

Food labelling system 'awful'

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OTTAWA - The former head of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency conceded Tuesday that Canada's food labelling system is "awful."

"It significantly undermines innovation. It significantly undermines competition," said Ronald Doering, who was instrumental in setting up the food inspection agency a decade ago.

Appearing before a House of Commons committee, Doering provided his frank assessment as parliamentarians wrap up their review of the controversial Product of Canada label.

The two-decade-old labelling policy allows companies to slap the Product of Canada tag on any food or drink product if 51 per cent of the production costs were incurred in Canada. These costs can refer to labour, transportation and packaging, which allows imported food and drink to be labelled a Canadian product.

He singled out Canadian juice companies that use locally grown produce when possible, but import fruit and process the product in Canada during the winter. They should be able to distinguish themselves with a Canadian label when competing against Chinese companies that import the same product from China, he said. Doering said labels such as Grown in Canada or Prepared in Canada can be brought in very quickly to provide more clarity.