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• (0815)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 73 of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

I will start with a few reminders. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. Just so you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee. Please note that screenshots or taking photos of your screen is not permitted during the meeting.

Welcome to everyone, including all the members. Since we are in public, I would like to welcome to the committee Mr. MacDonald, who represents the riding of Malpeque, Prince Edward Island, and Mr. Carr, who represents the riding of Winnipeg South Centre, Manitoba.

[*English*]

It's great to see everyone back.

Gord Johns, I don't think you're a permanent member, but it's great to see you here on behalf of our good friend Mr. MacGregor.

Colleagues, today we are starting the first study of Bill C-275, an act to amend the Health of Animals Act regarding biosecurity on farms.

The sponsor of that bill is Mr. John Barlow, the member of Parliament for Foothills and someone who sits on our committee. He's no stranger to us, but welcome, Mr. Barlow. It's great to have you here.

The way we're going to proceed with our format is that Mr. Barlow will have approximately five minutes. I'll be relatively lenient, Mr. Barlow, but we're going to give you some time for some opening remarks. We are then going to try to get two rounds of questions in for Mr. Barlow.

We then have three witnesses coming for what I'll call the second hour, but we're hoping to make it a bit more, about 70 or 75 minutes. I'll try to get three rounds of questions in from the respective parties, if possible.

We'll move quickly.

Without further ado, I'll turn it over to you, Mr. Barlow, for approximately five minutes.

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

Good morning, colleagues. It's an honour to be here to discuss my private member's bill, Bill C-275, an act to amend the Health of Animals Act.

This is very similar to a previous bill that we've dealt with, Bill C-205. It basically makes 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...capable of affecting or contaminating" the facility. Simply put, this enactment would apply existing penalties within the act to people who trespass on farms, properties and facilities where animals are kept. It also proposes to double the amount of those existing fines for groups and organizations that encourage unlawful behaviour that puts the biosecurity of our farms and our farmers' livelihoods at risk.

Colleagues, I really need to stress this next point, as I know all of us have probably been receiving emails and phone calls at our offices. I want to make crystal clear what this bill does not do, and I certainly want to address some of the misinformation that the campaigns have been doing for all of us. This bill does not limit an individual's right to peaceful protest on public property. This bill also does not prevent whistle-blowers from coming forward when they are witnesses to practices that jeopardize our food security, our food safety or the welfare of animals.

Canadian farmers and ranchers have a moral and legal obligation to look after their animals. It's simply that clear. In fact, farmers and their employees are obligated to report to the appropriate authorities any wrongdoing they see as they operate in a highly regulated environment. They must follow strict codes of conduct to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all farm animals.

Colleagues, the last time I was here on Bill C-205, I dedicated a lot of time in my discussion to the mental health aspect of this bill. I would invite those who are new to this committee to take a look at my comments on the previous bill, and there will certainly be another witness later today who is an expert in this field. I will leave most of that to her.

When this bill was debated in the last Parliament, members from all parties recounted situations in their ridings. What worries me, colleagues, is that since we had that discussion a couple of years ago, animal activists have become even more brazen, to the point where they're endangering the lives of animals on farms, and in some cases the public and the livelihoods of our farmers. We've seen animal rights activists hang dead pig carcasses from a Montreal overpass. We heard of the hog farmer in Ontario who has been targeted by ransomware, where activists are demanding that the farmer admit the mistreatment of his livestock, which of course is undeniably false.

Where this started, colleagues, was an incident in my riding with the Tschetter family, who woke up one morning to check on their free-range turkey farm and had 40 activists camped out in their barn. It took five to six hours to de-escalate and have these protesters removed. However, the impact on the family has been long-lasting. It impacts them to this day, as they question why they were targeted and what they had done wrong, as they had followed all the rules. Again, they have a free-range farm in Fort Macleod.

Now, opponents of this bill will claim it's not necessary because there's no proof of the introduction of disease by trespassers.

First, I think this misses the point of this bill completely, as one issue can make all the difference and it's a short-sighted argument to justify unlawful behaviour. Second, and I think more importantly, colleagues, is that it's completely false. We know of at least two incidents. One was in Quebec, where an outbreak of rotavirus was a result of protesters on a pig farm. Rotavirus hadn't been seen in Quebec in more than 40 years. Another was on an Ontario mink farm, where trespassers released thousands of animals, which led to an outbreak of distemper.

Colleagues, some provinces have followed up with something similar, but the vast majority—seven provinces and three territories—do not have anything like this in their legislation.

Finally, I just want to reiterate the impact that having an outbreak of an animal disease or an animal-borne virus on our farms could have on our farm families and certainly on our economy. Protecting Canada's food supply is absolutely critical. That is one of the pillars of what we do here in this committee. Viruses like avian flu, African swine fever, and foot and mouth pose substantial threats to Canadian agriculture.

In 2014, 10 farms in the Fraser Valley had an AI outbreak and more than 200,000 birds had to be euthanized. The most serious outbreak of avian flu in Canada took place in the Fraser Valley in 2004 and led to the slaughter of 17 million farm birds. Before the outbreak was eventually brought under control, it cost more than \$380 million in lost economic income. In the aftermath, a number of changes were made, including self-quarantine, biosecurity protocols, surveillance and laboratory testing.

● (0820)

The most recent outbreak in Canada impacted 7.6 million domestic birds in provinces across western Canada, as well as Ontario and Quebec, with B.C. being the hardest hit.

When we talk about African swine fever... Thankfully, this has yet to be detected in Canada. The first case of ASF was detected in China in 2018. It spread to every province in the country by 2019 and has been seen in the Asia-Pacific, central Asia, eastern Europe and now the Dominican Republic. It would be devastating if this came to Canada. It would have a \$24-billion economic impact.

I want to conclude with this, colleagues. As I said, this bill is not about prohibiting peaceful protests. The problem is that many of these protesters are not aware of the strict biosecurity protocols we have on farms, why they are there, or the fact that potentially trespassing on farms could have catastrophic consequences for our farmers, our food security and certainly our economy.

I know members on this committee understand the importance and urgency of this bill and what it can mean to our farmers, ranchers and producers. I look forward to addressing any questions or comments my colleagues have.

I appreciate your attention.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Barlow.

We're going to get right to that.

I'll start with Mr. Drouin for up to six minutes.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank Mr. Barlow for putting this bill forward.

You've touched on a few points. You were the author of the previous bill. Your bill talks about unlawful entry into buildings or areas where farm animals are kept. We would be in favour of presenting a friendly amendment. Obviously, we talk about biosecurity. If biosecurity protocols are followed, do you still object to entry? If somebody enters into.... Where I'm coming from is that sometimes there are bad apples. The majority of them are fine, but there are bad apples who taint the entire industry, unfortunately. However, you have people who do follow biosecurity protocols. You could be in a situation where....

If biosecurity protocols are followed, what is the danger of somebody entering into an area?

● (0825)

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you for that question.

My initial reaction is this. Of course, I'm always open to a discussion on amendments that would help make this proposal better. My concern is this: Are you still talking about a trespasser? I know all of us have visited farms. We've gone through the protocol. We've put on haz-mat suits, washed our boots, put on booties and those types of things. However, we've been invited onto those farms.

If you are saying.... If protesters are still trespassing on farms but they put on haz-mat suits and all those things, are they still having an impact? I would say, yes, they are. It is still impacting the mental health of that farm family. If I woke up in the morning and went down to my living room and some protesters were there who were upset about how I treated my dog, but they were wearing a haz-mat suit and whatnot, does that make it any better? I would say, as a dog owner, no.

I want some clarification. Are you talking about protesters, or are you talking about a regular person who has been invited onto that operation?

Mr. Francis Drouin: There are already trespassing laws. We don't have jurisdiction for that. As soon as we touch trespassing in federal jurisdiction, that bill could be challenged in court and rendered unconstitutional. That's what I'm worried about.

We have jurisdiction strictly over what happens inside the farm. That's where we want to present a friendly amendment to ensure that we stay in our—I don't want to use a pun—silo or farm, in terms of legislating the objective of what you are trying to do.

I certainly agree with you. I certainly agree with the objective of the bill. I've met a lot of farmers, in regard to ASF, who are spending \$23 million just to prepare the pork industry for ASF over two years. That's a lot of dollars. I've spoken to a lot of poultry farmers out in the Fraser Valley who have been affected by AI—that's poultry that didn't make it to the market. Millions of poultry were killed because of AI.

I certainly understand where you're coming from on this. We are dealing with a new reality. We just went through a pandemic. The objective of the bill serves a purpose to inform potential protesters that there are.... We're in a new world. Geographically, it's a small world now, with diseases travelling much faster than they used to. I know farmers are worried about potential protesters. I know you've mentioned a few cases.

From our perspective, if somebody follows—regardless of the reason why they're there—biosecurity protocols put in place.... That's where we would put a friendly amendment to ensure we respect the areas of jurisdiction of the federal government.

Mr. John Barlow: Yes, I understand and appreciate the clarification. Certainly there are trespassing laws in place, which is why we didn't go with the Criminal Code but amended the Health of Animals Act. We did not want to try to go down a path we thought was going to be onerous.

The issue with the trespassing laws in many cases, other than in B.C., is that, for the most part, there is a fine of a couple of hundred dollars. We have to understand that these groups are fundraising tens of millions of dollars off these events. They're filming them,

and they're fundraising off them, so there would have to be teeth to this that will make it a deterrent for these groups to do that.

My concern with your amendment, in all honesty, Mr. Drouin—and maybe we should have more discussion with stakeholders on this—is that we would now be giving an invitation to protests by saying that as long as you follow protocol, you're more than welcome to trespass on farms. That's not the message we're trying to portray here.

We're trying to say that our food security must be paramount. As you mentioned with the great analogy of COVID, imagine, on a similar scale, what would happen if we had a viral outbreak like African swine fever and what impact it would have on our economy and our country.

These protocols are in place for a very important reason, and they must be followed. As part of that, there has to be a line in the sand where, if you are not up to understanding the protocols, understanding the procedures and understanding why they're in place, you should not.... Protest as much as you want—you're welcome to do that, and it is your right—on public property outside the farm gate, but there has to be a line where we say that you're putting too many people and animals at risk when you cross that line.

● (0830)

Mr. Francis Drouin: I agree 100%.

The Chair: Thank you, colleagues. We'll have to leave it at that. That's six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

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

Mr. Barlow, thank you for your bill. I appreciate it. I appreciate the ability to second it in the House of Commons and give that second-reading speech.

You did talk about stakeholders a bit. Piggybacking on what Mr. Drouin was saying, can you comment on some of the stakeholders you've spoken with about this bill, some of the positive reactions you've had from stakeholders about this bill and how it's going to help their membership?

Mr. John Barlow: Yes, we've had extensive consultations with all of our agriculture stakeholders. Although we focused on livestock here, even those from the grain and oilseeds industry have been very supportive, as they are seeing similar issues where people are coming into their fields and taking pictures, taking plants and things like that. Again, you don't know what kind of weeds or whatever they're bringing.

The consultations have been very extensive, and I would say we've had unanimous support from every single agriculture stakeholder group we've spoken with. It's really two things: One is the importance of protecting the biosecurity on farms, and the second thing is that they see this, hopefully, as the federal government stepping up and protecting them and their mental health, as this has been becoming more and more of an irritant. "Irritant" is not the right word. It is painful to them, what they're going through when these things happen on their farms.

Mr. Warren Steinley: One example I have is about the Government of Saskatchewan. They've increased and changed some of their trespassing laws because of things like clubroot. People don't realize this, but when they go hunting or quadding, sometimes they inadvertently bring disease into fields that can ruin a whole field. This is a nice way to add to some legislation that provinces have.

Talking about some of the activists who go on the farms, I know they don't go by sector, but they have gone by jurisdiction, because some jurisdictions have lower fines and, as you said before, some people actually want to get caught, in jurisdictions where the fines are lower. Do you think there are some other motives behind some of these activities? Could you walk us through that and how this bill, as you said, with higher fines and increased penalties, might curtail some of that activity?

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you.

I don't think there's any question that these protests, when they happen, are well planned and well thought out. I'm sure one of the reasons the Tschetter farm in my riding was targeted was that it is right at the junction of Highway 2 and Highway 3, two of the busiest roadways in southern Alberta, so they would get a lot of attention. At that time, Alberta did not have trespass laws in place, as it does now, which were a result of this issue and a result of our initial bill, which some of the provinces have copied in terms of what we had first proposed.

Canada is one of the top 10 targeted countries in the world when it comes to these types of protests. One of the reasons for that, I believe, is that we do not have a national initiative in place—which we are proposing here—that is a deterrent to these groups.

We don't have definitive numbers in Canada, but some research on the United States shows that these groups fundraised close to \$90 million last year. That's a huge number. There's no question that this is a fundraising initiative for these groups, whose sole goal is to end animal agriculture, which I would hope all of us would oppose. That's why these deterrents have to be in place. There has to be a financial deterrent to these groups doing this; otherwise, they will continue to frighten our farmers and impact our daily lives.

• (0835)

Mr. Warren Steinley: One of the concerns with respect to your previous bill, Bill C-205, was noted by our colleague Mr. MacGregor, who is not here but who said the following:

I have received correspondence from concerned people from across the country who are worried that the bill might serve as an effective gag against their right to protest. What I would say in reply to that is that if we look at the specific wording of this act, it is talking about a person entering without lawful authority or excuse. There is nothing in the bill to prevent a whistle-blower, like a farm employee, who is already lawfully there and who witnesses something that they believe is wrong or contrary to animal welfare laws, from blowing the whistle and raising the alarm on that.

The difference between what the committee adopted in Bill C-205 and Bill C-275, which is before us today, is an amendment to apply the bill to whistle-blowers. Is that correct? Can you just speak on that, now that we have that on the record, with respect to how we can make sure they're protected?

Mr. John Barlow: That is correct. We did have a friendly amendment from Mr. MacGregor the last time we went through this.

I did not include it in this bill for two reasons. All of the stakeholders we spoke with felt it was redundant and not necessary because it is already in place. We were careful with our language to ensure that whistle-blowers were already protected. They are on the farm lawfully. They've been invited there. They're employees. They're farmers and family members, and they have a critical role.

As I said in my presentation, farmers and employees on farms have a moral and legal obligation to report any incidents that are not meeting our standards, any incidents where the health of an animal or the health of a farm employee or family member is being put in danger. I believe that is strongly worded in the legislation as is.

The Chair: We're going to have to leave it at that.

Thank you, Mr. Steinley.

Thank you, Mr. Barlow.

[*Translation*]

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

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

Mr. Barlow, thank you for being here this morning, and thank you for reintroducing this bill.

People who question the relevance of this bill often tell us that all the provinces have already adopted regulations, some of which are stricter than others. What do you say to those people?

Currently, as things stand, it is possible to file a complaint in the event of a breach and to initiate a criminal prosecution. Why should we pass another bill?

[English]

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you for the question, Mr. Perron.

I think in your question, you've answered it: Some provinces have something in place, but not all. In fact, I think there are four provinces: Alberta, Ontario, Saskatchewan and P.E.I. Quebec is trying to do something, but they have had to go to the Supreme Court to have something in place. I think it behooves us as the federal government to have a national program in place that will cover all provinces and territories, because that is not happening right now.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much.

What do you say to people who tell us that we are in the process of imposing a kind of gag order that will prevent whistle-blowing? That was just briefly mentioned by the Conservatives. Are you aware of the mechanisms that already exist in the agricultural system to denounce or report a farm that is not following the rules or is mistreating animals?

[English]

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you, Mr. Perron.

I believe that the legislation we have proposed covers that very well. Through our animal health regulations and the Health of Animals Act, an employee, a farmer or a family member who is on farm is obligated to come forward if they see something that does not meet CFIA or Health Canada standards.

We are not targeting whistle-blowers. I want to be absolutely clear here. Our goal is not to address whistle-blowers, because I believe they're already protected. This is about protesters who don't understand the protocols and the standards we have in place.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much.

In the last Parliament, during our study of Bill C-205, people from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency told us that they did not have the resources to act as peace officers. They also feared that this legislation would create confusion with the legislation of the provinces and Quebec.

Even in provinces where there is no legislation dealing specifically with trespassing on a farm, there are still laws that protect people from trespassing on private property, and so they already cover such situations. The witnesses have told us that they were afraid this would create confusion and make it difficult to prosecute people who would commit such an offence. What do you think?

• (0840)

[English]

Mr. John Barlow: I certainly understand CFIA's concerns. That's something we will have to address once we get to that point, but we're not asking the CFIA to be the RCMP.

When these issues happen on farm—and I've spoken to a number of farmers who have gone through this—they're not phoning the

CFIA. When they have protesters on farm, they're phoning the RCMP. The RCMP officers are the ones who are first on the scene and who try to de-escalate these issues and try to get this resolved. In many cases, it is resolved, but it takes hours. As I said, with the Tschetter example, they were there for five or six hours, and eventually left with a couple of their turkeys.

I understand the CFIA's concern, but we're not asking the CFIA to police this. The RCMP will do their job, police this and try to resolve the situation when it happens on the ground. The CFIA will have a role to play in the follow-up, when fines are laid.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much.

In the last Parliament, we did good work in committee and made a number of amendments to the bill. Among other things, we amended it so that it would apply to any individual who enters a building or enclosure where animals are kept, regardless of whether they have lawful authority or excuse to do so.

You chose not to use that wording. Can you tell us why?

[English]

Mr. John Barlow: I'm sorry. I had a little translation issue there.

Could you repeat the question?

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Yes.

During our study of Bill C-205, we amended the wording so that it would apply to any individual who enters a building or enclosure where animals are kept, regardless of whether they have lawful authority or excuse to do so.

Can you tell us why you decided not to include that amendment here?

[English]

Mr. John Barlow: We included the amendment from the Bloc, which has remained in this new version. I felt it was a good addition, so thank you for that, Mr. Perron.

I did not include Mr. MacGregor's amendment in this bill, because I felt it was already covered. In speaking with our stakeholders and the consultants we worked with on this, I know they felt it was redundant. Whistle-blowers are already protected in the Health of Animals Act. They are protected in the wording of the bill. Whoever is on farm for a lawful reason, including an employee, a farm worker or a farm family member, is already covered in the bill. We didn't feel we needed to re-emphasize that.

The Chair: Okay.

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

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

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Thank you. It's an honour to be here.

It's great to see you, Mr. Barlow.

I know you talked about the importance of the bill in protecting the mental health of farmers and their families as a primary motivation for you to introduce this piece of legislation. You and I have talked a lot about mental health over our many years here.

Can you talk about how this bill would improve the mental health of farmers?

Mr. John Barlow: Thanks for that question, Mr. Johns. I know that this is a pretty important issue for both of us.

If I can, I want to correct the record as I'm taking a quick review of some of the data we've collected here. I think I said that these activist groups had raised about \$90 million in the United States last year. It's actually \$900 million; I forgot a zero there. That shows what's going on.

In terms of how this protects the mental health of farmers, this is really what inspired me to do this. When I met with the farm family in my riding after this had happened to them, the looks on their faces were.... I was surprised by how hard they took this. They just didn't understand why they were targeted. They were basically saying, "What did we do wrong? We have free-range turkeys. We do everything that the CFIA has asked us. Our animals mean everything to us. In no way would we ever put them in danger." Then I had phone calls from farmers across western Canada asking, "Is it now open season on farming?" No one was charged in this issue. I think two people out of the 40 were given a \$250 fine.

Farmers just feel like they are being targeted and attacked for what they do. Are there bad actors? I'm sure there are, but the vast majority of farm families are doing everything they possibly can to protect their animals, water and soil. They just feel like there's no one out there standing up for them. I feel that something like this would show some leadership from the federal government's side that says, "Yes, we are there to protect you" and would put some parameters in place that will deter this illegal activity from happening.

● (0845)

Mr. Gord Johns: The last iteration of your bill, Bill C-205, made it all the way past second reading and was reported back to the House with amendments. Mr. Perron highlighted some of that in his questions.

Now, in the new version, can you explain why you didn't keep the same language that AGRI supported here at this committee and that Mr. MacGregor put forward as well? I know that in your proposed section 9.1 there's a reference to not taking anything into a space where animals are kept, including the specific language of "any animal or thing". Can you talk about what the rationale is for

this new language, which didn't appear in Bill C-205—what you've taken out and what you've put in here?

Further, can you define what "thing" is? I mean, "thing" could be anything. A cellphone or some type of recording device could also count as a "thing". It seems that interpretation of the law could certainly cover those types of items.

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

Yes, of the two amendments that we had, one from the Bloc and one from the NDP, we kept the one from the Bloc, which is the "thing" talked about there. I don't want to put words in Mr. Perron's mouth, but I believe the idea there was that you could be bringing in water or food.

We saw this specifically with protesters who were feeding pigs in a truck along the side of the highway. That's where the language for that came from. We have to expand that because even if you are bringing in food, water or other things, they could be just as harmful. The cellphone point is one I hadn't thought of, so that's interesting.

Again, the reason we did not include the NDP amendment at this time is that further review.... We were very proud to have the support of all parties at the end of this to get this through to the Senate. Unfortunately, an election happened, and we had to start over. However, in consultation afterwards, we felt that it was a redundant amendment. We are protecting whistle-blowers in the language of the bill. If you are lawfully on the farm as a farm employee or a member of the farm family—which a whistle-blower would be—then you are not encapsulated in this bill. You have a reason to be there. If you, as an employee, see something that is happening on the farm, processing plant or whatever, then, yes, you should come forward and file a complaint. Go to the RCMP, the CFIA or Health Canada, whichever avenue you want to take. We felt this was already strong within the wording of the bill.

However, I'm always willing to work with my colleagues. If there are ways to improve this, then I'm open to suggestions.

Mr. Gord Johns: Absolutely.

You mentioned several examples from recent years where outbreaks have led to the mass deaths of many animals. For example, tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of birds have died.

Just out of curiosity, in those instances you referenced, was it animal rights activists who spread the infections leading to those deaths?

Mr. John Barlow: Yes, it was, on the two specific ones I mentioned.

Mr. Gord Johns: In terms of whistle-blowing, what can be strengthened to support whistle-blowers? Have you put any thought into that?

Mr. John Barlow: I wouldn't say there's any specific wording, but I think a promotional campaign or some sort of marketing campaign could go around on this, once we finish it, hopefully, which could encourage whistle-blowers. If you see something on a farm, don't be afraid to come forward, because it's for the greater good.

The stronger the reputation of Canadian agriculture.... We're an export market, as well. We are selling to customers not only across the country but also around the world. We have a very strong reputation, and we want to protect that reputation. Any time something comes forward about an operation doing things they shouldn't be, or not meeting the standards, that is not good for anyone. Any farmer or producer you talk to, as much as they are at their wits' end and mentally stressed as a result of trespassers, they also want to ensure that everyone is meeting the standards that are there.

● (0850)

The Chair: We're going to have to leave it at that. Thank you, Mr. Barlow.

Thank you, Mr. Johns.

We'll now turn it over to Mr. Carr.

Colleagues, I realize that the pecking order is normally Conservatives and then Liberals. I got that a bit different. It will all work out in the end, anyway. Forgive me this time.

Go ahead, Mr. Carr.

Mr. Ben Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Barlow, thanks for the information you have provided thus far at committee.

I certainly take your point about the mental health impacts on farmers and the disruption to everyday livelihoods when there are significant demonstrations or events taking place on their property.

We've talked a lot about these animal rights activist groups. I'll trust you until I fact-check the \$900 million, in terms of fundraising. What is it that animal rights groups are finding that is driving them back continually to these farms? Surely you don't raise \$900 million if you send an empty video clip to those you're trying to fundraise from—assuming, as per your suggestion, that that's what they're trying to do.

I'm curious as to what it is they are discovering when they go to these farms. What is problematic in their minds and the minds of those who are supporting them, and how does this bill help address that?

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you for the question.

I can't speak for all of these groups and what they think they're seeing.

I think it's twofold, Mr. Carr. There's no question that this is a successful fundraiser for them, obviously, from the numbers we have seen. Perhaps I will table this document with the committee, so you can see that. In many cases, are they catching some things that shouldn't be happening? Perhaps. Again, these fundraising numbers are from the United States. I want to be clear on that. We don't have definitive numbers for Canada.

In many cases, a lot of consumers or Canadians don't understand what they are showing. For example, on the Tschetter farm, when they opened the doors to the barn, turkeys or chickens panicked. They were "fight or flight". They ran over each other and stomped and literally trampled each other. I know that, in one video we saw, they said, "Look, we have a couple of dead birds." Well, those birds died because those protesters went in. Those birds were not expecting it and didn't know who they were. You have 30 or 40 people coming in there. It scares the crap out of them and they trample each other. If you've been in a chicken barn, you understand. It's 35,000 birds in some of those things. There's a lot of room to go around, but when you have them all rushing into one area, that's what happens.

I think that, in many cases, they're being disingenuous about what's happened. We've seen a couple of cases where the videos they put up were actually not from that farm at all.

Listen, I think the overall goal of these groups.... I could quote from some of those. I have it here. "Humane meat? There is no such thing." That's from Animal Outlook. This is from the Good Food Institute: "Eating meat is not your personal decision, any more than...whether somebody beats their child is their personal decision."

Their goal is to end animal agriculture. That's the justification for what they are doing.

Mr. Ben Carr: Thank you for responding to that.

You mentioned a few moments ago the importance of strengthening the reputation of the industry and that the stronger the reputation of the industry, the better things can be for us internationally.

One of the things I've heard from folks who have reached out on the bill is that they feel as though they don't have enough information about what's going into the production of their food in Canada, everything from how the animal is treated prior to being slaughtered to when they're slaughtered and after. What do you think we can do, whether it's through the provisions of this bill or regulations beyond it, that will help work with industry to provide Canadians with a better sense of how things are being produced?

I'm a former teacher and school principal. We all know *The Simpsons* references from years past on how the agricultural industry went, but I'm curious as to whether there are educational materials that you think we can work to produce with industry, in partnership with some of these groups, as a fair compromise to provide Canadians with a transparent look at what's happening.

In my mind, that strengthens the international reputation, as you've referenced, and perhaps it helps to mitigate some of the tensions between the groups that are bringing attention to this and the farmers themselves. The by-product of all that is that we have safer regulations, greater protection and a reputation that's going to help advance the economic export piece. I'm just wondering if you can comment on what we can do around that.

• (0855)

Mr. John Barlow: I think that's an excellent point. You said you were a principal. I would say it starts in the elementary classroom. Agriculture should be part of the curriculum. We've all heard of Agriculture in the Classroom, for example, but very few schools actually use that program.

The point is that we're seeing two extremes and we're not seeing the middle. I think a lot of these protesters have the best of intentions, but again, they just don't understand what's actually going on and the standards and protocols we have and why they're there. That education element, I think, would go a long way towards alleviating some of their concerns, and it would also be a great educational tool for those Canadian consumers who just don't know where their food comes from. I think that for all the things we discuss here, probably the number one underlying issue we have is that most Canadians and consumers don't understand what happens from the farm gate to when they purchase that item at the grocery store. There's a lot that goes into that middle part.

As part of this bill, I think that certainly we can work with industry, which I believe is trying to do its best to get the message out there. Are people listening, though? I'm not so sure. I think that having an education program as part of the education system is integral. As to why we don't have that, I think that's something we could talk about for hours here.

The Chair: We'll leave it at that.

Thank you, Mr. Carr. We're at time. I actually gave you a little bit extra.

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

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Barlow, for bringing this bill forward.

I want to start with whistle-blowers. You mentioned that the opportunity for whistle-blowers is not being impinged upon by this bill at all, whistle-blowers who are family members or employees who are legitimately there. Would you not also agree, though, that there are other people, without that close a relationship to the owners, who visit farms in the course of their regular duties, such as veterinarians, fuel suppliers and feed suppliers, who are maybe not as close to the family from a vested interest point of view but who also follow proper biosecurity and have that same opportunity on the off chance there is abuse?

Mr. John Barlow: That's an excellent point. Probably the most important one is the CFIA. Any commercial farm operation will have regular CFIA inspections, whether you live in the most rural part of P.E.I. or just outside of Calgary. No matter what your operation is on a commercial side, you are having a regular inspection from CFIA to ensure that you are meeting the standards.

You can talk to any producer, and I'm sure you have. Those can be very stressful inspections as well, which shows that they want to make sure they are meeting the standards put in front of them when it comes to animal health, sanitation and all those things when the CFIA comes by.

Yes, whether it's a member of Parliament coming by to visit your farm, a fuel supplier or the guy coming to pick up the milk every day, there are constantly people coming by who have a lawful reason to be there. If they see something that they know, as experts, is not meeting the standard, they also should have that opportunity—and they do have that opportunity—to step forward and say something.

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you.

You led a tangent right into my next question, which is a bit tangential to the bill, but it deals with biosecurity in animal agriculture.

CFIA has proposed some new regulations around fair societies. I'm going to be speaking at and attending the annual Highgate Fair, in its 169th rendition. I'm a little over a third that old. There are proposed regulations that put an onus on traceability, again for biosecurity reasons, on the animals that will be displayed there. Can you comment?

My understanding from agricultural groups and organizations.... Obviously, they support a solid traceability regime, but are they willing to maintain that regime and the responsibility for it through that setting...so that the 83% who are volunteers in our ag societies are not discouraged from volunteering?

Mr. John Barlow: Yes, that is a concern with the new regulations brought forward by CFIA.

When we talk about the global reputation of Canadian agriculture, one reason we have that strong reputation is our very fulsome traceability program. However, with this new program that's being introduced, the concern from the stakeholders is that these groups that are now having to take on this new responsibility don't have the people to do it and also don't have the expertise to do it. They would rather have it—

• (0900)

Mr. Francis Drouin: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, go ahead.

Mr. Francis Drouin: While I respect and support what my honourable colleague is saying, we're getting a little far from what Bill C-275 is covering. If we could stay on the subject matter, it would be great for all of us.

The Chair: Certainly you have some leeway, but we are on Bill C-275, so I would ask you to make sure we keep tight on that legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Epp.

Mr. Dave Epp: How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Dave Epp: Perfect, thank you.

When I attend things like the Highgate Fair, often I'm late. When I am trying to get there on time, the odd time I have exceeded the posted speed limit. I'm not looking for law enforcement to find me, whereas, as I heard from your testimony—and perhaps this is linked to the \$900 million that agriculture groups raised—often one goal of these trespass incidents and biosecurity violations is for the people to get caught.

Mr. John Barlow: Yes, they're not hiding what they're doing. They want as much attention as possible when they are doing these things. They are filming it.

When that happened on the Tschetter farm, it wasn't the Tschetter family who phoned the RCMP. It was the protesters who phoned the RCMP. They said they were trespassing illegally on a farm and asked the RCMP to come protect them. That was the phone call to 911. They are asking to be caught. They are asking for the media to come. They want this to be a show. The farm family members just want to get on with their lives and do what they do. This was, as I said, an incredibly stressful experience for them, whereas, for the protesters.... I don't want to say it's a game, but they play it very well. They know what they're doing. You see by the fundraising numbers that are there. We hear all kinds of stories about bonuses if you get arrested and bonuses if you get a photo taken with the police and those types of things. They aren't doing this to be discreet.

Mr. Dave Epp: You go right into the mental health aspect of it. I know agriculture has broadly put a focus on mental health, as has our general society. The stigma about talking about it is being lifted, which is great news.

In particular, why is it such a concern to the mental health of farm owners when it comes to the violation of their flocks or their herds?

The Chair: John, answer very quickly. You only have five or six seconds.

Mr. John Barlow: Farmers feel like victims no one is standing up for. This is their livelihood. They care for these animals as if they are members of their family. With the blood, sweat and tears they put into this, they feel that they should be protected, not victims.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll go to Mr. Perron for two and a half minutes, and then we'll have Mr. Johns for two and a half minutes. Then we're going to turn it over to the next panel.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Barlow, the second clause of the bill mentions “[every] person, other than an individual...”. Can you explain the meaning of that wording? Who is being targeted in that sentence?

[*English*]

Mr. John Barlow: It's any individual.

We highlighted two aspects as part of this bill. One is a little bit of a new direction, I'd say. The first is that we want to ensure that those protesters who come on farm are held accountable. We also want to ensure that the groups that organize or encourage this type of behaviour are also held accountable. That is why we have those two separate elements.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much.

As for places, we are told that Bill C-275 will apply to any building or enclosures where animals are kept. Do you think that this way of describing the place covers more than the farm? For example, does that include a transport truck, a slaughterhouse, the site of a rodeo or a zoo, among others? If you think that the definition does not cover those places, should we not work to cover them, in your opinion?

[*English*]

Mr. John Barlow: Yes, the idea of the bill is to include transportation, processing plants, the rodeo, the zoo, any of those types of things where the health of an animal can be put at risk.

• (0905)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much.

In our last study, Keith Currie told us that he wanted to remove the requirement that an individual be unaware that they were exposing animals to a disease or toxic substance or that they didn't care about that. Do you think that the current wording makes it possible to effectively cover all offences? Could people get away with saying that they did not know or that it was not intentional?

[*English*]

Mr. John Barlow: As I said, Mr. Perron, I hope that when protesters are coming on farm and doing these types of activities, they may not understand the catastrophic consequences of what they potentially could be causing. I really hope that's the case, because if it's not the case, I think this is even worse. Not knowing is not an excuse. When they go to a farm and do that type of activity, they know deep inside that they are causing harm, either to that animal or to that farmer. I don't believe that not knowing is an excuse.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: I'm going to go back to one of the previous questions.

We know that animal rights groups have expressed some concerns about the bill, stating that it's not about the health of animals as much as it's about a trespass law. Hopefully you can help me with that.

We know that many instances of animal abuse on farms have been documented by farm employees who work there. I think you've been very supportive of that in stating that. If a farm employee with lawful authority or excuse to be on the farm property were to document an instance of animal abuse using a "thing", as I raised earlier, for example a cellphone camera, it seems that what you're seeking to do here is have that farm employee indirectly subject to a \$50,000 to a \$200,000 fine and possible jail time. Does that not seem like an awfully tough punishment for documenting instances of animal abuse?

Maybe you can dive in a little more on that, the concern about that language, because that's where it could lead.

Mr. John Barlow: I understand the concern there, but the whistle-blower is there lawfully, so he or she would not be included in this legislation, because they are there lawfully. This is about someone who is there unlawfully. That is the distinction.

Mr. Gord Johns: It's been raised, but I want to clarify again that the discussion about Bill C-275 is centred around farms. The first clause explains that it would apply to any building or any enclosed place in which animal are kept. There are a lot of buildings, and this can stretch pretty far. Would the bill apply to other animal enclosures that have been the target of animal welfare protests, such as slaughterhouses, rodeos, zoos, or animals being transported to such facilities?

Mr. John Barlow: Yes, it would. It would include those other facilities as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much, colleagues.

Thank you, Mr. Barlow.

We're going to take a two-minute pause. We're going to get our next witnesses in. Please don't go far, because I'd like to try to get three rounds, if possible, for the next witnesses.

• (0905) _____ (Pause) _____

• (0910)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

I would now like to welcome the second panel of witnesses.

First, from the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, we have Pierre Lampron, second vice-president, who is joining us by video conference, and Brodie Berrigan, director, government relations and farm policy.

From the Do More Agriculture Foundation, we have Megz Reynolds, executive director.

Finally, we have two representatives from the Union des producteurs agricoles: Paul Doyon, senior vice-president, who is joining us by video conference, and Annie Tessier, assistant coordinator, marketing and group support.

Welcome, everyone, and thank you very much for joining us this morning.

[*English*]

Colleagues, we're going to have five minutes for each organization for opening statements. Then I'm going to try to make sure that we can get in as many questions as possible.

I'm going to start with the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and either Mr. Lampron or Mr. Berrigan.

You have up to five minutes. I'll turn the floor over to you.

• (0915)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Lampron (Second Vice-President, Canadian Federation of Agriculture): Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Pierre Lampron, and I am second vice-president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, CFA, and a dairy farmer in Quebec.

The CFA is Canada's largest general farm organization. We represent over 190,000 farmers and farm families across Canada that are the heart of a Canadian agri-food system generating \$134.9 billion of Canada's gross domestic product.

I want to be clear that the CFA supports Bill C-275. As a dairy farmer myself, I fully appreciate the critical importance of ensuring that strong biosecurity measures are in place to protect our animals, our livelihood as farmers, as well as our economy.

Before diving into why the bill is so important for Canadian farmers, I would like to start by reminding the committee that producers are already taking a leadership role in promoting animal welfare and on-farm biosecurity. Across all animal industries, farmers have put strict biosecurity protocols in place to ensure the health and safety of their livestock.

As a dairy farmer myself, I am most familiar with the national standard on biosecurity for Canadian dairy farms, which was developed by the Dairy Farmers of Canada in collaboration with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. This is just one example, but every livestock commodity has their own biosecurity standards.

The national standard for dairy farms focuses on four biosecurity control areas that result in a significant reduction in disease and human food safety risks and includes: restricting visitors' access to animals; ensuring the farm is well maintained, clean and sanitary; ensuring that there is a herd health plan in place that includes a proactive veterinary response to disease risk; and keeping new animals separate from existing animals until they represent no disease risk.

On top of that, the dairy sector has integrated biosecurity into its proAction certification program, which offers proof to customers that the sector is ensuring quality and safety, animal health and welfare, as well as environmental stewardship. Those are the pillars of the proAction certification program.

Unfortunately, industry alone cannot prevent a breach of biosecurity protocols. We need the support of governments across Canada, including the federal government, to ensure that our animals and our livelihoods are protected.

To date, several provincial governments have put in place legislation to prevent trespassing on farms. However, these laws are not uniform across the provinces. Bill C-275 fills a critical gap in that legislative framework because it focuses more on preventing biosecurity risks than on trespassing.

Furthermore, we would argue that biosecurity is very much a national issue with potential consequences that go beyond provincial boundaries and affect our food production, our farmers' mental health and our economy.

Strong biosecurity measures are necessary not only to reduce the risk of spreading disease and stress on the animals; they also serve as proactive measures to strengthen our domestic food systems to ensure food security for Canadians.

Without strong biosecurity protocols, there is a risk of disease outbreaks that jeopardize our national food supply and our farmers' ability to provide food to their communities. In addition, the mental health and well-being of producers and farm employees could also be affected owing to animal welfare impacts and loss of livelihood.

Finally, in the context of international trade, the integrated nature of our markets has long made clear the importance of animal health and animal biosecurity as key priorities.

An outbreak of an infectious disease in any sector has disastrous effects, including but not limited to closing our borders to trade, lost trade opportunities, and increases in production costs.

● (0920)

Thank you for this opportunity to speak today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair: That's great, Mr. Lampron. It was exactly five minutes.

[*English*]

We'll go to Ms. Reynolds.

It's over to you for five minutes.

Ms. Megz Reynolds (Executive Director, The Do More Agriculture Foundation): Farmers are used to adversity. They watch as an entire crop is destroyed in a 10-minute storm. They grieve, pow-

erless, as disease rips through their herd or flock. They watch market prices tank when global production is good. They pray for rain, for markets, for health and for safety. On a daily basis, they pray for an understanding of who they are and what they do.

I sit before you today on behalf of Canadian farmers in my capacity as the executive director of The Do More Agriculture Foundation. We are the national voice and champion for mental health in Canadian agriculture.

Last spring, just as avian influenza was moving across Canada, I sat down with a group of poultry producers in Nova Scotia. The focal point of our conversation was mental health and the challenges farmers are facing that lead to chronic stress, burnout and anxiety. A conversation that is usually robust was lilted. The producers sharing their table with me were more focused on the migratory birds outside the window than on our dialogue. They were living day and night with the fear that avian influenza would show up in their barns, introduced either by wild birds or through a break in biohazard security.

I didn't grow up in agriculture. I grew up in the city, and before moving to a farm, I never would have thought twice about walking into a barn full of animals. It never would have crossed my mind that walking into a biosecure barn housing 30,000 birds could result in introducing a disease like avian influenza that could see that entire flock dead within the week.

Producers across Canada are not expecting everyone to know the ins and outs of their operations or of animal husbandry, but they are asking for help. They are asking for protection and for understanding, and for Bill C-275 to be enacted to protect their animals, their families, their farms and their livelihoods. Agriculture is an industry with a foundation of deep rural roots, hard work, resilience, strength and community.

On a daily basis, farmers deal with numerous factors that are outside of their control and directly influence their mental well-being. Farmers should not have to add to that living with the fear of protesters trespassing into enclosed areas and endangering their animals, their livelihoods and Canadian food security.

Farmers are among the most vulnerable when it comes to mental health challenges like stress, anxiety, depression and burnout. In 2021, the University of Guelph found that one in four Canadian farmers felt like their life was not worth living, wished that they were dead or had thought about taking their own life in the last 12 months.

Sandi Brock and her husband raise sheep and run a grain farm outside of Hensall, Ontario, in a place that she feels is sort of like the middle of nowhere, yet Google has led strangers straight to her door. Sandi has been kind enough to share her story through me.

She writes:

I have long feared the forces of anti-agriculture (specifically livestock) that have made it their mission to end animal agriculture. In the same breath, I also respect where people are in regard to their core values.

In 2017, I decided to start a YouTube channel to “bring” people onto our farm, and into our lives as farmers on an Ontario family farm. Instead of expecting the general public to trust and understand what we do, I turn my camera on, almost daily, to bring them alongside us to witness it all....

I started this channel in the hopes of maybe not changing minds, but instead giving context behind the work we do each day. Not to educate, but maybe to cultivate empathy. As it turns out, millions of people have tuned in over the years and even some that don't agree with animal agriculture have reached out and offered up their genuine respect for us as farmers, and for us as a family.

But my comment section isn't always so nice, and there is always a gnawing in my gut that one day one of those negative commentators will show up at my front door. And trust me, it happens.

Thankfully, so far, the strangers that have found my address and shown up unannounced have been because they like me. Unfortunately for me, I do not know the difference. When these strangers have shown up, I have had an out-of-body experience like no other. I shake from head-to-toe for hours after they leave, and the intrusion stays with me for days after.

We live where we work. The vulnerability of strangers showing up unannounced is one thing, but the violation of privacy is a completely different level, and this is where I can firmly stand beside my fellow livestock farmers.

It feels like, and quite honestly is, a break-in. Businesses and homes are protected by the law. Our farms are quite literally our farms and homes, and in so, should be protected.

I started sharing my life online to help connect, provide context, and give the experience of a small family farm. Sharing did this, and more, and I'm so proud of the connections we've made. But after experiencing even the mildest forms of trespassing, and seeing and feeling firsthand how vulnerable we truly are as an industry I have seriously questioned if it was all worth it in the end.

Thank you.

• (0925)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Reynolds.

Certainly, from speaking with my farmers in the Annapolis Valley, I know from the likes of Amy VanderHeide and others that you spend time in our beautiful corner of the world, and I thank you for the work that you do.

[*Translation*]

Now we will hear from the representatives of the Union des producteurs agricoles.

Mr. Doyon or Ms. Tessier, the floor is yours.

Mr. Paul Doyon (Senior Vice-President General, Union des producteurs agricoles): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good morning, everyone.

My name is Paul Doyon. I am the senior vice-president of the Union des producteurs agricoles, or UPA. I am a dairy and maple producer. I am accompanied today by Annie Tessier, assistant coordinator, research and agricultural policy branch, UPA.

Animal biosecurity is a major concern, both for reasons of animal health and welfare and because of the major economic and commercial consequences associated with animal diseases. The

UPA believes that Bill C-275, An Act to amend the Health of Animals Act, provides a clear signal of the importance of compliance with biosecurity measures on farms to deter trespassing on livestock premises.

Biosecurity and animal health are among farmers' responsibilities, in part determined by the Health of Animals Act, which sets out the measures to be taken when a disease occurs in a herd. Among other things, the act stipulates that the premises concerned be accessible only to persons authorized to enter them to limit the risk of spreading diseases.

In addition, the various livestock sectors work on prevention and have adopted safety and biosecurity protocols that are often very strict, under which only persons who are authorized and follow those protocols can enter the farms. Agricultural input suppliers, livestock transporters, and renderers also have a role to play in animal biosecurity.

In recent years, the rise of anti-meat and anti-speciesist movements has been felt in many countries, including Canada. A lot of these protests have taken place in public places. However, a more radical faction is ready for civil disobedience and organizes trespassing onto private premises, such as farms. For example, in Quebec, a hog production farm in the Saint-Hyacinthe region was trespassed onto in December 2019. The 11 co-accused were convicted of breaking and entering and mischief. In April 2021, during a lockdown related to COVID-19, two activists trespassed onto a dairy farm in the Eastern Townships and tried to release animals.

However, it is well established scientifically that the entry of unprotected persons or those who do not know the rules to follow on a farm site poses a significant risk to biosecurity, as well as to animal health and welfare. The clothes and shoes of an intruder who has not complied with the biosecurity protocol may carry pathogens or contaminants.

Some diseases have decimated herds and resulted in their systematic slaughter. Cases of avian flu in Canadian and Quebec chicken and turkey farms have multiplied and require a significant mobilization of producers and stakeholders.

Those authorized to enter livestock premises know the dangers of their behaviour: sudden movements, random noises or a change in routine can cause stress in the animals and lead to erratic behaviour that can lead them to injure themselves, lethally injure other animals or their young. In addition, an animal that has experienced significant stress is more likely to develop health problems. So without leading to herd depopulation, unauthorized entry could introduce diseases into the herd and require increased use of antibiotics, while the agricultural community—farmers, veterinarians and government authorities—is working to combat antibiotic resistance.

All these factors will have a significant impact on the financial health of the business, but also on the mental health of the producer, their family and their employees.

Several Canadian provinces have specific trespassing laws. Others, such as Quebec, use provincial laws and the Criminal Code to lay charges of breaking and entering or mischief against unauthorized entry into private premises.

Bill C-275 is an important tool that the federal government will have to consistently protect farm animals from the consequences of trespassing by providing significant penalties that can deter individuals or groups from trespassing without authorization and without following established biosecurity or animal welfare protocols.

• (0930)

Given that an unauthorized entry into a livestock premises brings an increased risk of exposure to diseases and contaminants for the animals there, whether premeditated or not, we believe it is important to clarify the wording in the act. The act should clearly specify that any person who enters a breeding site, enclosure or biosecurity zone without authorization is deemed to pose a risk, even if he or she complies with the biosecurity protocols in place. It's just as important to respect animal welfare.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Doyon.

We'll now move on to the question period.

[*English*]

This is the way we're going to do this, colleagues. We have 45 minutes left, and the first round is going to be five minutes for all major parties. The second round will be five minutes for the Liberals and the Conservatives, and two and a half minutes for the Bloc and the NDP. Then we'll do five minutes in the third round for the government and the opposition party. That way, we can get everyone in.

I will be tight on time, unfortunately. I'm usually pretty lenient, but I will be very tight.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lehoux, you have the floor for five minutes.

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

I thank the witnesses for joining us this morning.

I've heard three speakers raise the issue of biosafety and talk about the importance of the bill.

Mr. Lampron, you're also a farm owner. What do you see as the main dangers associated with unauthorized entry to a farm, such as yours? We know there are several, but just give me a concrete example.

Mr. Pierre Lampron: We have a lot of biosafety measures on the farm. We do foot baths, we wash boots, and people have to write their names in the register at the gate, among other things. When people arrive, we don't know where they've been or what disease they might be carrying. These diseases are often contagious and can therefore affect several animals in the herd. That's really the question we're asking ourselves: What disease are these people going to introduce into our breeding herd?

Mr. Richard Lehoux: I'd like more clarification on that, Mr. Lampron. As I understand it, people who enter a farm without authorization can be carriers of various diseases, which can be transmitted through their clothing, shoes or instruments, and which have already been detected on other farms.

Mr. Pierre Lampron: That's right. Bacteria can be on shoes, clothes or anything. They can be airborne too. They can be transmitted involuntarily, but also voluntarily. These people who enter without authorization don't always have good intentions.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: I say that because we heard two veterinary doctors, one from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, say that disease transmission by people was unlikely, because it took a much longer contact. I take it you don't agree with that. In your opinion, the simple act of entering a farm creates a very high possibility of transmission, doesn't it?

Mr. Pierre Lampron: Yes. I don't know if he was talking about dairy production. Maybe the danger is lower in those cases, but pork and sheep production are very fragile. Cattle production is not immune either. Bacteria have already entered through individuals. That's why we've adopted biosafety standards. It's to protect our animals.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Mr. Doyon, do you have anything to add about the importance of biosecurity? Then I'll turn to another point.

Mr. Paul Doyon: What Mr. Lampron said is correct. Pathogens can be brought in by intruders, but sometimes just creating stress in animals can make them more vulnerable to microbes, which can travel through the air or in other ways, in the following days. An animal that is stressed by all kinds of things is more likely to contract diseases. This is a recognized fact.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Thank you, Mr. Doyon.

Another very important element that often comes up is the question of mental illness and the stress that all this causes producers. Can the witnesses talk a little more about the impact of this stress on farms? Earlier, Ms. Reynolds mentioned that one in four producers develops some form of mental illness as a result of stress.

I invite the witnesses to respond in turn, starting with Ms. Reynolds. Then I'd like to hear from the other two representatives.

● (0935)

[English]

Ms. Megz Reynolds: There's so much on a daily basis that a farmer is thinking about or dealing with that is out of their control but directly influences their ability to be successful. All of that is weighing on them at all times. They are living where they work, so they don't have the ability to go home at the end of the day and distance themselves. That adds to the mental load and stress that they're constantly carrying.

We have seen, in growing years, the disconnect between those who produce food and those who are no longer connected to the farm. We're all consumers, so I'm not going to do a "this or them". A lot of producers are feeling that they're not understood. They're feeling as though people have the idea that they're trying to hurt their animals or don't care about their animals, or that they don't care about what they're doing or the environment.

They can't control their prices and they can't control the weather or trade. To have the additional risk that someone at some point can come to their farm, their barn or their home.... Maybe it's just that, and maybe they can't send their children out to do chores because they're scared of that, and the weight of that—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Reynolds. I apologize, but we're right at time, so I have to keep moving.

Up next is Mr. MacDonald for five minutes.

Mr. Heath MacDonald (Malpeque, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses for being here today.

Obviously, we've received quite a few emails in reference to this bill. I am fully in support of it—I want to be clear about that—but I also want to reinforce the importance of the bill and why it needs to happen. We fully understand the economic value, but there's also the mental health value to our farmers and the well-being of our livestock.

There are bad apples out there. We know that. They are in every industry, in every sector. Do you feel this legislation would impair the ability to raise awareness to ensure accountability in cases of legitimate agricultural abuses? I'd like to put that to the Canadian Federation of Agriculture to let them expand on it.

Mr. Brodie Berrigan (Director, Government Relations and Farm Policy, Canadian Federation of Agriculture): Pierre, did you want to jump in?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Lampron: I'll let you answer the question, Mr. Berrigan, since you'll be able to give a specific answer to the question about diseases.

[English]

Mr. Brodie Berrigan: Yes, thank you for the question.

I think it is a very good question. I had a similar question before about this legislation. This is a very important bill for Canadian farmers, and certainly we're very supportive of it. As was mentioned previously, it is important from a national perspective for farmers, as well as from the perspective of ensuring and supporting our food security objectives, mental health objectives and international trade implications.

In terms of the integrity of the process, I think there are already very strong animal welfare codes of practice in place in Canada. Those animal welfare codes of practice have been co-developed through the National Farm Animal Care Council with a diverse set of stakeholders, including Humane Canada.

In the event where there are bad actors, there is a system in place. We have the Criminal Code of Canada, of course, which prohibits anyone from wilfully causing animals to suffer neglect, pain or injury. I think the other thing to point out is that, at the end of the day, the incentives are there to protect and promote biosecurity and animal welfare. Farmers have everything to lose and nothing to gain from breaches in biosecurity.

That's how I would answer that question.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Berrigan, very good.

We touched on this a bit in the preamble and some of the questions, about how many different people access these farms who are obligated to report any deficiencies or abuses that may be taking place. Can you talk about some of the people who enter those farms on a daily basis who would be obligated to report?

Mr. Brodie Berrigan: Certainly that covers veterinarians, as was discussed earlier, in the previous testimony. You can certainly have inspections on a regular basis. A lot of farms, such as dairy farms—I'm sure Pierre can tell you a bit more about that—have mandatory third party inspections every second year. There are people coming who are invited to the farm on a regular basis to perform certain mandatory and necessary functions.

I think the distinction we're making in this bill is between those who are not invited to the farm and the premises and who pose a threat to biosecurity and those who are there for very legitimate purposes.

● (0940)

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Berrigan.

Ms. Reynolds, we have a program in Prince Edward Island that's called Farmers Talk. I think it was just started about two years ago. It was a really surprising number, the uptake on this program. I'm going to ask you this: Outside of this bill, what are some other things government can do to support your organization or farmers across the country?

Ms. Megz Reynolds: I appreciate that question.

One of the biggest things is putting mental health as part of the lens through which we look at things, especially policy creation. Last year, avian influenza was such a big thing across Canada. There are no turkey populations in B.C. anymore. I had some great conversations with some government officials about whether, when the CFIA officer shows up, they are coming with mental health support so they can help connect producers to that, instead of just, "Here's a list of what you need to do."

The fact that I'm here today to answer your questions and testify is a really great first step in making sure we're including mental health in the thought process.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. MacDonald.

Thank you, Ms. Reynolds.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Perron, you now have the floor for five minutes.

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

Thank you, witnesses, for being with us today.

Mr. Doyon, you mentioned something interesting: the additional use of antibiotics that might be necessary following contamination. From memory, I think this is the first time anyone has mentioned this. It's very relevant.

You also mentioned that the legislation in the provinces and Quebec is not equal, and that in one place or the other, certain laws are going to be used. You said that in Quebec, we use the Civil Code and the Criminal Code. People who question Bill C-275 tell us it's not necessary because there are already laws that can protect against intrusions.

I'd love to hear you talk about this aspect. Why is Bill C-275 essential? What will it change in relation to existing legislation?

Mr. Paul Doyon: Pan-Canadian regulation is really essential, and that's what Bill C-275 is going to enable. It will send a signal to everyone that people are not allowed to enter farms, which are places of production, but also living environments for families. It's not allowed for people to just turn up and demonstrate. That's what it should be across the country.

Mr. Yves Perron: What do you say to people who tell us that this bill is a kind of gag order that would be imposed on whistle-blowers? Some organizations are saying that, and Mr. MacDonald talked about emails he's received about the bill. I've also had meetings with certain groups who are telling us all this.

What mechanisms are in place? There are mechanisms in place. If we're close to a farm and we suspect mistreatment on a farm, how can people currently proceed to report such a case without committing an offence, without entering the farm, basically?

Mr. Paul Doyon: Earlier, we were saying that there are quality assurance programs, whereby people regularly go to farms and make reports. The Department of Agriculture makes regular visits to these farms. What's more, the professionals who turn up at farms to perform tasks, such as veterinary surgeons, feed advisors or oth-

ers, are all people who have the ability to report abusive acts and any mistreatment of animals.

As for those who are far away, Ms. Tessier may have an answer for you.

Ms. Annie Tessier (Assistant Coordinator, Marketing and Group Support, Union des producteurs agricoles): Provincial ministries can always be contacted to report cases of animal abuse by a producer. You can also contact humane societies. There are already mechanisms in place regarding denunciation.

As Mr. Doyon and others have said, there are already people who go to farms, who are authorized to go and who can flag problems that might be experienced on the farm.

• (0945)

Mr. Yves Perron: So, you're telling me that there are already processes in place to counter this problem and that there's no need to commit aggression. Indeed, in theory, when you enter somewhere without permission, you're assaulting the owner of the premises. You have to call things by their name.

I'd like to hear about another thing from the witnesses. One of my fears is that if this type of trespassing continues, I'm afraid something unfortunate could happen. Earlier, Ms. Reynolds talked about mental health, and I'm going to draw a rather lame parallel. If people are in a farmer's living room protesting about the way he treats his dog, he won't be able to get them out. Sometimes, self-defence can be tempting if the person doesn't feel protected by society or legislation. Do witnesses have any fears about this?

I invite Mr. Doyon to answer first, followed by Mr. Lampron.

Mr. Paul Doyon: You're absolutely right. At one point, on social networks, people gave us unacceptable suggestions for when people show up at a farmer's house. We've produced a little guide for producers to give them advice and show them how to behave if protesters arrive on the premises of their business or farm. It could indeed be dangerous for people to want to take the law into their own hands, which could lead to some very unfortunate events. That's not what we want, of course.

Mr. Pierre Lampron: This is why this bill is important.

The Chair: Mr. Lampron, I'm sorry, but the member's time has expired. It will be possible for you to complete your answer following Mr. Perron's next question.

Mr. Johns, you now have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you.

First, I really appreciate the part of Mr. Barlow's motivation behind the bill around the mental health of farmers.

Ms. Reynolds, I've learned a lot from your testimony here today and greatly appreciate that, especially as the NDP critic for mental health. I know Mr. MacDonald asked you what more Canada can do to support the mental health of farmers. I know we have the three-digit suicide prevention line coming on board at the end of November, and the bilateral agreements are rolling out with provinces, but there are not a lot of strings attached to ensure that the money is going to go directly to mental health. In fact, some provinces might just put it all into long-term care or other important needs.

The government promised \$4.5 billion over five years for mental health that could supply different initiatives, such as targeted funding for mental health for farmers. Can you talk about the need for targeted funding to support farmers and what possibilities could be there to support farmers?

Ms. Megz Reynolds: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this.

There is a need to have more of a national approach to farmer mental health. There are some incredible provincial programs. Some have been running upwards of 20 years and have a crisis line and free counselling. Affording counselling can be a barrier, as a lot of farmers are running their own businesses and they don't always have benefits, so sometimes it's the cost.

There is, of course, the stigma piece, and the biggest barrier can be that they're possibly worried to reach out to the traditional systems because that person will not have an understanding of their challenges as farmers. Having that specific mental health support for farmers and having that more nationalized approach.... Having the 988 number is incredible, but we need to make sure that the people on the other end of the line have a connection and understanding to agriculture so that when that person from the farming industry does call in, they are not told to go take a holiday from their dairy farm because they're experiencing burnout and need a break.

It's about making sure we have a national approach, making sure that it doesn't disappear after a couple of years, and then making sure that those who are interacting with those in agriculture have that understanding and are best suited to support them.

Mr. Gord Johns: Would you support the importance of getting that mental health transfer that was promised and that is no longer? It's going into the bilaterals. Do you see an important role in getting that money out the door, on top of the bilateral agreements, so that it gets to the organizations and industry, like farmers?

Ms. Megz Reynolds: It would be great to see this, along with working with each province. As I said, some provinces have really great systems, and some are bringing them online right now, so having more of a nationalized approach to that would be great.

With the foundation, we have a free national peer-to-peer support platform for anyone in the industry, trying to make sure that when someone reaches out, there is help there for them.

• (0950)

Mr. Gord Johns: This is a question for both Mr. Berrigan and Ms. Reynolds.

Maybe you can talk about some other amendments that you might suggest for this bill. You heard me speak about some of the language about "any animal or thing". My concerns were around what "thing" could be portrayed as. Do you have any thoughts you want to share while you're here today?

Maybe we can start with you, Mr. Berrigan.

Mr. Brodie Berrigan: Sure, I'm happy to start. Pierre, feel free to jump in.

I think it's difficult to answer that question without seeing the details of what those proposed amendments might look like. I think ultimately, at the end of the day, our interests are ensuring that farmers and livestock are protected and that the proper biosecurity protocols are in place on farms and followed and respected.

I think we would be open to a discussion about what those could look like, but at this point it's difficult to comment specifically on any amendment.

Mr. Gord Johns: Ms. Reynolds, do you think it would be worthwhile for this committee to do a study on the mental health of farmers and what supports farmers could gain—doing a proper study, evaluating the provinces that are having success, and then trying to scale that up across Canada, making it a pan-Canadian type of approach?

Ms. Megz Reynolds: I testified in 2018 in the original study on farmer mental health, so I think it would be worth possibly relooking at that and seeing what needs to evolve and going from there. The landscape has changed. That was the tipping point of starting to have the conversation, and now we're comfortable having the conversation and people are becoming more comfortable reaching out for help.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Johns.

We'll now turn it back to the Conservatives.

I think it's Mr. Barlow for five minutes, and then we'll go back to our Liberal colleagues.

Mr. John Barlow: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses for being here.

Ms. Reynolds, I want to ask you a question going on some of the stats you gave in your testimony, which are quite stark.

I lived through this with BSE more than 20 years ago. We lost something like 3,000 ranches. It cost upward of \$10 billion. I think the thing we don't talk enough about is the impact that had on our farm families. It's two decades later and many are still trying to recover from that.

You were talking about the discussions you had with farmers as a result of avian flu. It is not only about the trespassers. What impact does it have on farmers and their mental health when they have to euthanize whole herds or whole flocks? Can you talk about the impact that has on farmers as well?

Ms. Megz Reynolds: It's devastating. Even when you're raising an animal knowing that it's going to go into the food system, you have it for a certain amount of time and during that time you look after it as if it is your child. I think it's important to note—and the comment about whistle-blowers has been brought up a lot—that the people showing up and trespassing to protest are not whistle-blowers. They don't necessarily understand what that farmer needs to do to take care of that animal and what that animal means to that farmer.

I've talked to farmers, men, across Canada, and they tear up when they talk about having to cull a full barn in response to disease showing up.

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you.

I'm going to ask a question similar to Monsieur Perron's, but I'm going to get the English answer, if that's okay, Monsieur Perron. It was a good question.

Certainly the number one question we get from our colleagues is this: If there are provincial trespassing laws in place, why is this necessary? I think it's important that we have a national initiative in place and show some leadership on the national stage.

Mr. Berrigan, as the representative of CFA and so many members—I certainly appreciate your support—maybe you wouldn't mind articulating a bit why this legislation is important, despite having some trespassing laws in place.

Mr. Brodie Berrigan: Certainly. Thank you for the question.

As was discussed previously, trespassing legislation provincially is a bit spotty. I think this bill fills a critical gap in that sense. It also raises and elevates the importance of biosecurity as a critical issue for farmers in Canada.

We do feel that this is an issue of national importance and something that Canadians and Canadian farmers need to have in legislation because it touches on things we've talked about here today, like food security issues, production issues, mental health issues, certainly, and international trade implications. There are significant international trade implications associated with biosecurity breaches and outbreaks on farms, which can cost the entire economy and Canadian society millions of dollars.

I think there is quite a compelling case to have this legislation.

● (0955)

Mr. John Barlow: I'm not sure if you were here for my testimony, but the research we've done now in the United States shows that these activist groups are fundraising \$900 million a year. PETA actually went from \$60 million to \$80 million in fundraising revenue last year. When I look at the trespassing laws, in many cases these are a \$100 fine and then you carry on.

When you see the scope of what we're talking about here in terms of the dollars, how important is it to have some strong deter-

rents there that will show these groups that there are consequences to taking on this kind of activity?

Mr. Brodie Berrigan: Thank you for the question.

I think it goes without saying that there need to be very strong deterrents in place to deal with this issue. A lot of these organizations are very well resourced and funded, as you said. The penalties and implications that are in place right now are simply not severe enough to act as a deterrent.

We welcome the bill and its enforcement provisions, absolutely.

Mr. John Barlow: How am I doing?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. John Barlow: Okay, I will be really quick.

As Mr. Johns noted, we did do a study on mental health. We tried to have mental health as part of this bill as well. That would have been a money part of it, so we had to remove that as part of this PMB. I just want to reiterate how important that aspect of this legislation is.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Barlow. We'll leave it right at time.

I'll turn the floor over to Ms. Taylor Roy for five minutes, please.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to begin by thanking all the witnesses for being here.

I think everyone on this committee agrees that biosecurity on farms is a real concern and that the mental health and welfare of our farmers is of concern as well. I don't think there's any disagreement on that. I think the disagreement lies with what the intention of this bill is and whether it is necessary. I believe trespassing laws are provincial jurisdiction; we know that, and there are many in place.

Ms. Reynolds, I really appreciate the work that you and your organization are doing on supporting farmers' mental health. It seems to me that the incidence of outbreaks on farms is a real cause of mental health stress for farmers. When I looked through the list of outbreaks, since 2020 at least, they have been numerous, as you know, but it is debatable—we can debate the one—whether any of those were caused by a trespasser.

I'm wondering if this is one of the biggest causes of stress. In the recent report you put out, "Measuring Impact & Identifying Future Action", in April 2023, you identified 14 causes of stress for farmers. Trespassing wasn't included in any of the 14. Are there not larger issues, and can we not address biosecurity more directly to really address the problem that is affecting the mental health of farmers?

Ms. Megz Reynolds: Thank you for that question.

Depending on where you farm, if you're in Ontario or Quebec, around cities with much denser populations, there is a much higher risk of trespassing. Whether that is perceived or real, it weighs on someone the same as if that person is about to break into their barn tomorrow.

One of the items identified in our study was the challenge with public trust, and this is a piece of public trust. Farmers are worried that they're not understood and that they're at risk because of what they're trying to do. That is a growing concern when looking at the increase of these incidents happening all over the world. We may not be able to link all the AI outbreaks over the past two or three years to trespassing, but that doesn't mean that it is not one of the main causes, as we continue to move forward.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Thank you.

A lot of the causes have been identified, and a lot of it was introduced by practices on farms, in fact.

Mr. Berrigan, I want to go back to something my colleague Mr. Barlow asked earlier regarding the increase in animal activism. First, I want to correct the record, because Mr. Barlow mentioned that all animal welfare organizations are out to end animal agriculture. As you know, you've worked with some and that isn't the case. They are there to protect the welfare of animals as well, and their safety. There are a number of emails we received that have really been concerned with the health and safety of animals as well.

The increase in the numbers we heard from Mr. Barlow, of course, was from the U.S. With the increase in the fundraising and the amount of money that's been donated, why do you think people are doing that? What are they finding on farms? What are they talking about that's happening? Clearly, it's becoming an increasing issue and people are concerned about animal welfare, so what do you think the basis for that is?

• (1000)

Mr. Brodie Berrigan: Thank you for the question.

As was mentioned previously, a vast majority, if not all, of the animal activists we have some experience with are very much fundamentally opposed to animal agriculture, full stop. That's really the issue. The challenge we're having is with ensuring that the proper biosecurity measures are in place to support those farmers. Not to prevent people from having free speech and expressing their concerns, but to ensure that those issues don't bleed onto the farm—

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: I want to interrupt for a second because I have only a couple of minutes. I was asking what it is that these groups.... You worked with Humane Canada, I believe, and that's a group that advocates for animal welfare and is not opposed to animal agriculture. I think there are numerous others that I could actually put into the record, but I'm sure you know of them. What are they finding? What are they showing people or telling people? Why are people concerned about this?

Mr. Brodie Berrigan: I can't speak on behalf of those other organizations. What I will say is that the National Farm Animal Care Council has put in place a number of codes of practice to support

animal welfare in Canada. Those codes of practice have been co-developed with organizations, like Humane Canada, that are very much in support of continuing to improve those codes of practice. Our biosecurity and animal welfare standards are really world-class, and we should be very proud of the measures we have in place in Canada.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Berrigan and Ms. Taylor Roy.

You have two and a half minutes, Mr. Perron.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Lampron, I'll come back to you. I'd be remiss if I didn't chat with a member of my riding. I'll let you answer the previous question about the possibility of unfortunate incidents.

Mr. Pierre Lampron: That's what makes Bill C-275 so important: If producers feel that the government doesn't care about their problems, if they don't feel supported, at some point, all kinds of things can happen.

I think the idea is that we work together. We're going to work on our side, the government is going to put rules in place to prevent these intrusions, we're going to put out nice positive messages for producers and we're going to get through this. That's what I wanted to say.

We mustn't forget that these organizations—we saw the amounts mentioned earlier—are very well organized. They're international. They see which countries have no laws or standards, and it's these countries that are the most attacked. We don't want to be the global target of farm intrusions. It's important to have protection.

Mr. Yves Perron: Mr. Doyon, earlier, you proposed an amendment or, at least, a possible modification, if I understood you correctly. You said that we should clarify the text of the law by mentioning that everyone is deemed to bring a risk.

As we're running out of time, could you send us your proposal in writing and tell us what you think should be in the law? This would allow us to evaluate your proposal from a legal point of view and see if it's possible to add what you're proposing. Sometimes we can't just write everything any old way.

I'd also like you to explain why you're proposing this. If you do it quickly, we might get Mr. Lampron's reaction too.

Mr. Paul Doyon: I'll let Ms. Tessier answer.

Ms. Annie Tessier: A brief clarifying our thinking on this amendment has already been sent. What we are saying is that anyone who enters without authorization presents a biosafety risk. Even if that person respects certain biosafety protocols, they increase the risk, because they can cause stress. So we asked that it be made clear that anyone who enters without authorization or legitimate excuse is deemed to cause a biosecurity risk.

Mr. Yves Perron: Mr. Lampron, you have five seconds.

• (1005)

Mr. Pierre Lampron: It's a good idea to protect animals.

The Chair: That's good. Thank you, Mr. Perron, Ms. Tessier and Mr. Lampron.

It's the Conservatives' turn. Mr. Steinley, you have five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Warren Steinley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

There are a few things I'd like to set straight. Sometimes there's some misinformation, even in our committees. There have been two cases of disease outbreaks because of trespassing. One was in Quebec City, where they had rotavirus on the farm, which they hadn't seen in 40 years, after unlawful protesters were on the farm. Another example was on an Ontario mink farm, where trespassers released thousands of animals, which led to an outbreak of distemper. I'm not sure what the other committee members were hearing, but that's the case of what happened and how protesters have allowed disease outbreaks on farms.

There are a few other things I'd like to put on the record from some of the organizations that are against animals as food. One is PETA, and their revenue was \$82.2 million last year. This is a direct quote: "Ending speciesism is our ultimate goal. One strategy to end speciesism would be to end the use of animals as food." That was Matthew Braun, manager of grassroots protest campaigns, 2021.

Another quote I would like to put on the record is from The Humane League, which has a total revenue of \$13.6 million: "find a vulnerable target.... The crueler it is, the quicker the fight is over." That was David Coman-Hidy, former executive director of the campaign in 2016. Another one is from Direct Action Everywhere, with a total revenue \$1.6 million: "We are trying to destroy animal agriculture", said co-founder Wayne Hsiung in 2016.

I'll direct my questions to Ms. Reynolds.

When farmers see these comments and know that there are hundreds of millions of dollars put into ending what they do, and they see these comments online, like the story you told us of the individual in Ontario, obviously that does affect their mental health. For anyone on this committee to sit here and say that there are no groups out there trying to end animal agriculture, do you think that would be factual?

Ms. Megz Reynolds: We've seen from events around the world and events in our own country that there are individuals whose intent has nothing to do with the welfare of the animals. It is strictly that they want animal agriculture to be stopped. That is why I wanted to highlight the comment on whistle-blowers, where oftentimes it's not the people who are showing up to possibly do harm who are in a place to be whistle-blowers. It's the neighbours; it's the professionals who show up and know what they're looking for.

I just want to stress how so many farmers in Canada are at such a chronic stress load that it could be one little thing and.... For us on the outside, it looks like it was just fear of this or the tractor breaking down, and we don't understand what happened, but that was enough to put that individual over the edge.

We've had multiple deaths due to suicide over the last couple of months in our agriculture community, and oftentimes from the outside it looks like one little thing. Anything we can do to help give our farmers peace of mind and help them feel safe for their animals and safe on their farms and in their homes I think is important.

Mr. Warren Steinley: I also have that case of Mr. Barlow and his constituents, the Tschettlers, where just because there wasn't a disease outbreak.... People broke into their farm and they could have had a disease outbreak, but also many birds had to be put down because the people who were on that farm didn't know how to behave around animals and that caused these animals to stampede and kill one another.

Do you think that would have had an adverse effect on that family as well, with someone who should really not be on the farm in the first place coming onto the farm? This bill would prevent that.

Ms. Megz Reynolds: Of course. If anyone were to have someone show up in their house or their home, there would be a huge amount of stress and anxiety created, but add on top of that the fear that you have for your animals. And then again, even if you're raising animals to go into the food system, if something happens on your watch, that affects you and it affects your mental well-being because you feel like you have failed them and you have failed as a farmer.

Mr. Warren Steinley: I'd add this from personal experience. I grew up on a dairy and beef farm and it was a family farm. My father and my uncle farmed together, and animal health was paramount in what we did. Our family vacations were going to cattle shows. We loved our animals. I could go on for an hour about the show calves I've had, the nights I slept in the barn to make sure that when the calves were born, they were okay. It was something very important to us and it was a family tradition to make sure that our animals were well taken care of. I think that's the norm. I don't think we were special.

These family farms need protection now. What they're going through now is a cultivated effort to make sure that the farmers are shown as villains, and I believe that's what this is sometimes. They're trying to show farmers as villains, and we, as parliamentarians, need to stand up for our family farmers and make sure they're safe, make sure their families are safe.

I just want to thank you for all the work you do, and thank all the witnesses for being here today. I'll leave the final comments to you, Megz, on anything more we could do to help our farmers.

• (1010)

The Chair: Unfortunately, Mr. Steinley, you've talked right to five minutes, but it was great.

Ms. Reynolds, we have appreciated your testimony, but I have no more time to give.

I'm going to turn it over to Mr. Louis. Just to be clear, I skipped over Mr. Johns because he asked really good questions and he said he was satisfied that he had been able to get his testimony on the record. Thank you, Mr. Johns, for giving us two and a half minutes back.

Mr. Louis, it's over to you for five minutes. You'll finish us off.

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all witnesses here in person and virtually.

I think from today's discussion it's clear that we all want to ensure that farmers are safe, which includes mental health, and we all want to make sure that animals are safe. That's the balance that we seem to be having. We've had this at many committees, in many studies that we've done, and I don't think we need to vilify one side or the other. I think everyone is working for the same thing.

I really appreciate everyone being here. From the Do More Agriculture Foundation, Ms. Reynolds, thank you very much. We have talked about that stigma for mental health and it's one of those big contributing factors in why so many people in the farming industry who are dealing with mental illness choose not to get help. One thing that made me feel good is that you said people are becoming more comfortable talking about mental health.

I still find that there's a bit of the traditional system issue. There's the challenge that people don't want to talk to someone in their community, which is why I'm so proud that we now have AgTalk, which is a peer-to-peer support line, or the suicide hotline that we're putting in soon.

You mentioned that there are issues that are out of farmers' control but limit their ability to do work. The biggest issues I'm hearing about would be climate change, which I think is also in your studies; financial uncertainty; isolation and loneliness, especially in the last few years; and the workload and the time pressure. Those are the major issues.

Where would the concerns about trespassing fit in, in that sliding scale?

Ms. Megz Reynolds: That's a really great question. Honestly, it depends on the farmer and on where they live and what they're exposed to.

In some areas, there is a higher risk or farmers have a perceived higher risk. I talked to a producer in Saskatchewan earlier this week, and she doesn't feel she can send her children out to fix fences by themselves because of the perceived risk there. You have farms, especially in the more highly populated areas, where they feel the risk is very high and very real. So it's down to that individual.

Mr. Tim Louis: So it wouldn't be necessarily geographical. It's more of an individual situation.

Ms. Megz Reynolds: It's geographical, in the sense of the denser population. You have farms.... Ontario is a great case of farms and cities being very close together. I used to farm in Saskatchewan. That's all there was, where I farmed.

You have a much higher risk in some areas, even if, again, it is perceived. We're surrounded by people who don't understand what we're doing. They're three to four generations removed from a family farm, and the farmers feel like these other individuals don't trust what they're doing and don't trust that they're taking care of their animals. Then, if they do come in, because they think something's wrong, they could look at a barn full of birds or a dairy operation,

and what they're going to see is very different from what the vet being there sees or what the person whose job it is to make sure those animals are safe sees, because one is trained and the other is not trained.

Mr. Tim Louis: You mentioned—this was anecdotal—that some people are bringing others to the farms for advocacy, maybe even through social media. That helps. That's educating people. You mentioned that it's cultivating empathy as well. It seems like a win-win.

Are there any programs that you know of that we can look into amplifying, to see how we can bridge that gap?

Ms. Megz Reynolds: I know that John Barlow mentioned Agriculture in the Classroom. A lot of what's going on right now in regard to welcoming people to the farm and doing more of those scheduled visits where it's controlled and it's safe is farmer-led and grassroots-led.

I would welcome all of you to reach out to farmers in your networks and ask to go for a visit to learn more about their operations.

Mr. Tim Louis: That happens with this committee quite a bit. We've all been on farms.

You mentioned four provinces—I think they are Alberta, Ontario, P.E.I. and Saskatchewan—that have bills like this in place. Are we seeing the number of trespassers going down because of those provincial laws being in place? Are you seeing mental health improving in those provinces where this is already in place?

• (1015)

Ms. Megz Reynolds: I can't speak to the statistics of trespassing and not trespassing. That's not my area of expertise.

What I can say is that it just feels like there is more going on at all times that is out of control, whether that's more severe weather, a higher risk of disease happening or possibly trespassing, depending on where you live. It's the cumulative effect of this constantly sitting on producers' shoulders and them possibly not reaching out for help. That's the fear. It's all of that adding up and not being able to remove some of that or help support them with different pieces.

Mr. Tim Louis: I have only about 30 seconds left—

The Chair: No, unfortunately, you have five.

Mr. Tim Louis: I have five seconds left.

I wanted to talk about the biosecurity enhancement initiative under SCAP that we're using to strengthen biosecurity, but I will ask you after.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, colleagues. We did very well to get three rounds in.

Thank you, Mr. Johns, for giving us a couple of minutes back.

On behalf of the committee, I'd like to thank all of our witnesses here today in the room—Mr. Berrigan and Ms. Reynolds—and on screen—Mr. Lampron, Mr. Doyon and Madame Tessier. Thank you for your contribution to agriculture and for being here today.

Now, just before you go, colleagues, we do have the subcommittee report that the clerk has prepared. We did discuss this. She wants us to be able to move forward and put this forward. I know there were conversations about maybe going in a different direction. That's fine. We, as a committee, can always decide differently, but I would like to table that we did have a subcommittee meeting

and we did discuss some things, and if it changes down the line, it changes down the line. I'm not steering you wrong, I promise.

Do I have unanimous consent to concur in the report?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Colleagues, we'll be back next Thursday, October 5, to continue this study.

The meeting is adjourned.

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