

This is the reply to the WSGA's October 30, 2012 letter to Minister Ritz the investigation into the XL recall. Our letter also went to the premiers and agriculture ministers of all four western provinces.

Quote: 182343

Mr. Phil Rowland
President
Western Stock Growers' Association
office@wsga.ca

Dear Mr. Rowland:

Thank you for your correspondence regarding the voluntary recall by XL Foods Inc. of various raw beef products that may have been contaminated with *E. coli* O157:H7. This is a serious issue, and I appreciate your taking the time to share the Association's views.

I am aware of the extreme pressure that the closure of the XL plant placed on producers and the industry; however, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is satisfied with the actions taken by XL Foods, and effective October 23, 2012, the XL Foods plant was allowed to progressively resume slaughter and processing operations under enhanced CFIA surveillance and increased testing protocols. While plant activities are gradually being resumed, the industry will continue to feel the effects of this difficult time. Please be assured that the Government of Canada will continue to work with industry members as we move forward to fully recover and expand Canada's beef sector.

You have raised a number of valuable points about the recent recall, the CFIA's actions, and the efforts of XL Foods Inc. to return to normal operations. I can assure you that a thorough review of all events and circumstances related to the XL Foods Inc. *E. coli* O157:H7 situation will be conducted. The review will be undertaken by recognized external experts supported by the CFIA, the Public Health Agency of Canada, Health Canada, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. The results of the review and the CFIA's response will be made public once completed. Your comments will be provided to the external review body for further consideration as this review goes forward.

The CFIA is committed to full transparency. A number of the issues that you raised about *E. coli* testing and specific corrective actions taken at the establishment are addressed in the CFIA's report on the in-depth assessment of XL Foods Inc. Establishment 38, which is available at www.inspection.gc.ca/food/consumer-centre/food-safety-investigations/xl-foods/assessment-of-establishment-38/eng/1350996393353/1350996638312.

I have noted your comments about the shared responsibility for food safety among government, industry, and the consumer. You will be pleased to learn that the *Safe Food for Canadians Act*, which is intended to further strengthen our food safety system, received Royal Assent on November 22. The Act provides industry with clear, consistent, and straightforward inspection and enforcement rules so that it can best meet its responsibility to put safe food on shelves for consumers. The Act also includes regulation-making authorities for food traceability. This authority will enable future regulations to be developed where necessary and, following consultations with the industry and the public, to better track food in the marketplace.

I understand that ranchers, farmers, and industry need a strong processing sector, and that the success of the processing industry must be founded on food safety with an appropriate level of oversight. The CFIA remains fully committed to ensuring that Canada's food safety system provides consumers with the protection that they expect and deserve. Please be assured that the health and safety of Canadians and Canada's food supply is, and will remain, of the utmost importance for the Government of Canada.

I trust that this information is of assistance. Again, thank you for writing.

Sincerely,

Gerry Ritz, PC, MP