canada since 2013 and was elected chair in 2018.

I'm joined here with Phil Boyd today. He's the executive director of the Turkey Farmers of Canada.

Today, TFC would like to show our support for Bill C-205, introduced by MP John Barlow. We feel the bill will help prevent unlawful entry to farms and breaching of biosecurity protocols and in doing so protect Canadian farmers against the negative ramifications of activism on the farm. This is an issue that has become increasingly prevalent and of concern for many turkey farmers and the whole agriculture industry.

About one and a half years ago, a turkey farmer in Alberta entered his barn to find over 30 individuals from an activist organization had broken in. Additionally, the activists had made sure that the RCMP and press were called and were on site. This was a huge shock to the farmer. Imagine if you woke up in the morning to find a group of strangers sitting at your kitchen table or showed up to work and had them sitting all around your office on the floor.

Despite being on private property and breaching biosecurity protocols, the group demanded turkeys to be released to them before they would leave. The turkey farmer handled the situation well, being open and honest and pointed out the on-farm programs in place for the welfare of birds.

However, the situation was difficult for both the farmer and the turkeys in his care and points to the absolute importance of this bill.

Break-ins not only breach farm biosecurity but also negatively impact the farmers and their farm families and have ramifications on their feeling of safety and well-being. Canadian turkey farmers take great care to ensure the humane treatment of our turkeys while providing safe, high-quality food to consumers. As mentioned, the Canadian turkey industry has two mandatory on-farm programs that ensure Canadian turkey is raised with rigorous standards of food safety and animal welfare. Both these programs are reviewed annually and audited by qualified on-farm auditors.

The TFC on-farm food safety program focuses on controlling pathogens on-farm, minimizing disease transmissions to turkey flocks, and ensures that marketed turkeys are free of medication and other chemical residues. This program received full government recognition under the CFIA food safety recognition program, showing national consistency in terms of food safety [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

The TFC flock care program is recognized as following the NFACC animal care assessment framework. The process involves a diverse range of stakeholders that, among many others, includes researchers, veterinarians and animal welfare group representation.

This program verifies Canadian turkey farmers' commitment to ensuring the proper care and respectful treatment of our birds and that the programs are reviewed by a third party process, including third party audits. The finding of the third party auditors has consistently been that the national flock care program was implemented effectively and maintained on an ongoing basis and that the animal care measures are consistently applied.

These on-farm programs lay out strict biosecurity procedures applicable to farm personnel and visitors to prevent the spread of disease in barns and to meet animal welfare and food safety standards. This includes signage on the farm, locking barns, foot and clothing biosecurity and the tracking of visitors. Those trespassing on farms are putting these protocols at risk, potentially exposing the turkeys to unknown pathogens and increased stress.

Farmers take great care to maintain the atmosphere in the barns to keep birds safe and barns clean and to mitigate stressors. When individuals enter a farm property without authorization, they are directly risking the health and the welfare of these birds in the barn.

• (1645)

In conclusion, I would like to once again express my appreciation of the invitation to appear before the AGRI committee. I must reiterate the importance of the bill for our industry and I would ask the members of the agriculture committee to carefully consider it.

We recognize some provinces are undertaking work in this regard; however, national consistency is very important to ensure all farmers across Canada receive the same protection.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Ference.

[*Translation*]

We now move to the Union des producteurs agricoles.

Mr. Groleau or Ms. Tessier, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Marcel Groleau (General President, Union des producteurs agricoles): Committee members, Mr. Chair, we are also very pleased to have been invited to testify before you.

Rather than dealing with aspects of health and biosecurity, given that that has already been fully discussed and that there has been a good deal of eloquent testimony since this committee began its work on the issue, let me instead tell you about one particular case.

Two years ago, an incursion took place on a pig farm, Les Porreg Inc. I am going to tell you about the consequences of that incursion for the company. First of all, people came to a production site with no houses nearby. They were therefore able to get in easily without being seen. They arrived early one morning. The doors to the building were locked, but they managed to find one that enabled them to get in. Once they were in, they opened all the other doors. It was in the winter, so it was cold and they let the temperature inside the building drop. That morning, they also prevented the animals from being fed. In addition, they put water in the generator's gas tank. Naturally, no one noticed that until the gas was analyzed.

After publishing photographs of the consequences of that incursion, the Grégoire family received threats. They were affected psychologically, because people from all around the world were sending them threats and insults.

After the incursion, the mortality rate in the herd increased and some sows had to be aborted. The family also had difficulty in insuring their company again. The insurer did not want to renew their policy. The Union des producteurs agricoles intervened and we put pressure on the insurer to continue the company's level of insurance.

It all had consequences for the company, which suffered significant losses. To be compensated, it will have to sue the demonstrators and try to prove that the losses incurred were really caused by the incursion. This will be very difficult to do. That is why it's important for Bill C-205 to be passed and for the consequences for demonstrators entering farms to be increased. The young woman

who described it at the press conference was still crying as a result, several weeks after the incident.

The consequences are therefore extremely difficult for producers going through situations of this kind. Those who perpetrate the incursions suffer few consequences, simply because no legislation involves a penalty for the incursions when damage cannot be proved. They are given a little slap on the wrist and asked not to do it again. But the current laws in Quebec provide for no serious consequences for incursions into a farm or a residence when no vandalism takes place or when no offences can be proved.

Recently, in the Estrie, there was also an incursion on a dairy farm. That case involved two individuals who tried to free the cows and send them outside. The farm was close to the road and there was no fence. What happens if a cow is hit by a vehicle? What happens if a child is injured in such a collision? I don't need to paint you a picture of the aftermath of a collision with a cow.

That is why incursions must absolutely be censured. Hence the importance of the bill that you are currently studying and the fines that it provides for the offence.

• (1650)

Setting all the issues of biosecurity aside, just think of the human beings who are the victims of these incursions. There truly is a human cost.

In conclusion, may I suggest that Bill C-205 simplify the proposal for section 9.1 in the Health of Animals Act to make it even clearer—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Groleau. Unfortunately, the time is up.

Mr. Marcel Groleau: Will I have the opportunity to come back to this, perhaps during the time for questions?

The Chair: Yes, of course.

We will now start our time for questions.

[*English*]

I will start with the sponsor of the bill, Mr. Barlow, for six minutes.

Go ahead, Mr. Barlow.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks for everybody's testimony.

I think, from the stories we're hearing from Mr. Ference and Mr. Groleau, you understand why this legislation is so important, not only for biosecurity but for the mental health of our farmers as well.

Mr. Ference, I'll start with you.

Mr. Tschetter is a constituent, and I know how this impacted him and his family. You mentioned something that I thought was really quite interesting, and we heard this from the chicken farmers in the previous panels as well. We're seeing these incidents of activism increase, but these activists—it happened in Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec as well—were the ones who actually phoned the RCMP, because they knew the consequences would be minimal if anything. To me it shows that the current system we have right now is not suitable. There isn't enough of a deterrent.

Do you see the fines and penalties within Bill C-205 as a strong enough deterrent to send a message to those activist groups and those people who are doing these actions and unlawfully protesting on private property?

Mr. Darren Ference: It's definitely an improvement on what we have, because with what we have, there is no deterrent for them. This will give some consequences, and hopefully there will be a deterrent in that.

They're calling the police because the police weren't trained on how to get rid of them and don't know how to deal with the biosecurity, and there are no consequences for it.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Ference—and maybe, Mr. Groleau, you want to chime on this really quickly as well—we're talking about biosecurity here, which is an important element. How important is showing national leadership in standing up for the safety of our farm families as well as their mental health? How important is that as part of this legislation?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Groleau: For us, it is essential. As Mr. Ference was saying, we really appreciate the fact that it applies all across Canada and gives some minimal protection to producers in provinces that do not yet have regulations.

In terms of fines, I believe that one of the items that should be added is that the fines will be applied to each individual involved in an incursion rather than to the group. I don't know whether that is currently the case.

Certainly, an incursion like the one that happened on the Porgreg farm, for example, causes a lot of disruption. I can tell you that 25 people getting into a pork farm is extremely troubling. The consequences are much more serious than if two people get into a dairy farm, for example. I believe that the offence should be severely penalized and that other fines should be added to correspond to the number of people taking part.

[*English*]

Mr. John Barlow: Thanks, Mr. Groleau, for that.

That is included in the legislation. There are two different sets of fines. There is one for the individuals who are protesting, but the stronger one is for that organization or that group. Whether it's PETA or Extinction Rebellion or those types of groups, there is a stronger fine for them. Those two different tiers exist in the legislation, but I appreciate your addressing that aspect as well.

I wanted to turn to Mr. Correa. I think talking about the processing side is also important. We've seen what's happened with the cyber-attack on JBS recently and the shutdowns within the processing supply chain with COVID. Cargill, here in my riding, was shut down for 14 days. There was a backlog of 130,000 animals.

I want to ask you two quick questions, and do your best to answer them. We've seen blockades, or people feeding animals when they're in transport. Would a processing facility turn away an entire load if they aren't sure what's been tampered with on that load? Also, what are the security or safety concerns about protesters around the machinery and the trucks, which certainly impacts the processing plants as well?

● (1655)

Mr. Jorge Correa: Thank you for the question. I'll just respond to the first question.

For any contaminant that can be provided to those food animals that is unknown, the CFIA inspector would be in the capacity to refuse the entry of those animals into our slaughterhouses. It's under regulation. For example, there could be chemicals taken by those animals, or even antibiotics or something that we suspect those animals had as a contaminant, and they can be refused entry to the slaughterhouse.

Mr. John Barlow: Right, so if it looks like someone's trying to water pigs, for example, you don't know what they are giving them, so that entire truckload of animals could be refused, costing the producer significantly by having that load turned away.

Mr. Correa, what are some of the concerns the processors would have in terms of the public unlawfully entering the facility grounds or operating or protesting around these trucks and heavy machinery?

I have been inside Cargill. I know what that looks like and the biosecurity concerns that are there. What are some of the security concerns that the processors would have on that element?

Mr. Jorge Correa: All the people around animals and around vehicles or equipment are professionals. All are fully trained to manipulate or handle animals or equipment.

This equipment and these vehicles are extremely dangerous for people and dangerous also for animals if they are not manipulated well.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Correa. I'm sorry. We're out of time.

Mr. Ellis, you have six minutes.

Mr. Neil Ellis (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): I guess my first question would be to Marcel. He spoke about the trespassing court case that happened two years ago. He touched on the court case, but he didn't go into any details of what the outcome of the case was.

If he knows, I would like to know if any of the charges did stick, and which ones.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Groleau: The owners of the farm decided not to pursue legal proceedings because they did not want to continue with a presence on social media and to be the object of threats, as had been the case beforehand. These groups, which I call terrorist groups, operate so as to frighten their victims. It would have been very difficult for the owners to prove beyond any doubt that they had suffered damages. What it would have cost them may well have been in addition to the losses they were already incurring.

However, the Union des producteurs agricoles, the UPA, sought an injunction so that the people who had taken part in that incursion would not be able to perpetrate others. We obtained a temporary injunction to start with. It became permanent as we waited for the judge to subsequently hear the UPA's application. That application was for demonstrations to be prohibited less than 250m from a farm. However, the injunction applies only to the demonstrators who were on the Porgreg farm.

I wanted you to see that it is basically impossible to prove damages to the people who are the victims of these incursions.

• (1700)

[English]

Mr. Neil Ellis: Do you know of any other cases in which charges have been laid successfully?

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Groleau: No, none to my knowledge.

[English]

Mr. Neil Ellis: Darren, you touched on a few things, but I want you to walk me through what type of protocol you have now for farm protester unlawful entry. Is there a standard protocol that Turkey Farmers of Canada has?

Mr. Darren Ference: We went over the protocol. I know that B.C. and Alberta went over the protocol with all their farmers to push forward on how to deal with it. TFC was working with all of our provincial boards to make sure we had a protocol that was consistent across the country on how to handle it.

Mr. Neil Ellis: Would current trespassing laws apply for any of the trespassing that happens now?

As another question, what are the recourses now if someone intentionally makes a farm animal sick? Are there any recourses now that you guys have in your tool box?

Mr. Darren Ference: I don't believe that any of the current trespassing laws in the national.... I know Alberta has brought in a new trespassing law that very much mirrors or is very similar to this bill, but this bill protects us right across the country and doesn't expose certain farmers and protect other farmers.

I think it's important to have a national one that covers nationally, which Bill C-205 will do.

Mr. Neil Ellis: I'll just touch on that. I think Ontario also has an act in place.

Do you know if there have been any charges on those acts? I know the Ontario act was 2020. I'm not sure when the B.C. act

went into place. I believe Alberta has one also. Do you know if they've been successful?

Mr. Darren Ference: I don't know if there are any charges on the acts. I know there was a charge from the trespass that occurred prior to the act, and that's what drove the act in Alberta, but I don't know the progress of where that is.

Mr. Neil Ellis: I have one last question, and I'll give it to you, Darren. Don't feel that I'm picking on you here, but this question was asked already of Marcel. Mr. Barlow explained in his testimony to the committee on May 6, 2021, that protecting the mental health of farmers was a key motivation for introducing Bill C-205. I wanted you to touch on this. If enacted, would this bill improve the mental health of farmers? If so, how?

Mr. Darren Ference: This act would improve the mental health of farmers. Having all these people come in is stressful for the farmer. It's like invading your home or your place of business. Your home is your private place. Our farms are our private place, no different than our homes. If we have 30 people sitting there demanding things, it is very stressful to deal with. Our animals are actually a part of us. When the animals become stressed, we're also stressed. This would help improve mental health.

Mr. Neil Ellis: Thank you for your testimony.

Chair, it's over to you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Perron, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for joining us.

I am particularly glad to see Mr. Ference and Mr. Groleau. We have not seen each other for a long time.

Mr. Groleau, I have asked various witnesses a number of questions about the shortcomings in the current legislation. I was quite pleased to hear you deal with the subject at length in your introduction.

Was it complicated to obtain the permanent injunction that you did obtain? Pursuant to that injunction, what will be the consequences if one of the demonstrators is not in compliance?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: There will be severe penalties. If I recall correctly, if demonstrators do not abide by the injunction, they will be in breach of a court injunction and could even be imprisoned as a result. That is the legislation that applies when an injunction prohibits someone from carrying out certain actions or limits those actions. It could even lead to imprisonment.

Mr. Yves Perron: The UPA launched that process and you are a large organization. But is it realistic to think that individuals can protect themselves by applying for the same thing? I don't think so.

Mr. Marcel Groleau: No.

But, as I mentioned, we were ready to help the Porgreg farm. The Union des producteurs agricoles has a professional defence fund to support measures that producers might initiate. We can then create a body of case law that will allow us to better protect producers in general. Now, the owners of the Porgreg farm did not want to keep fighting. They wanted to look after their wounds rather than to seek vengeance or try to settle scores. Above all, they wanted to disappear from social media, given all the threats that they had received.

• (1705)

Mr. Yves Perron: Could you talk to us about the processes in place? I am trying to get that clear. Some have told us that, if the bill is passed, people who are concerned about mistreatment on a particular farm will no longer be able to report it. However, there are ways. Can you tell us about them?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: Of course.

First, I would say that most cases of the mistreatment of animals in Quebec happen with people who are not farmers. They are dog breeders, kennel owners or horse owners who do not have the means to look after their horses properly. The Quebec Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the MAPAQ, which is responsible for those matters in Quebec, records cases of animal mistreatment principally among owners of that kind.

There is no way that agricultural producers are going to mistreat their animals because they bear the direct costs of doing so. Our income comes from the proper treatment we provide to our animals, not from mistreatment. The people who say that they have to be able to report such situations have to understand that.

The activists who complain about the meat industry are against the meat industry, period.

Under current legislation, veterinarians are required to report producers if they observe mistreatment on any farm. All producers use the services of veterinarians. If agronomists go onto a farm and see mistreatment, they are required to report it. We already have oversight in this area and the legislation already allows for action in such cases.

Mr. Yves Perron: If people had suspicions, could they contact the MAPAQ?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: Sure, they could. Inspectors from the department would then go to the premises.

Mr. Yves Perron: You brought up mental health a lot in your statement. I would like us to go into it a little further.

Are people afraid that, at some point, an incident might turn bad? I'm thinking of someone who wakes up in the morning and sees 20 people on his private land and does not handle the situation well. That could have harmful consequences.

I for one am afraid of that, and it's not often mentioned when the issue is being studied.

Have you discussed it in your organization?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: Yes. In addition, we have sent notes to all farmers with a view to preventing situations like that. We have told them that, if ever that situation happens on their farms, they must

not try to deal with the situation themselves and they must call the police instead. We have given them an entire procedure to follow. We ask them specifically to take photographs so that people can be identified.

However, Mr. Perron, we are certainly not able to control the reactions that each and every farmer might have.

You are a farmer, Mr. Lehoux, and you know farmers. You know that not everyone would react by keeping cool. I am sure that some would tell people to get off their land immediately. All kinds of things can happen in situations like that. Emotions can get the better of people.

Yes, we are certainly afraid of that. I even feel that it is what the activists are looking for. If they can capitalize on a situation to decry violence on the part of a farmer as well, you can be sure that they will.

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much.

Mr. Ference, I am glad to be talking to you and seeing you. You referred to an incident where 30 or so people made their way onto a farm. We do not have a lot of time but, quickly, how did that end up? Mr. Groleau has just said that farmers are told not to deal with the situation themselves, but that is what the farmer you were referring to did. He tried to deal with the situation.

How did it end up?

[English]

The Chair: Please reply quickly, Mr. Ference.

Mr. Darren Ference: The farmer arrived at the barn and opened the door to find 30 people lined up down the wall. Those people had already called the RCMP. The RCMP came and didn't really know what biosecurity was. The RCMP ended up outside, and the people were demanding the release of a turkey. Our protocol is to never release. I believe that at that time we hadn't gone over it with the farmer, and I believe he did release a bird to their care, which could not be put back in.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ference.

Now we'll go to Mr. MacGregor for six minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Chair.

We can broadly define trespassing as unlawful entry onto private land. I think it's mostly contained within provincial legislation, because under our Constitution the provinces have exclusive jurisdiction in making laws in relation to property and civil rights. The criminal law is engaged when we have an identifiable harm against public health, which is why the CFIA exists as a federal agency.

Mr. Ference, you made some comments about how provincial laws against trespass are not really working. Can you broaden that point? You said that police have had a hard time following through with charges. Can you illuminate that a bit more so we can understand it?

Mr. Darren Ference: We're talking about the trespass that occurred here. The trespassing bill had not yet been brought forward in Alberta. It was brought in afterward because of this circumstance. Then you could have the "no trespassing" sign, but people could come in from any point. Before it, the farmer who was trespassed against had to press the charges and be convinced to press the charges. There was no distinct law to automatically charge people without the farmer pressing charges.

It's important to have these laws in place to set things out so that if you violate them, you have to go. The law in Alberta now has stronger penalties toward the organization that organizes trespasses, and it's very similar to Bill C-205. It's important that we get consistency across the country. I was listening earlier to some of the chicken farmers. You don't want people to go to an easier spot to target farms.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: You made a comment earlier about the police and their training on biosecurity issues. What do you think the police agencies' current understanding is of biosecurity?

Mr. Darren Ference: When we went through it as part of the Alberta board, there was very little understanding from the police on what biosecurity was. They entered barns without any biosecurity protocols. They did not put on any biosecurity clothing or clean their footwear or anything else when they were going in, which is standard in the feed industry. Anybody who's associated with a barn or with an operation would do that. They had no understanding of that, and they just entered to remove the trespassers. I think a lot needs to be done there.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I'm asking that question because I think the police have a very good understanding of what trespassing is: being unlawfully present on private property and not leaving when the owner says to leave. The CFIA is an organization that intimately understands the concept of biosecurity. They have already testified before this committee that if Bill C-205 were to come into effect, they would not have the resources to take on the added responsibility.

How do we fix that? If Bill C-205 does become part of the Health of Animals Act, how do we fix the situation if police decide to apply charges? Would they need to have CFIA officials with them to give them an understanding of biosecurity? I'm wondering if you have a solution to how we fix the resource problem in implementing the law and enforcing it.

Mr. Darren Ference: I think it could be some simple training on some simple biosecurity practices. In the rural or agricultural areas, it should be part of the RCMP training.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: That's good to know.

Maybe I'll open the floor up to other witnesses, if they want to chime in.

We received a brief from Humane Canada, which of course is the national network of all of the different humane societies in each

province. They've made some recommendations. They would like to see the federal government provide stronger support for the National Farm Animal Care Council's work to create standards of care, as well as increased financial support.

Do you think that would go some way toward being proactive in providing some much-needed education to the Canadian public about how farm animals are looked after?

• (1715)

Mr. Darren Ference: Is that for me?

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Maybe you can start, and if any of our other witnesses want to chime in, they can.

Mr. Darren Ference: Phil, do you want to go ahead? You have your hand up.

Mr. Phil Boyd: Thanks very much, Darren.

Thanks, Mr. MacGregor. It's an important question.

By way of context, we have to remember that the people who break and enter into a barn are animal activists. They're not the general population that cares about animal welfare. I'm not sure that what Humane Canada is proposing would address or go any way towards mitigating the kind of activist activity we've seen.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I see, Mr. Groleau, that you want to comment.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Groleau: I would add one comment, Mr. MacGregor, if I may.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Of course.

Mr. Marcel Groleau: The vast majority of Canadian livestock sectors have already adopted codes of good practice in conjunction with the National Farm Animal Care Council, with veterinarians and with organizations working for animal welfare.

In the dairy sector, milk producers have to abide by the code set out in the Quality Milk program. The same goes for other sectors, including the pork sector. That work has already largely been done.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Groleau.

[*English*]

Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

[*Translation*]

We now go to the second round of questions.

Mr. Lehoux, you have five minutes.

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for joining us this afternoon.

My first question is for you, Mr. Groleau. You have placed a lot of emphasis on the psychological impact on the farming families of these incursions onto farms. You spoke at length about the Grégoire family and then you talked about a dairy farm in the Estrie. Those incidents had consequences later.

Could you tell us a little more about that, Mr. Groleau?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: The farmer in the Estrie managed to stop them, as they were only two. So it was easier to limit what they were doing. Only two animals ended up being driven outside the barn. So the damage was limited.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: But there was another case that was reported to us at a previous meeting. Those farmers were a young couple, who had a pig operation for about a year. After the incursion they had on their property, they left farming. That's no real incentive for the next generation of farmers.

Mr. Marcel Groleau: Exactly.

I would also like to bring up the point by saying that Bill C-205 is certainly not about protecting farming families. It is about protecting the health and well-being of the animals. I feel that is important, and you in the federal government have the tool with which you can respond. If your response is for the health and well-being of the herd, you will also be protecting the health of farming families.

As for the stress, we as farmers are all concerned that it may happen to us. It's inevitable. No one can predict when or how it will happen, but we know that it can happen to us. We are under that stress as well.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Various dairy and pork producers in Quebec have lived through such experiences. As a group, the Union des producteurs agricoles is very well aware that Bill C-205 may be passed. Do they look favourably on that?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: Yes, that is why you on the committee have heard from representatives of Canadian pork and milk producers as well as from other groups. We all feel that it is important to discourage this kind of behaviour, in the interests of health and biosecurity.

We are not opposed to people demonstrating. Demonstrating is a basic right. The right to demonstrate must even be protected. However, it must be done according to the rules and with regard to private property.

• (1720)

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Do you consider that the fines currently proposed in Bill C-205 are enough to have a deterrent effect?

It must be understood that, with what you have told us about Mr. Grégoire's farm, the impact in the area was very considerable.

Mr. Marcel Groleau: I believe that, if individuals are the target and they are potentially subject to substantial fines, they will think twice before acting in such a way and the organizations in which they are active will not want to put their members in situations that could cause them financial difficulty.

In that sense, I feel that the proposed bill is indeed a deterrent.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Mr. Groleau, you concluded your comments with a proposal. You were talking about the proposed section 9.1 of the Health of Animals Act. What would you like to add or amend?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: Yes, we would amend the proposed section 9.1 by removing the words "or excuse". The section would therefore begin as follows: "No person shall, without lawful authority, enter a building or other enclosed place in which animals are kept..." We would take out: "knowing that...entering such a place could result..." because we do not believe that the words serve any purpose. Instead, we would say: "in order to expose the animals to a disease or toxic substance that is capable of affecting or contaminating them". We would also take out "...or being reckless as to..."

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Will you be able to send us that section as you have amended it, Mr. Groleau?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: Yes, we have it in writing in our brief. We believe that it makes the interpretation of the section even clearer, as it is essential to the bill.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Groleau.

Thank you, Mr. Lehoux.

We now go to Mrs. Bessette.

Mrs. Bessette, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mrs. Lyne Bessette (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for joining us today.

Mr. Groleau, let me start with you.

Mr. Marcel Groleau: Okay.

Mrs. Lyne Bessette: In the case of the Porgreg Inc. pig farm, a report by the Quebec Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the MAPAQ, recently made public by Radio-Canada, reveals that the pigs were living in really deplorable conditions when the group of activists made their way onto the farm. It even seems that an inspector from MAPAQ was sent as a direct response to that incident.

Since you did not mention this in your opening statement, could you please comment on the MAPAQ report?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: You are right, Mrs. Bessette.

Following that incursion and the complaints that were made, MAPAQ indeed inspected the Porgreg farm and asked the farm to make some corrections to the site. That was done and everything is now back in order.

This proves that complaints to MAPAQ are sufficient and that there is no need to intrude. In this case, there were deaths, diseases, abortions and damages. Clearly, no one is forced to go that far in order to register a complaint and get results.

If a complaint had been filed, MAPAQ would have visited the site and the demonstrators would have achieved the same result.

Mrs. Lyne Bessette: Thank you.

The Radio-Canada report also mentioned “scenes of horror” in describing the state the pigs were in. In your opinion, would Bill C-205 reduce the possibility of shedding light on situations of that kind?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: I would like to clarify the term “scenes of horror”. When the cameras arrived, the demonstrators had already been on site for some time. You would see scenes of horror in any pig farm where 30 or so strangers were wandering around, where the animals should have been fed three hours previously but had not been, and where the doors were open and letting in the cold. So it is important to put that report into context.

Bill C-205 is intended to protect farms from incursions that could cause problems for the well-being and health of the animals. To be honest with you, I don't think that the bill would correct the situation that happened on the Porgreg farm.

Mrs. Lyne Bessette: Thank you very much.

When incursions occur on a farm, we see that the farmers often do not file complaints with the authorities.

Mr. Marcel Groleau: That is correct.

Mrs. Lyne Bessette: How would Bill C-205 encourage farmers to take the steps necessary to make sure that those responsible for the incursions are punished?

• (1725)

Mr. Marcel Groleau: In our opinion, Bill C-205 should discourage demonstrators from making their way onto farms. They will have to find other ways to express their opinions, because, if their actions have any impact on the health and biosecurity of the animals or on the farms, or if they cause any damage, there will be significant monetary consequences. There is a deterrent effect. Penalties for traffic offences have been significantly increased and that has had a deterrent effect and led to corrections in behaviour. So penalties are important.

In Quebec, we will continue to work to amend the act dealing with home invasions or farm invasions. In the Civil Code of Quebec, incursions are currently not sufficiently penalized to discourage that kind of behaviour. That would be in addition to the tools we would have under Bill C-205.

Mrs. Lyne Bessette: Thank you very much.

If Mr. Correa and Mr. Ference want to add anything, I will hand the floor over to them.

[English]

Mr. Darren Ference: I just think it's vital that we have this Bill C-205. The majority of farmers are passive, so it's hard to get them to lay a charge. They want to farm and they want to be on their farm. They don't want to be pulled away to go to a criminal court while they're calving or they're seeding. It becomes a hindrance, so it's hard to do that.

This will help deter people from coming there. It won't mean that the farmer necessarily has to press the charges, but with the law, charges can be pressed because the law was broken.

Mrs. Lyne Bessette: Thank you.

[Translation]

Thank you.

I have no further questions, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Bessette.

Mr. Perron, the floor is now yours for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much.

Mr. Ference, I would like to go back to the matter of resources. You said earlier that the police will need to be trained, but people from the Canada Food Inspection Agency are telling us that they will not have the resources they need to enforce the act.

If the bill is passed and the police see that an offence has occurred, would it not be enough to communicate the information, so that the procedure can take its course? Could you tell me your views on that?

[English]

Mr. Darren Ference: If the CFIA doesn't have the resources, I still think the RCMP has the resources. They're our resource in rural Canada. They're in every community. They just need to be properly trained on how to access or enter a farm differently from another business. I think they could efficiently and effectively be our resource for this bill.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much.

Mr. Groleau, do you want to add anything?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: I believe also that there can be collaboration between the Canada Food Inspection Agency, CFIA, and the inspectors from the Quebec Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. There can be a presence in all provinces. The CFIA already has a presence in abattoirs everywhere. Collaboration with provincial agencies also seems desirable.

Mr. Yves Perron: Do you feel that the local force observing the offence would be enough?

According to the wording of the act, it would be.

Mr. Marcel Groleau: If the federal and provincial levels could collaborate, but also transfer responsibilities, as we see in other areas, it would help with the enforcement of not only Bill C-205, but perhaps even aspects of other agreements between the federal government and the provincial government on the whole area of healthy livestock operations.

Mr. Yves Perron: Okay.

You mentioned your proposed amendment and you have included it in your report. We will look at it very carefully.

Would you have anything else to bring up?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: First, let me congratulate Mr. Barlow, who proposed this bill. Thanks to him, we have been able to have the discussion that we are currently having. I don't know whether we will have the time to see the bill passed before the end of the session, because only a short time is left. But I must thank you and ask you to continue this work, regardless of whether it happens in this session or a subsequent session.

• (1730)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Groleau. Thank you, Mr. Perron.

[*English*]

Now we have Mr. MacGregor for two and a half minutes.

Go ahead, Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Chair.

I'll continue with the Turkey Farmers of Canada.

In the existing “Prohibitions” section in the parent act, the Health of Animals Act, where prohibitions are defined, when they deal with how to treat a diseased animal—for example, it's illegal to bring it to market, to conceal it or to let it go out into a pasture—they refer to “no person”, whereas Bill C-205 is using the specific language:

No person shall,

but then it includes:

without lawful authority or excuse

There have been a number of cases in which employees at a farm have been responsible for introducing a biosecurity threat. Is there anything we can do to make sure that every person—no matter whether he or she is a protester or a farm employee—is actually respecting those biosecurity protocols? Is there anything further the federal government can be doing to make sure that any person who's entering a place where animals are kept is observing those strict biosecurity protocols?

Are there any suggestions you might have?

Mr. Darren Ference: I don't have any suggestions on how you can support it. Phil does. I know we have our animal flock care and our on-farm. We're audited by a third party. We're doing all we can do for that.

Phil, do you have more to add?

Mr. Phil Boyd: I do, thanks, Darren.

Mr. MacGregor, I have a couple of points I can offer really quickly.

One, our programs—and they're probably similar to the other programs you've heard discussed at this committee—all have a training component for the farmer and for farm employees. They're mandatory programs, so that training has to happen. There's continuous improvement as far as farm labour is concerned, at least within our sector, as I hear from talking to any of the farmers who have hired employees.

The second thing that's interesting is that we have CFIA accreditation of our on-farm food safety program through an FPT process. We have also asked for that accreditation on our animal care program, but haven't received it yet. That would really reinforce the kinds of things we're trying to address through our testimony on this bill.

As well, Mr. Barlow, the TFC appreciates the work you've put into this and the leadership you've shown on it.

I don't know if that answers your question entirely, but by way of context, training and that kind of accreditation and recognition for the animal welfare component of our programs—it's the same in other sectors—would be meaningful steps.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boyd. Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

That concludes our second hour. I really want to thank our panel.

[*Translation*]

So I thank Jorge Correa, from the Canadian Meat Council, and Darren Ference and Phil Boyd, from the Turkey Farmers of Canada.

[*English*]

Thank you for appearing.

[*Translation*]

I also thank Mr. Groleau, General President, and Annie Tessier, Assistant Coordinator, from the Union des producteurs agricoles.

Thank you all for coming to testify.

[*English*]

The meeting is adjourned.

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