

**Opening Statement for the House of Commons Standing
Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food**

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**representing the plant science industry
représentant de l'industrie de la phytologie**

My name is Dennis Prouse, and I am Vice President, Government Affairs of CropLife Canada. We greatly appreciate the kind invitation you have extended to us today.

CropLife Canada represents the manufacturers, developers and distributors of plant science innovations, including pest control products and plant biotechnology, for use in agriculture, urban and public health settings. We are committed to protecting human health and the environment, and in providing a safe, abundant food supply for Canadians. We believe in driving innovation through continuous research. CropLife Canada is a member of CropLife International, a global federation representing the plant science industry in 91 countries.

As this Committee completes this study on one element of biotechnology I think it is useful to look at the success of plant biotechnology, which Canadians might be more familiar with. It has now been over 20 years since the commercialization of the first genetically engineered crops in Canada, and we can now look back on where that has led us, what the process was, and what the path might be going forward.

The plant biotechnology industry is a global, research-based industry that invests significant amounts of capital and time into the discovery, development and regulatory approval of a wide variety of plant breeding innovations. These innovations have produced new varieties of crops that are resistant to insects, diseases, drought, and certain herbicides thereby delivering more predictable yields, improved quality and access to more environmental sustainable farming practices.

These innovations have delivered significant benefits around the globe for the environment, consumers and farmers. In Canada alone these improved crops raise yields by 32%. Fully \$8.3 billion, or 71% of Canada's trade balance in crops, is directly attributable to innovations in crop protection products and plant biotechnology. These benefits are good for consumers as well as farmers, since without the use of plant biotechnology and pesticides, we would pay about 55% more for food, roughly \$4400 more per family and \$60 billion more as a country.

We are also very proud of the role that plant biotechnology is playing to improve sustainability. Reduced land use, less tillage and limiting equipment passes saves Canadian farmers up to 194 million litres of fuel per year, saving 29 million tonnes per year of GHGs. Without biotech crops and pesticides farmers would need to use 50% more land than they do today to produce the same amount of food, more than the total area of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and PEI combined. Far from harming biodiversity, growing more food on less land promotes it. For the future, research is underway to develop crops that can thrive in changing climate conditions including drought, excess moisture and salty soils. Modern agriculture is more sustainable than ever thanks to innovation, and is part of the solution for climate change.

The history of plant biotechnology in Canada has been one of tremendous success. That success has been made possible by one key policy pillar – a transparent, predictable and science based regulatory system. Canada’s science based regulatory system is world renowned, and since its official formation almost 20 years ago the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and Health Canada have done outstanding work in safeguarding the health and safety of Canadians, and in establishing a regulatory model in which innovation could be commercialized. This is not insignificant, as many nations have regulatory models that lack predictability and timeliness and are rife with political interference in decision making. Needless to say, this is not a model that fosters investment and innovation.

My previous statements were specific to our experience in plant biotechnology but I believe the remainder of my thoughts today apply to the path to success for any innovation, plant or animal.

In order for Canada to continue to be a leader in any area of innovation, and remain competitive on a world stage in agriculture, and realize the benefits these products can provide, farmers require timely access to the latest agricultural tools. To do this it is imperative that Canada’s regulatory pathway for the commercialization of these innovations is timely, predictable and transparent to create an environment that encourages investment.

The most critical element in the commercialization process impacting the development of these capital intensive, research-based innovations in Canada is the regulatory regime for safety approvals. There is a relatively short window for innovators to make a commercial success of research-based investments and so lengthy and unpredictable review periods are prohibitive for large corporations and smaller start-ups alike.

The pace of innovation in these fields has never been greater Canada has an opportunity to continue to be a leader. Canadian regulators are already involved in the international science community tracking the discussions on these issues, for example Health Canada and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, just last week, hosted an OECD meeting here in Ottawa, gathering international experts from around the world, to discuss the wide range of benefits that new “gene-editing” technology can bring to plant and animal agriculture, aquaculture, the environment and human health and the associated regulatory requirements.

Given this pace of innovation it is important for governments to periodically review their regulatory regimes which requires directed investment in those regulatory programs. In the past this investment has taken the form of the Canadian Biotech Strategy Fund in the early 2000s which resulted in the development of improved regulatory frameworks and processes which were more efficient for the government and for industry, aiding in Canada’s success as a plant biotechnology leader (5th in the world).

In the case of plant biotechnology, government would be reviewing the system in the context of two decades of safe and successful commercialization. In that time there has not been a single product

submitted for review that has been deemed harmful to either humans, animals or the environment, either in Canada or in any other country with a functioning regulatory system. Trillions of meals safely consumed, and 2 billion hectares safely grown, across the globe in that time attest to high degree of safety inherent to these innovations for both consumers and the environment. For animal biotechnology this review would be coming at a time when this long standing area of science is about to see renewed interest and investment.

In support of the above statements CropLife Canada has two recommendations for the committees consideration, that are aligned with the Government of Canada's new Innovation Agenda, particularly the commitment to "Ease of Doing Business", which has clearly signaled that the Canadian Government's desire to modernize its regulatory regimes to adapt to and capture the potential of innovative industries while maintaining Canadas high safety standards

- 1) CropLife Canada recommends that the Government of Canada publically commit to improving the efficiency of the approval system for products of both plant and animal biotechnology through directed investment in the regulatory departments involved in their oversight. This investment would be time limited and focused on finding efficiencies by improving the underpinnings of the already functioning systems and embracing risk based approaches to regulation. This commitment to improve would clearly indicate to innovators that investment in these sectors are encouraged while also driving home to the general public that safety will remain a top priority.

This type of clear commitment will drive government efforts to improve the regulatory regime through leveraging internal efficiencies and reducing duplication. It will also demonstrate to the public that safety will not be compromised during this process while sending a signal to existing innovators, and new startups, that Canada is committed to supporting the commercialization of new innovations.

- 2) CropLife Canada strongly recommends that the Government of Canada builds on its strong science-based regulatory system, leveraging the international scientific consensus on the safety of these products and their domestic and global history of safe use, and develop a tiered risk assessment process which is founded in the principal of risk-based allocation of resources. Ensuring that government resources are appropriately allocated will ensure the regulatory regime can process new innovations quickly and efficiently.

This should specifically address plant breeding innovations which have emerged in recent years (e.g. products of gene editing, CRISPR-CAS9, etc.), which are early indicators that the pace of technology

development is increasing rapidly compared to the last 20 years. It is essential that a modernized approach to reviewing these innovations be based on a predefined and transparent process which is founded on a definition of risk that is consistent across the departments and agencies involved in the regulatory regime.

To conclude, Mr. Chair, it is clear that plant biotechnology has delivered clear and measurable benefits to Canadian consumers, farmers, and the environment. These benefits have been facilitated by successive Canadian governments having the foresight to maintain a transparent, predictable and science based regulatory system. For both plant and animal biotechnology we believe that maintaining the integrity of that system, and respecting the scientists within it, is critical to fostering future innovation in Canada. Equally as important to fostering innovation will be clear measures to improve efficiency and timeliness of that regulatory system.

I thank you for your time, and look forward to any questions the Committee may have.