

# 2021 CONFINED FEEDING OPERATIONS SURVEY

## Final Report

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December 15, 2021



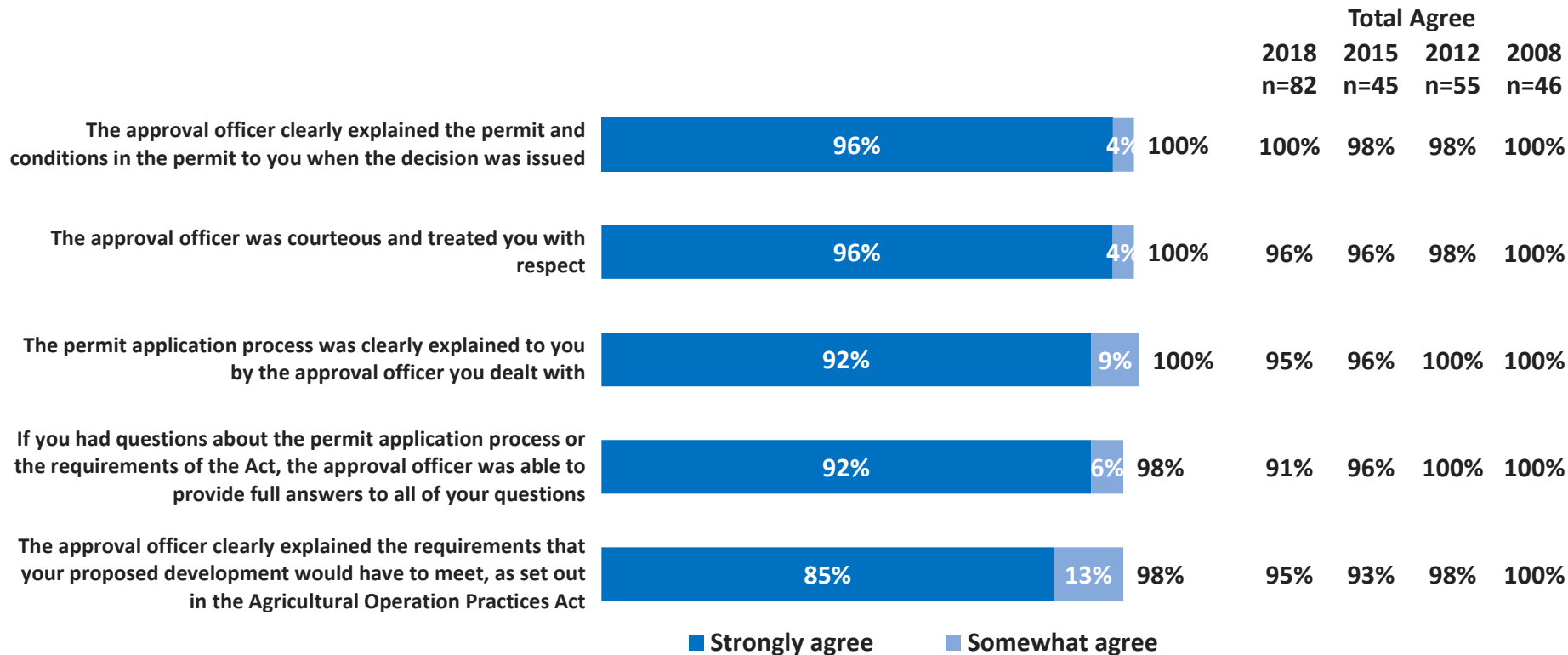
# Methodology

- This report presents the results of a telephone survey conducted by Ipsos on behalf of the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB).
- This is the fifth survey conducted to determine how well the NRCB is dealing with its clients under the Agricultural Operation Practices Act. Prior surveys were conducted in 2018, 2015, 2012 and 2008.
- The current survey was fielded November 2 to 19, 2021 with respondents who had interacted with the NRCB from October 1, 2020 to September 30, 2021. The average interview was six minutes in length.
- The final sample size was 142 respondents, broken down as follows (note that 6 respondents were BOTH applicants and operators involved in a complaint or compliance issue):
  - 65 complainants (+/-8.0%, 19 times out of 20)
  - 47 applicants (+/-10.4%, 19 times out of 20)
  - 36 operators involved in a complaint or a compliance issue (+/-13.3%, 19 times out of 20)
- Due to rounding:
  - Not all charts and tables in this report will add to exactly 100%.
  - Not all summary statistics will be exactly equal to the sum of their component parts.

# APPLICATION PROCESS

# Agreement with Statements about Application Process

Ratings for the application process continue to be very strong on all attributes.



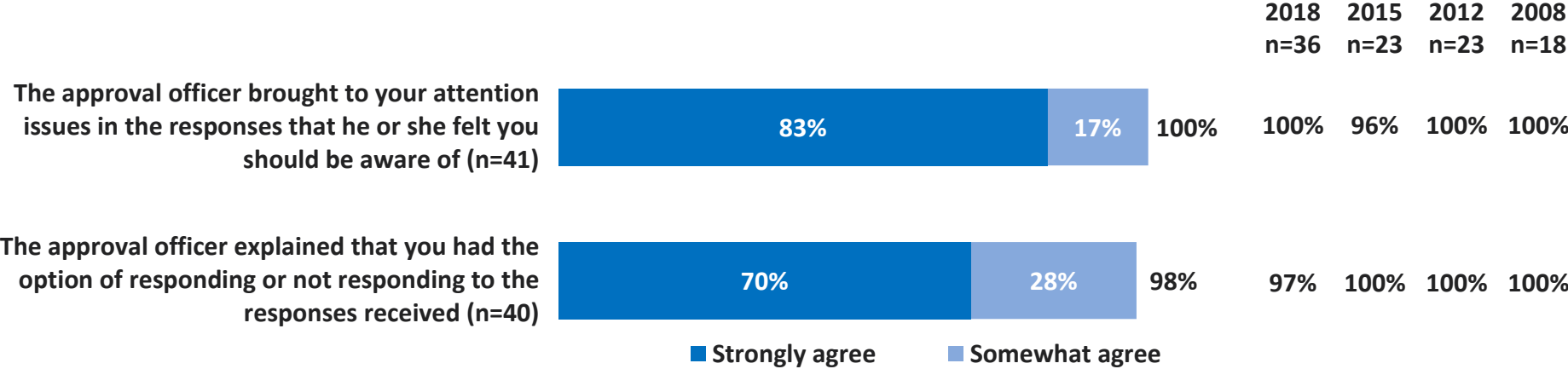
Q1. Thinking about your most recent application for a permit, please indicate your agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements. Would you say you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree?

Base: Applicants (n=47)

# Agreement with Statements about Response Letters

## (Among the 87% who received letters)

Applicants continue to agree that with respect to response letters, approval officers are identifying important issues and providing options for responding.



In 2021, applicants were asked if they received responses – that is, letters of support or opposition – when their notice of application was published.

In prior years, applicants were asked if they received statements of concern – that is, letters of opposition – when their notice of their application was published.

Q3. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements. Would you say you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree?

5 Base: Applicants who received a response letter excluding don't know and not applicable (n=40 to 41)



# Helpful to Have All Information in One Binder

Almost all applicants think it is helpful to have a single binder with all relevant information.



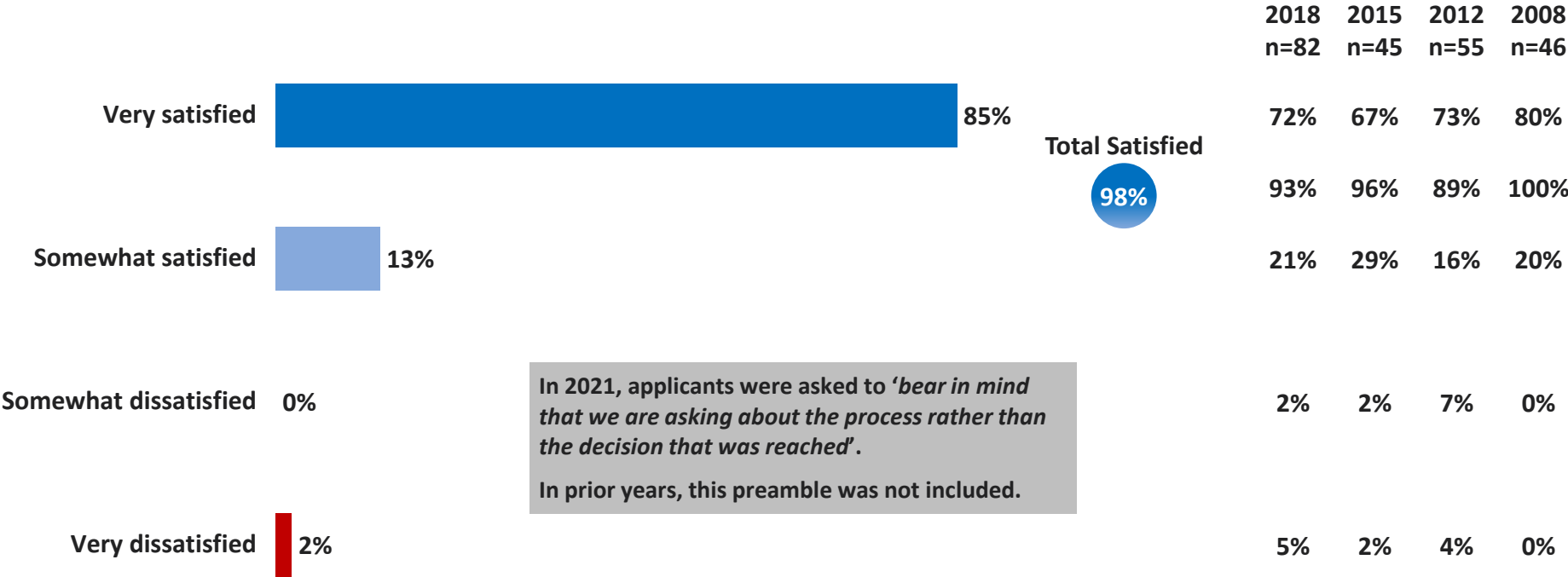
Q4. *At the end of the process, you were provided with a binder that contained the decision on your application, copies of your application, and other information. Did you find it helpful to have all of the information in one binder?*

Base: Applicants (n=47)



# Overall Satisfaction with NRCB During Application Process

Nearly all applicants are satisfied with the overall service they received from the NRCB in the application process.

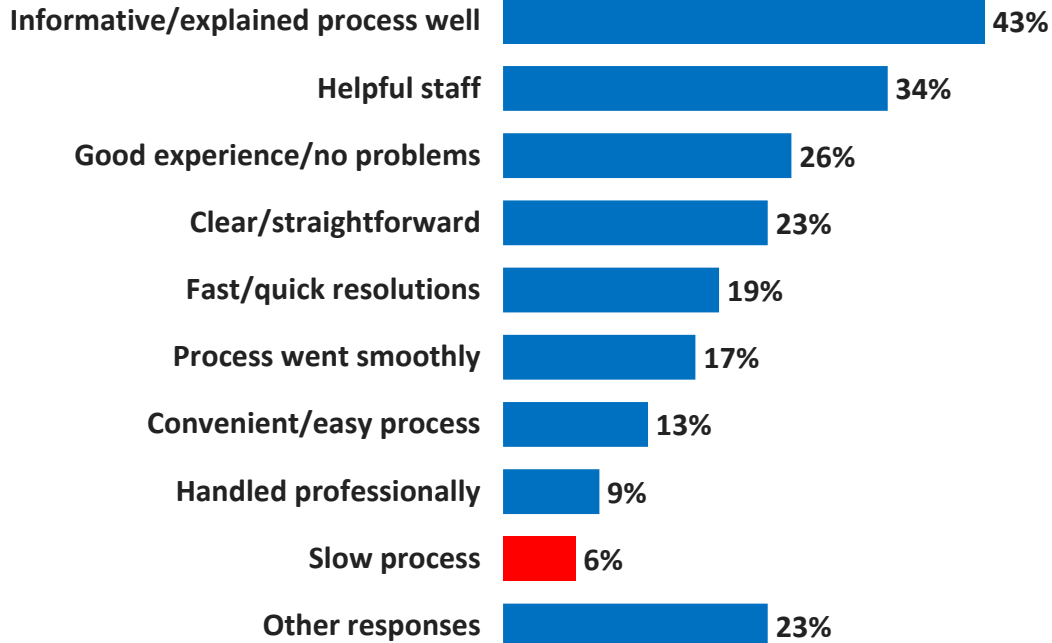


Q5. *Bear in mind that we are asking about the process rather than the decision that was reached. Thinking about your overall experience with the NRCB during the permit application approval process for your permit application, how satisfied were you, overall, with the service you received from the NRCB?*



# Top Reasons for Satisfaction Ratings (Coded open-ended responses)

The top reasons for satisfaction relate to clear information/explanations, helpful staff and a smooth, quick and convenient process.



## Sampling of Comments

*"All my questions were answered in good time. And the issues that came up were dealt with very quickly."*

*"Because he was very helpful and he explained everything to me."*

*"Because she explained everything when I didn't understand and I think she did a very good job."*

*"Everything went according to plan. There were no great holdups and they were very co-operative and they understood what we needed."*

*"I got all my questions answered and very smooth and easy process."*

*"It was a clear process and the officer approached the process in a very fair and even way."*

*"It was clearly explained to me how the process worked and we went through each step."*

*"The officer explained it so clearly and any questions asked, they were able to answer. He was friendly to talk to with and had lots of patience for questions that had to be clearly explained."*

*"There was somebody that disagreed with the permit and the NRCB helped us with that. They were very much on our side."*

*"They are very professional, making the whole process clear. It wasn't like dealing with a lot of bureaucracies, everything is done for a positive reason, not just to make it difficult."*

Q6. Why do you say you were [INSERT SATISFACTION RATING FROM Q5] with the overall permit application process?

Base: Applicants (n=47)



# Barriers and Challenges with Application Process

All open-ended comments on barriers/challenges with the application process are listed below. Most (77%) applicants had no comments on barriers/challenges.

## All Comments

*"A small change is made into a complete new permit. The 30,000 square foot barn, I wanted to move it 20 feet. That triggered a complete new application even though it was within the boundaries for minimum distance separation."*

*"Based on what I've heard, the link between NRCB and Alberta Environment isn't known to all staff at Alberta Environment"*

*"Basically is the mind set of the manager of officers, field officers. Basically sets as a yes or no prior to any further investigation."*

*"If you get along with your neighbours it goes better. And it's far away from the city lines, borders."*

*"I do know that we have to apply for a permit, but what happens when you apply for a permit and you finally go build, plans change and then you have to wait for a permit again. You make a plan, but when you make this plan it doesn't always work in reality and you have to adjust and the builder has to wait for the permit."*

*"I've heard of applications being accepted, the decision made and then after the fact opposition to it. Then the application license is revoked so they are not allowed to continue on with the livestock numbers they had in the application due to concerns of acreage owners in the country. Acreage owners have too much say with the status of the application. You live in Alberta in the countryside. if we can't have agriculture here, where can we have it?"*

*"Just more communication and understanding between the producers and the approval officers."*

*"Process getting more and more complicated."*

*"The NRCB should be granted with a little more power in terms of how close you can be to a hamlet or a town."*

*"Time constraints."*

*"Would like to see setting up multiple CFOs which should not be a big hindrance. When the first one has been approved, there should be no hindrance in building the second, third or so forth providing you meet the regulations."*

Q6A. *Based on what you have experienced or heard from others, are there any barriers for operators to apply for a permit, or any particular challenges with the permit application process?*

# Suggestions for Improving the Application Process

All open-ended suggestions for improving the application process are listed below. Most (77%) applicants had no suggestions for improvement.

## All Comments

*“Application officers should follow all laws in Alberta.”*

*“As long as farmers have adequate land base they can dispose of the manure in an environmentally friendly manner regardless of what their neighbours think.”*

*“Could be split up to be more streamlined would be nice.”*

*“Just keep the worrying to a minimum so that there's not much paperwork. But for the most part it's self explanatory.”*

*“Just better open communication between both parties.”*

*“Maybe on a quicker time frame, but maybe because of COVID it's slower.”*

*“The only suggestion that I have is counties should be punished for over-stepping their authority which is NRCB legislation.”*

*“Their website could be little user friendly.”*

*“They should be thorough, that there should be no bias towards the producers from the approval officers.”*

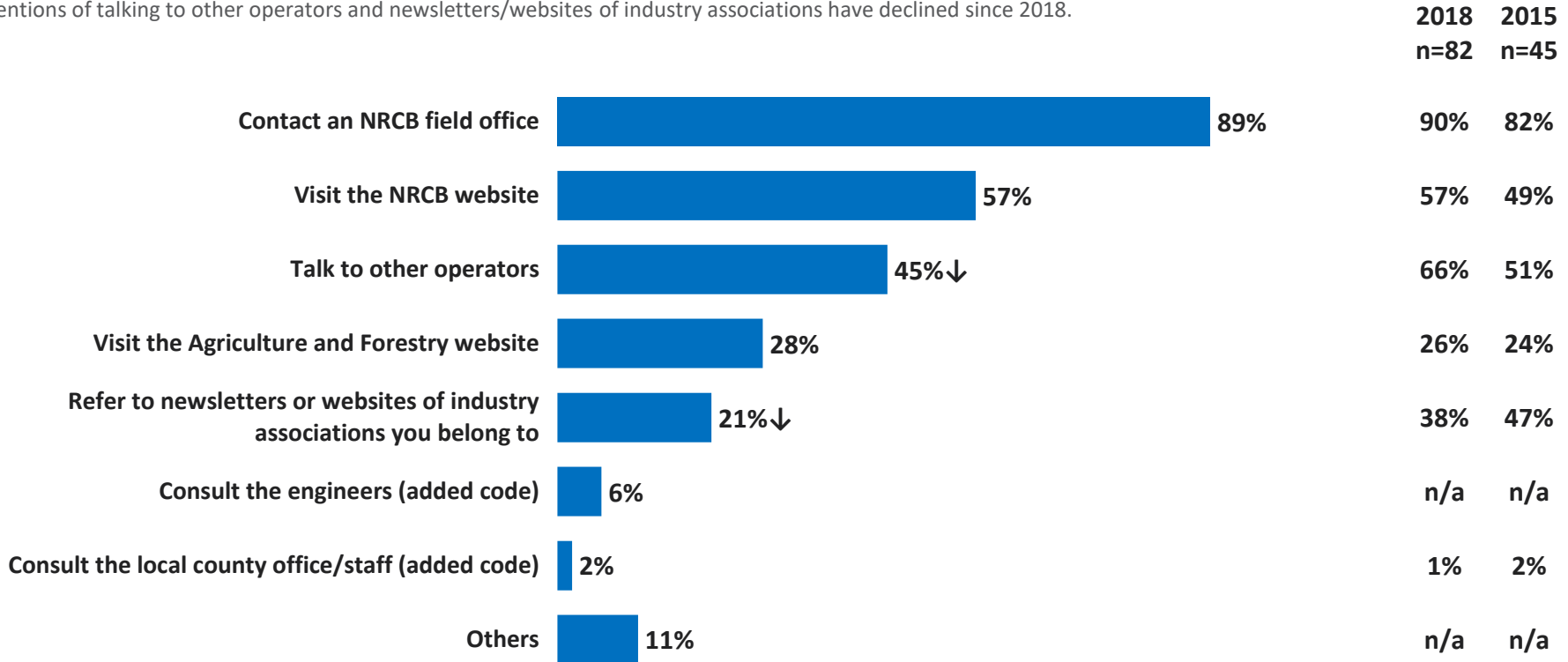
*“They're waiting for the engineer. I can't see why they can't start the process while you're waiting for those.”*

*“While building that they could be more flexible to adjust to some changes.”*

Q7. Do you have any suggestions for improving the permit application process itself – not the legislated requirements of the Agricultural Operation Practices Act?

# Information Sources

The most used information sources for applicants include the NRCB field offices, the NRCB website and talking to other operators. Mentions of talking to other operators and newsletters/websites of industry associations have declined since 2018.

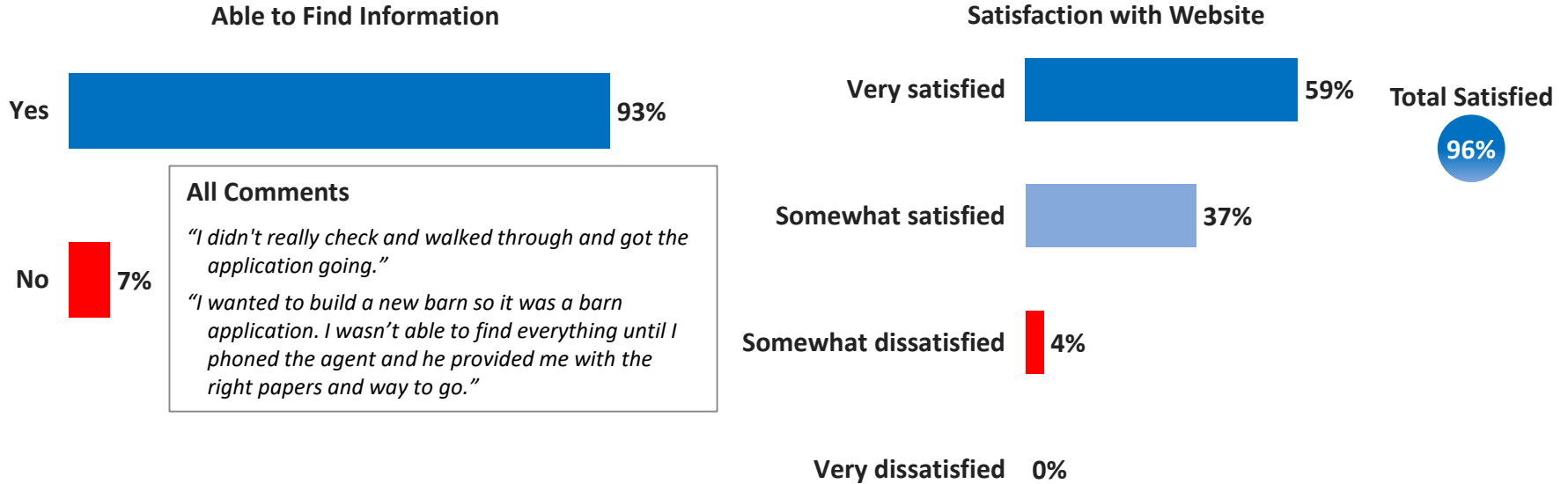


Q8A. Thinking about the last time you needed information about the act or regulations, or how to apply for a permit, did you (READ LIST)?

# Reviews of NRCB Website

## (Among those who got information from website)

Applicants who have used the NRCB website give it high ratings for satisfaction and being able to find information.



Q8C. Were you able to find the permit application information you were looking for on the NRCB website?

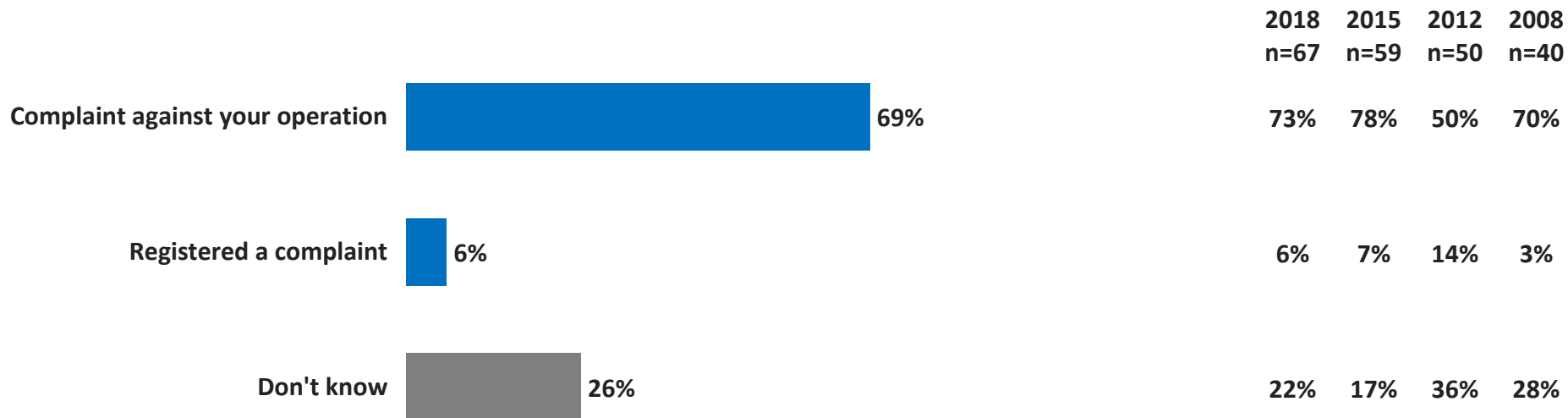
Q8D. (IF NO) What permit application information were you unable to find on the NRCB website?

Q8E. Overall, how satisfied are you with the NRCB's website when seeking permit application information? Would you say you are very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied?

# COMPLIANCE PROCESS

## Type of Compliance Issue

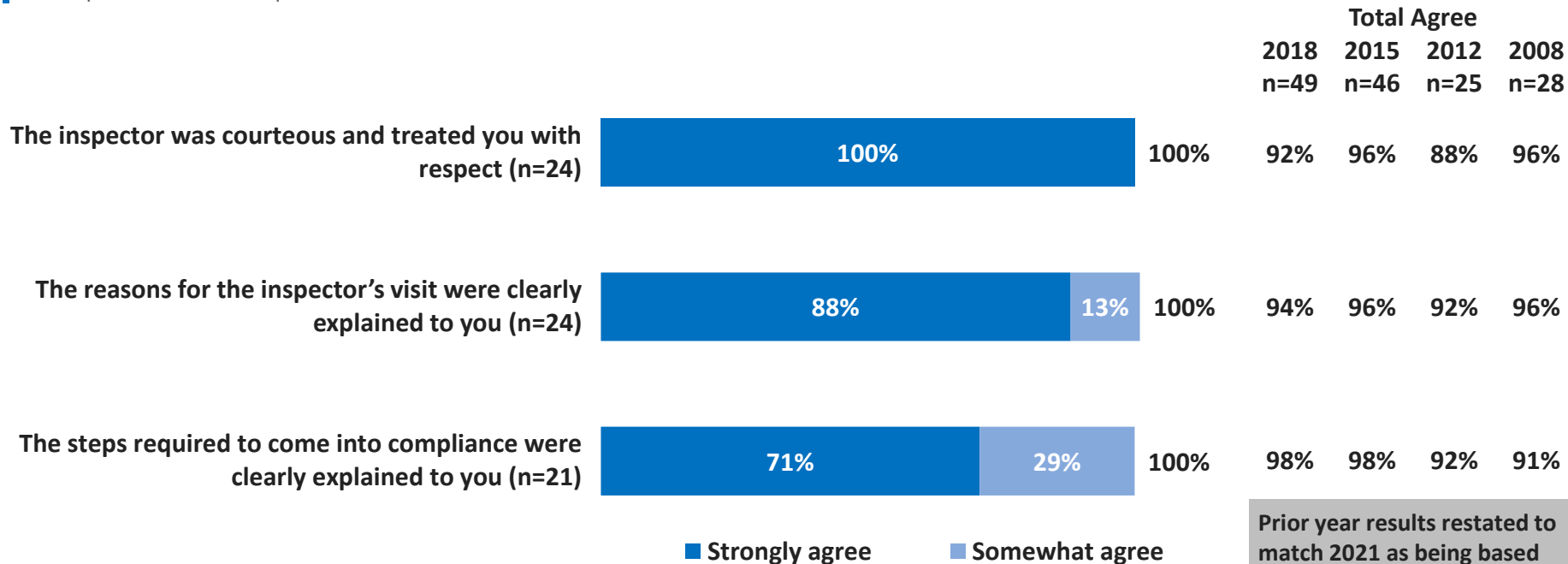
There are many more respondents who had a complaint against their operation than who registered a complaint. One-in-four were unsure which compliance issue applied to them.



Q9. *You said you dealt with the NRCB on a compliance issue. Was there a complaint against your operation or did you register a complaint under the Agricultural Operation Practices Act?*

# Agreement with Statements About Dealings with NRCB Inspectors

All of those who had a complaint against their operation agreed the inspector was courteous/respectful, clearly explained the reason for visit and clearly explained the steps to come into compliance.



Prior year results restated to match 2021 as being based only on those with complaint against their operation.

Q10. Thinking about your most recent dealings with an inspector from the NRCB, please indicate your agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements. Would you say you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree?



# Suggestions for Improving Communications or Process for Compliance Issue

All open-ended suggestions for improving communications or the process when dealing with a compliance issue are listed below. A majority (58%) had no suggestions for improvement.

## All Comments

*"I would say maybe not look into every complaint. If there's a valid complaint, go for it. But if it's not, I see that there's a problem there."*

*"If he had it in writing what he wanted done, it might've been better. That way it would leave nothing to suggestion, because it was in writing."*

*"In the case there is a complaint about some what I do or don't do from a 3rd part or from a resident, then I would like to know who that individual is - but they are not allowed to tell me."*

*"It's very appreciative of the officer to work with the farmer and realize all the stress and unforeseens with farming."*

*"Maybe the person that's lodging the complaint should pay a \$100 fee when they complain the NRCB."*

*"My experience is that the system is getting less used by people, not even taking the time to look or ask questions but involving right away with the properties and spending tax money, in my eyes has totally no value. They should look into a complaint and where to go and look for it. I think the animosity is great, like an angry neighbour who is not happy in life and looking for attention and shouldn't misuse it. It's a waste of time. I think it used to be a complaint line and the NRCB should educate people, it's not a complaint line for people who are not happy."*

*"Nothing against the NRCB, simply if the complaints are numerous and frivolous that individual is put on notice."*

*"The NRCB has to follow the government rules, but they have too much power over farmers. They are losing their rights to apply manure."*

*"There should be something in place to deal with bogus calls, calls to waste people's time. They should be held accountable."*

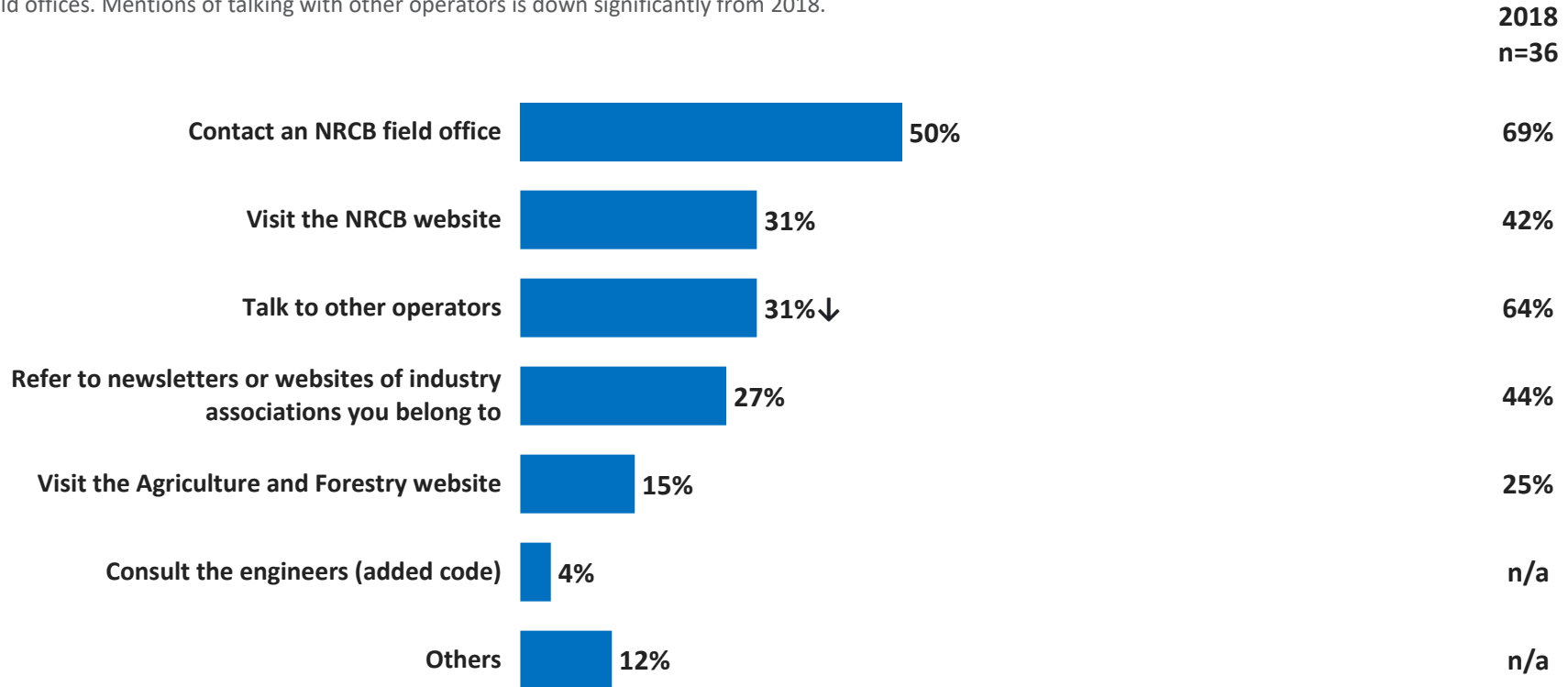
*"They need to learn the circumstances about the complainant sometimes."*

Q11. *Keeping in mind the NRCB cannot change the regulations or legislation, do you have any suggestions for improving communications or the process when dealing with a compliance issue?*



## Information Sources

Among those who had a complaint against their operation or who registered a complaint, the most used source of information are the NRBC field offices. Mentions of talking with other operators is down significantly from 2018.

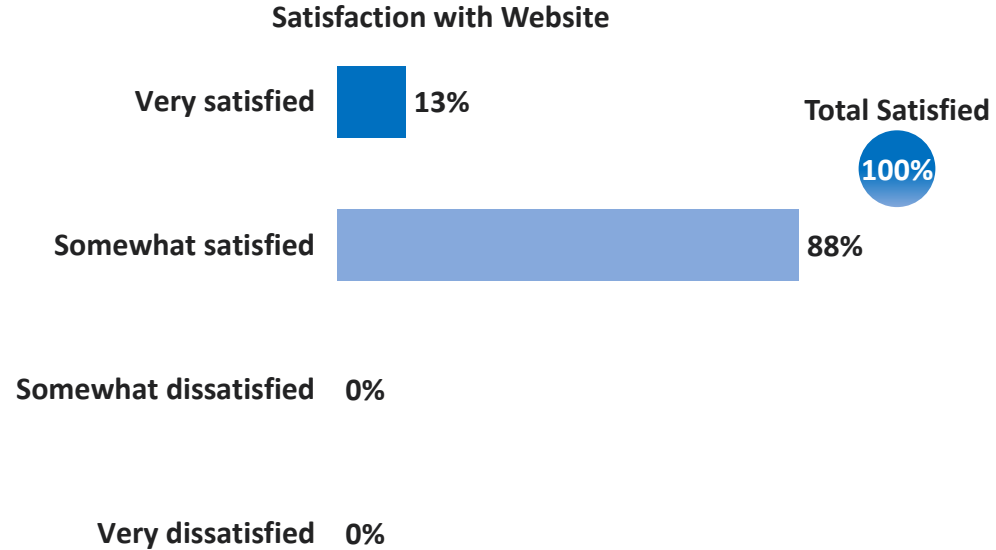
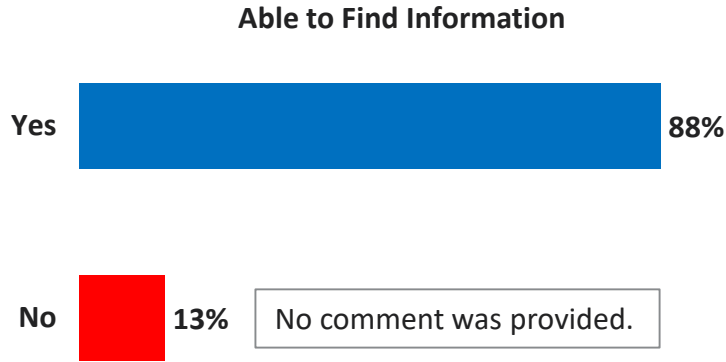


Q11A. Thinking about the last time you needed information about the act or regulations or compliance issues and information, did you (READ LIST)? (READ LIST)?

# Reviews of NRCB Website

## (Among those who got information from website)

It's only 8 respondents using the NRCB Website, but all but one was able to find their desired compliance information, and all were at least somewhat satisfied with the website.



Q11C. Were you able to find the compliance information you were looking for on the NRCB website?

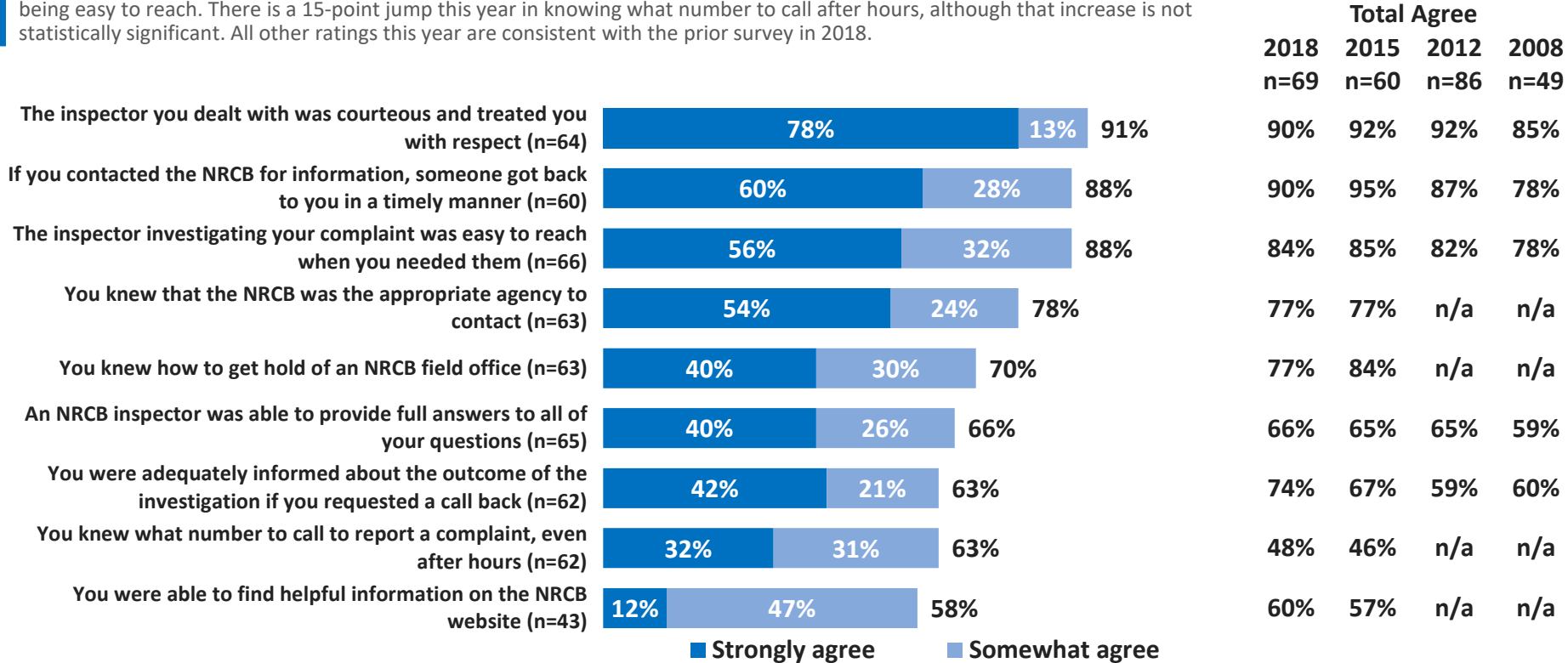
Q11D. (IF NO) What compliance information were you unable to find on the NRCB website?

Q11E. Overall, how satisfied are you with the NRCB's website for compliance information? Would you say you are very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied?

# COMPLAINT PROCESS

# Agreement with Statements about Complaint Process

Complainants give very high ratings for courteous/respectful inspectors, NRCB getting back to them in a timely manner and inspectors being easy to reach. There is a 15-point jump this year in knowing what number to call after hours, although that increase is not statistically significant. All other ratings this year are consistent with the prior survey in 2018.

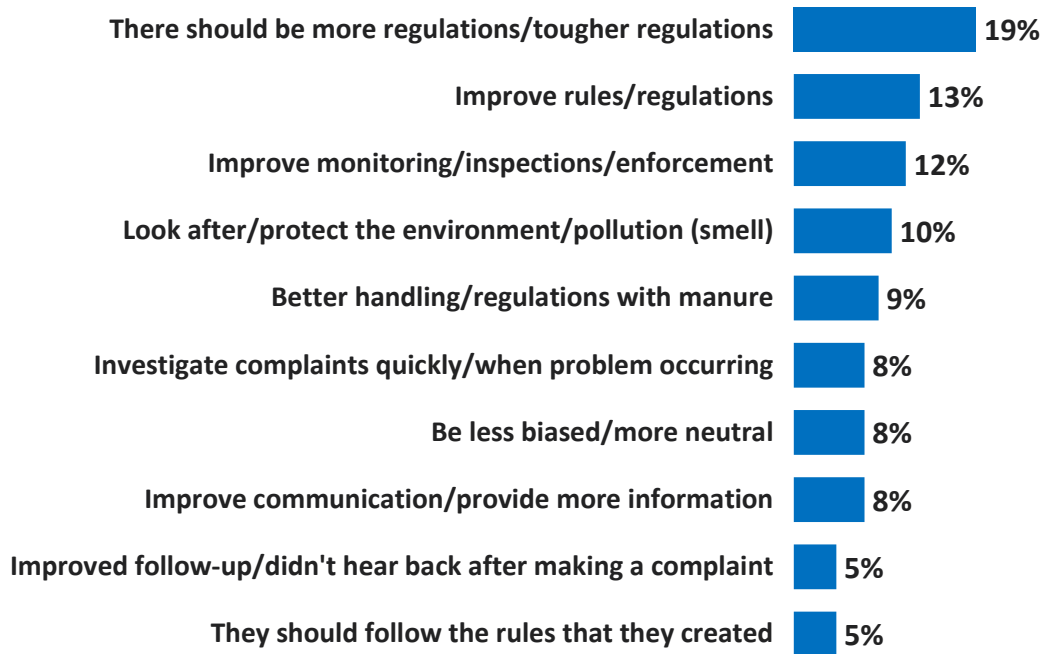


Q12. Thinking about the most recent time you registered a complaint, please indicate your agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements. If the statement does not apply to you, please say so. Would you say you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree?

# Top Suggestions for Improving Communications or Process for Complaints

## (Coded open-ended responses)

Complainants had a variety of suggestions for improving communications and the process. Even though the question made it clear that the NRCB lacks the authority to change regulations, many of the suggestions still touched on this topic. Roughly one-third (36%) offered no suggestions



### Sampling of Comments

*"Heavier enforcement for repeat offenders would be my main thing. Ensure that the inspectors have no relationships with the people they are investigating so they are unbiased."*

*"I don't know why this is so important to me, but they didn't call me back. I had to go on the website, but I didn't get a callback, I had to go on the website to find out."*

*"It's like they are a protector to the feedlot instead of being neutral. All about protecting the CFO."*

*"More regular follow up calls."*

*"That they get back to the people filing with a complaint."*

*"The problem is the lack of regulation and I know that's not NRCB. Regulation are outdated and violate our charter right so we cannot enjoy our property when we are surrounded by dairy operations."*

*"The process seems to be biased and almost predetermined I would say. Our voices were not considered as credible as the owner of the feedlot."*

*"Year after year of complaining doesn't mean you are resolving the issue. They actually have to have a communication process for the complaint and on permitting as well."*

Q13. *Keep in mind that the NRCB does not have the authority to change the regulations or legislation because Alberta Agriculture and Forestry is responsible for the legislation governing the livestock industry. Do you have any suggestions for improving communications or processes used by the NRCB when dealing with a complaint?*

Base: Complainants (n=67)

