



February 25, 2015

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DELIVERED BY EMAIL

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GOVERNANCE AND OVERSIGHT IN THE REGULATED SYSTEM

Dear Chairs:

I write further to the Vancouver Sun article of February 23, 2015 regarding biosecurity audits in the BC poultry sector. You should already be aware of the earlier January 7 and February 20, 2015 communications sent by staff of the BC Farm Industry Review Board (BCFIRB) regarding this subject. BCFIRB members also discussed this matter at our February 11-12, 2015 board meeting.

In its earlier communications referenced above, BCFIRB acknowledged that there can be legitimate statutory and legal reasons for not releasing certain information. How such decisions are made and communicated, however, is critical to establishing and maintaining public trust in a regulatory system. In this regard, your boards as first instance regulators did not meet BCFIRB's expectations as the Provincial supervisory board.

In addition to the principled expectations outlined in our November 25, 2009 and June 14, 2011 letters, I draw your attention to the SAFETI principles and their definitions established in consultation with the commodity boards. You will note the definition of "transparent" and that regulatory boards will "ensure that **processes, practices, procedures & reporting** on exercise of mandate are open, accessible and fully informed" [emphasis added]. I also draw your attention to the September 2011 guidance document – developed at the request of the boards – which outlines the balance between accessibility to information and the protection of privacy. Most recently, BCFIRB representatives made a presentation at the January 22, 2015 seminar conducted by the Centre for Organizational Governance in Agriculture reviewing these expectations.

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Farm Industry Review Board

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SAFETI¹, especially the transparency element, is a tool by which the public can gain increased confidence in the governance and oversight of the regulatory system. Such confidence is critical generally. As boards gain increased statutory responsibility for ensuring that biosecurity, animal welfare, food safety and other important social issues are effectively and appropriately regulated and enforced under the *Natural Products Marketing (BC) Act*, your performance will be scrutinized more closely by the public, many of whom are consumers of regulated products. In BCFIRB's view, the response of your boards – regardless of whether audits should or should not be released – to the request for information did not meet the expectations of transparency and did not contribute to ensuring public confidence in the regulatory system.

As you are aware from our January 15, 2015 letter, BCFIRB will be arranging a meeting of commodity board chairs to update and review governance requirements and other matters. That meeting will provide a timely opportunity to further review BCFIRB's supervisory expectations of the boards.

Yours truly,



John Les
Chair

cc: Honourable Norm Letnick
Minister of Agriculture

James Mack, Assistant Deputy Minister
Agriculture Science and Policy, Ministry of Agriculture

Jack Brown, Chair
BC Cranberry Marketing Commission

Gary Rolston, Chair
BC Hog Marketing Commission

Jim Byrne, Chair
BC Milk Marketing Board

Alf Krause, Chair
BC Vegetable Marketing Commission

BCFIRB website

¹ Strategic, accountable, fair, effective, transparent, inclusive.