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EXHIBIT NUMBER: FR1-017
File Name: Hog Review
Date: April 12, 2007
Received by: [Signature]
(Commission Secretary)

Unger Poultry Ltd and Rose Grove Farms

My father-in-law Abe Unger and brother-in law John Unger started Unger poultry, a laying hen operation in the late 60s, after some attempts at farming with hogs did not turn out too well. In 1975, with dad getting older, John decided that he needed some help and invited Julia and me to join them on the farm. We had quota for approximately 37000 layers in two barns that stood parallel to each other about 150 ft apart. We were farming about 1000 acres of land, about 350 of which where contiguous to the farm yard. The older barn that was actually built in several stages and was rather decrepit, with uneven floors and manure gutters, leaky roof, and mouse habitation aplenty was due for demolition. Both had 2 tier cages with a litter board between levels and a manure gutter from which the manure was pushed to the middle of the barn, into an auger that took the manure out and into a manure wagon. Because of the condition of all of the equipment and the amount of manure produced cleaning barns was an almost continuous chore. That of course made for limited time to get the job done in, especially in winter time, so manure was often spread close to the yard, certainly only onto the fields near by.

We realized that this system was not a sustainable one for a number of obvious reasons, so we had a concrete pit constructed between the barns, with the augers now emptying into it. This allowed for more timely hauling of manure, and it could be hauled a greater distance. Around this time we purchased a pullet barn that was moved onto our yard and with it we were back in the old gutter, manure wagon routine. But now we could haul the larger amount of layer manure to fields farther away, twice a year, and spread the smaller amount of pullet manure onto the fields closer to home.

In 1995 John suggested that we go into hog farming in order for him to bring 2 of his sons in law, as well as two other acquaintances onto the farm. Rosegrove farms was to begin with a 600 sow barn to be built next to our town lagoon which had been built on land purchased from us, part of a 220 acre piece. Since this parcel of land was already smell initiated we felt it was a suitable place for a barn. We contacted all the neighbors, only a handful, and everything seemed to go well until one individual, whose house had been constructed within 200 feet of a broiler barn, and a mile from our cite, decided that we were building at the chosen site because we did not want a barn close to our homes. He circulated a petition and had the project stopped. We than proposed a location 1/2 mile from the Unger Poultry yard. We realized that this would conflict with of our plan of having a new piece of land for manure, but felt that this would not stop the project. This site choice too met with opposition, some from trades people that had done

thousands of \$ worth of work for us, and have again since. This time however the municipality granted us the required permit with a caveat, requested by a church group, that prevented us from cleaning out the lagoon during Aug. their convention time. This location now compelled us to pump liquid manure an additional two miles at significant cost.

In 2002 we decided that we needed to do some major renovations to our layer operation. We extended the newer of our two barns and removed the older one. The newly extended one was reworked inside and out. We closed the manure gutters and installed new, automated cages with manure belts, and with enough cage space to house our layers at the new proscribed space requirements. New ventilation systems were installed, all electrical equipment was redone, a new manure storage building, and an egg packing and cooling room were constructed. One of our grain trucks was fitted with silage type end gate, so we can now easily haul the dry manure over even greater distances. From there it is reloaded after harvest is done, and spread onto the land.

In 2004 we made improvements to the pullet sector of our operation. To match our pullet numbers with the laying hens we needed to purchase some additional quota. Again the old cages were removed and replaced with new automated ones, equipped, as the layer cages were, with water efficient water nipples instead of cups that tend towards higher water consumption. And again cage space was increased to meet the new regulations. The barn was repainted on the inside, all the electrical equipment replaced, and new ventilation with phone out alarm system installed

Our intentions had been to finish all the weanlings that we produced in our sow barn, so in 2000 we built a 4000 place finisher H style complex. We choose a piece of land, 140 acres, 4 miles from the sow barn, again mindful of spread acres. In addition to our land we secured spread acres from neighbors. It was interesting that during the process of contacting the neighbors regarding this location, one, a member of the church whose members had a concern when we were building the sow barn, was again concerned about barn odor. This time, the proximity of his **house** to the barn was the concern. I pointed out that his house was the same distance and direction from our proposed barn as the church was from the sow barn. I asked him whether he was aware of that situation ever having caused inconvenience at the church. His answer was “**no, but it probably would whenever we were to clean the lagoon**”. I was happy to tell him that we had already cleaned it 4 times, and his concerns were allayed.

All of our dealings with our neighbors are not equally congenial. Naturally there is odor. On a few occasions we have had the misfortune of

spilling some manure on the road. On one such situation we paid for a car wash, fuel to go to the wash, and something to cover his time. We find that a good will gift at Christmas time, consisting of pork and a couple of dozens eggs goes a long way to conveying to them the idea that our work is not like theirs, but we are all trying to do our well, and in a sustainable way. We have had to postpone spreading when people tell us that they are planning a special event, because summer time is both manure spreading time and barbeque season, or the wind is blowing smell into town, or towards the neighbors.

I have one other concern in regards to the aforementioned Landmark town lagoon. It is built on land that the municipally bought from us, right next to the Seine River floodway. This is the exact location we had planned to build our first Sow barn at. A few years after we were turned down, they asked to purchase another piece of land to expand the lagoon. You tend to get a bit weary of the emerging pattern! Just the other day I read, in the small paper put out by the town that it is again time for expansion, that the funding is all in place, and that the new cell will be constructed just west of the two existing ones. I had heard about the tentative lagoon expansion via the grape vine but no negotiations have taken place to date. Why build to the west of the older cells you ask? Because that way they are still on the banks of the water course. We would rather have it on the south end. A question this commission has probably often heard is”, **how is it that farmers must stay a prescribed distance from a water course for building and spreading but municipalities build their holding pits as close as possible”?**

I have cogitated on this for some time. Surly there are a lot of phosphates in the effluent that is discharged into the rivers and lakes from these lagoons. We have been given to believe that such discharge happens only after the effluent has been neutralized. Does this process remove phosphates? If so, would it not also do that in a lagoon full of hag manure? I have heard it said that there are 9 town lagoons that empty into our little diversion alone, although I can come up with only 8. That is a lot of effluent, and how many more are there? I'm sure the members of this committee have heard Winnipeg city's horror stories times aplenty, so I won't go there, but I have a real concern that we are trying to place too much blame with the farmers. Let's remember that food production can not be done without some waste product, and if as citizens we want to be partners in the eating of that food, we may have to allow for some smell and inconvenience!

A few other thoughts about our operation. We have done soil testing on our farm as far back as I can remember, because fertilizer is costly, and environmental concerns are real. I have taken the two day training course for

the Environmental Farm Plan, and am slated for the final interview next
Wed. Thank You all .