



Ipsos Reid Public Affairs



Natural Resources Conservation Board: Confined Feeding Operations Survey

Final Report
January, 2009

- ❖ The Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB) commissioned Ipsos Reid to conduct research to help determine how well it is dealing with its clients under the Agricultural Operation Practices Act.
 - ◆ Specific segments of interest included applicants, operators with a compliance issue and complainants.
- ❖ Ipsos Reid conducted a total of 126 telephone interviews with the past year's applicants, operators and complainants using lists provided by the NRCB.
 - ◆ Interviews were conducted from September 4th to 16th, 2008 and averaged three minutes in length.
- ❖ The sample size per segment and associated margins of error (taking into account the finite populations) are as follows:
 - ◆ Applicants (n=46): ± 10.92 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.
 - ◆ Operators (n=31): ± 16.21 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.
 - ◆ Complainants (n=49): $\pm 11.77\%$, 19 times out of 20.



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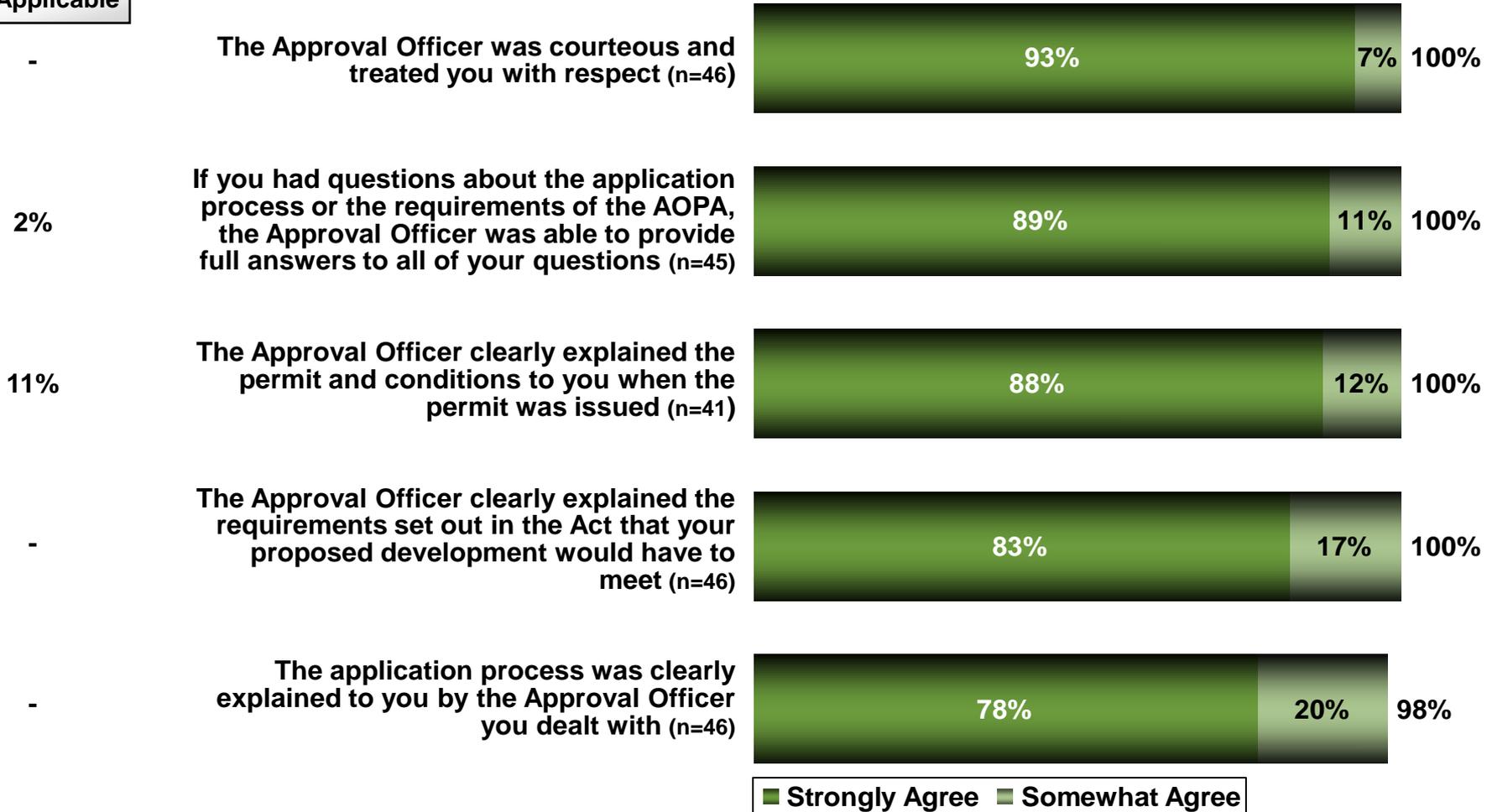
NRCB Approval Process



There is near unanimous consensus among Applicants that NRCB Approval Officers provide a high level of service.

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?

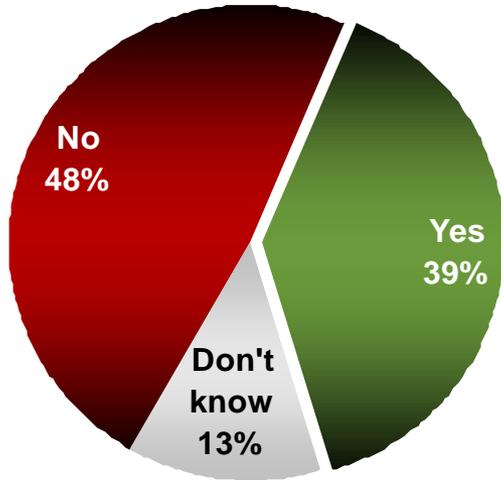
Not Applicable





Approval Officers also receive strong marks for their assistance when statements of concern were received.

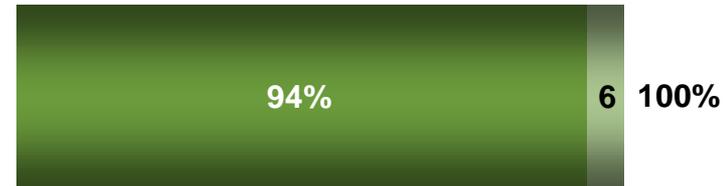
Q2. Were statements of concern – that is, letters of opposition – received when notice of your application was published?



Base: Applicants (n=46)

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

The Approval Officer brought to your attention issues in the statements of concern that he or she felt you should be aware of



The Approval Officer clearly explained that you had the option of responding or not responding to the statements of concern



■ Strongly Agree ■ Somewhat Agree

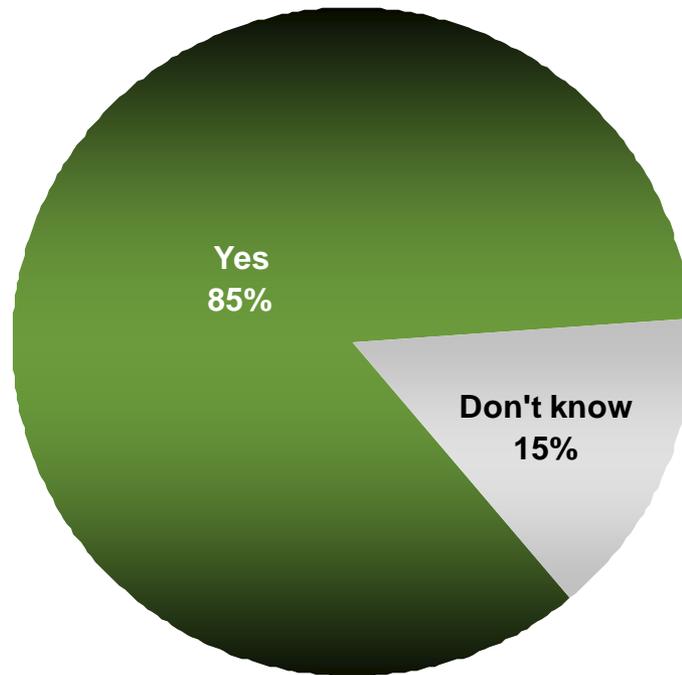
Base: Applicants who received a statement of concern (n=18*)

*Caution: Small base size



There is clear agreement that it was helpful to have all information related to their application in one binder.

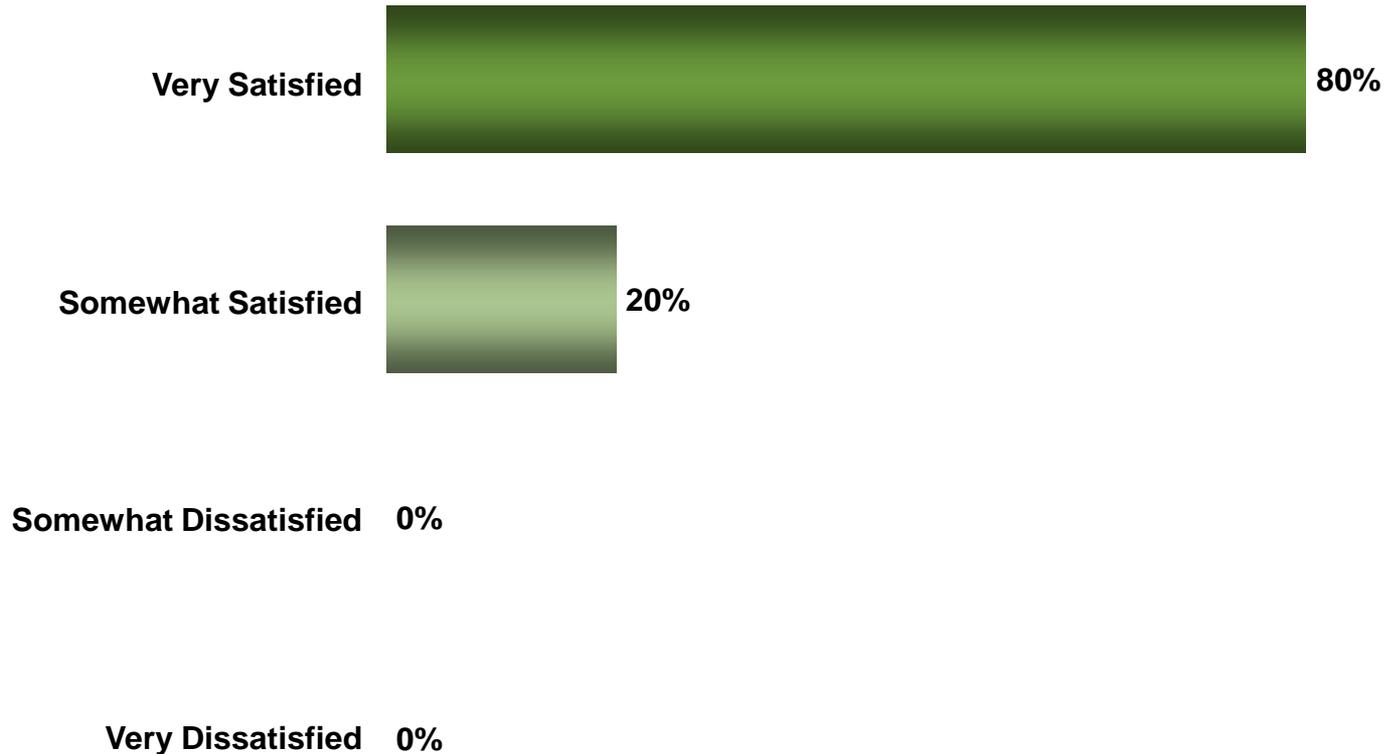
Q4. At the end of the process, you were provided with a binder that contained your permit, copies of your application, and other information. Did you find it helpful to have all of the information in one binder?





Without exception, all Applicants surveyed were satisfied with their overall experience with the NRCB during the approval process for their application.

Q5. Thinking about your overall experience with the NRCB during the approval process for your application, how satisfied were you, overall, with the service you received from the NRCB? Would you say very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied?





Relatively few Applicants offer suggestions for improving the application process – speeding up the process is the most frequent suggestion.

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

“I would just speed it up. It takes too long for some applications to get approval.”

“The process could go a little faster.”

“The whole process is long, it takes eight to ten weeks. I was quite pleased with the outcome. The Approval Officer I dealt with was very co-operative and helpful.”

“I think they should drop their government talk and talk like normal people. They talk on a different level compared to the way those of us in the agriculture business talk. They have a new extension officer here and he's not an approval officer. He is hired by the government and has helped with our application taking a lot of work off of our plate. That person should stay independent from the NRCB.”

“Keep the regulations more consistent over time. If you are applying for a permit, you have to meet certain standards and the standards seem to change too often. It's sometimes hard to get somebody on the phone.”

“The only thing that surprised me a little bit was that I didn't know we were not allowed to build before we had a permit. I've always understood that the permit was for the number of animals we were allowed at the operation, and not about the barn to be built. I didn't see why we weren't allowed to build the barn before the permit was issued because if we didn't get the permit we could do something else with the barn.”



Others who offered comments provide positive feedback.

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

“When we did work with the NRCB everything went smoothly. I can’t think of anything to improve the process. I just liked and was very satisfied with the NRCB. They helped us along as much as possible. Whenever I phoned and asked for information it was always provided in a courteous manner. They did come out to look at my operation and they were very helpful. Wherever the application needed improvement they let us know and they gave us the time to do it, they didn’t said it had to be done right now.”

“It was just a really good experience. I’ve dealt in the past with the Red Deer office and I wasn’t too happy. Now, however, we seem to be all on the same page. The officer also thinks about the farmer and how to process the permit application in a fast, good way.”

“They’ve got this thing nailed down pretty good, it’s better than leaving it up to the individual counties. I think what happened in the past was that each county had their own guidelines. You could have different rulings between two different counties, and have different rulings in both counties as far as manure disposal and storage and what you can or can’t do. It is better under one umbrella, as it is now with the NRCB.”



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NRCB Compliance Process



More than nine-in-ten Operators agree the NRCB Inspector was courteous and respectful, and that the reasons for the visit and the steps required to come into compliance were clearly explained.

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?

Not Applicable

7%

The reasons for the Inspector's visit were clearly explained to you (n=29)



-

The Inspector was courteous and treated you with respect (n=30)



19%

The steps required to come into compliance were clearly explained to you (n=24)



■ Strongly Agree ■ Somewhat Agree



Operators provided a variety of suggestions for improving communications.

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?

“By checking his paper work instead of driving on the yard, the issue could have been resolved. A spot appearance, is what he had done.”

“Don't hire people who are hot heads. Having someone doing their job is one thing but when they come over and tell you things that they think you need to do, the act is open to interpretation. There's no flexibility, no accommodation and they threatened to fine right away. When someone threatens to fine you without saying how can we make this work for all stake holders it's tough to want to work with them. You just want to sue them. The problem you're dealing with is you're suing the government body and not the inspector personally who started the problem.”

“We forward them through the Alberta Cattle Feeders Association.”

“I just have to deal with so many people to get to the right person.”

“I think the issue in your operation is where you have more exposure to people. If you have a feed yard in northern Alberta where four-thousand people go by you everyday, you could be a way worse offender than someone who has acreages all around them. So there is no consistency in operation standards. We had an issue three years ago and the board members and bureaucracy was inviolable in the NRCB Inspector's job, so we had a political aspect. In the last year or so in Canada they made all the changes to the NRCB, so our experience was a lot better than our first experience.”

“To check out the story from the complaint first.”

“They are expecting too much of their inspectors. If they could add another inspector in this area that would be great. We were dealt with in a fair manner.”



Operators provided a variety of suggestions for improving communications.

Cont'd

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?

“Keep it formal.”

“Anybody that makes a complaint should pay a hundred dollar fee. If they are right they can get it back. If it's not right, then they won't get it back because the government has to come out and do an inspection for nothing.”

“To take the power away from the neighbor. The neighbor wants to blackmail you. The law which is designed at the present time is about blackmail and harassment power and this law has to be changed. Basically the neighbor is harassing you, the way the law is designed the neighbor has blackmail and harassment power over the feed lot operation. The law needs to be changed to have a fairer situation.”

“Just that I would like a report of their findings when they've been done. I never received a report. They just said I was in compliance.”

“I would suggest they make it easier to comply with rules and regulations instead of looking at the environment, or if the neighbors are happy. They should also look at the economical feasibility of it. If they can afford to comply with them, because it costs money, maybe they should. While we were applying and filing out our application, we contacted several environmental companies, and we contacted our local politician. They seem to know very little about what's going on with these rules and regulations. They handed out responsibility to the NRCB but they know very little to nothing basically.”



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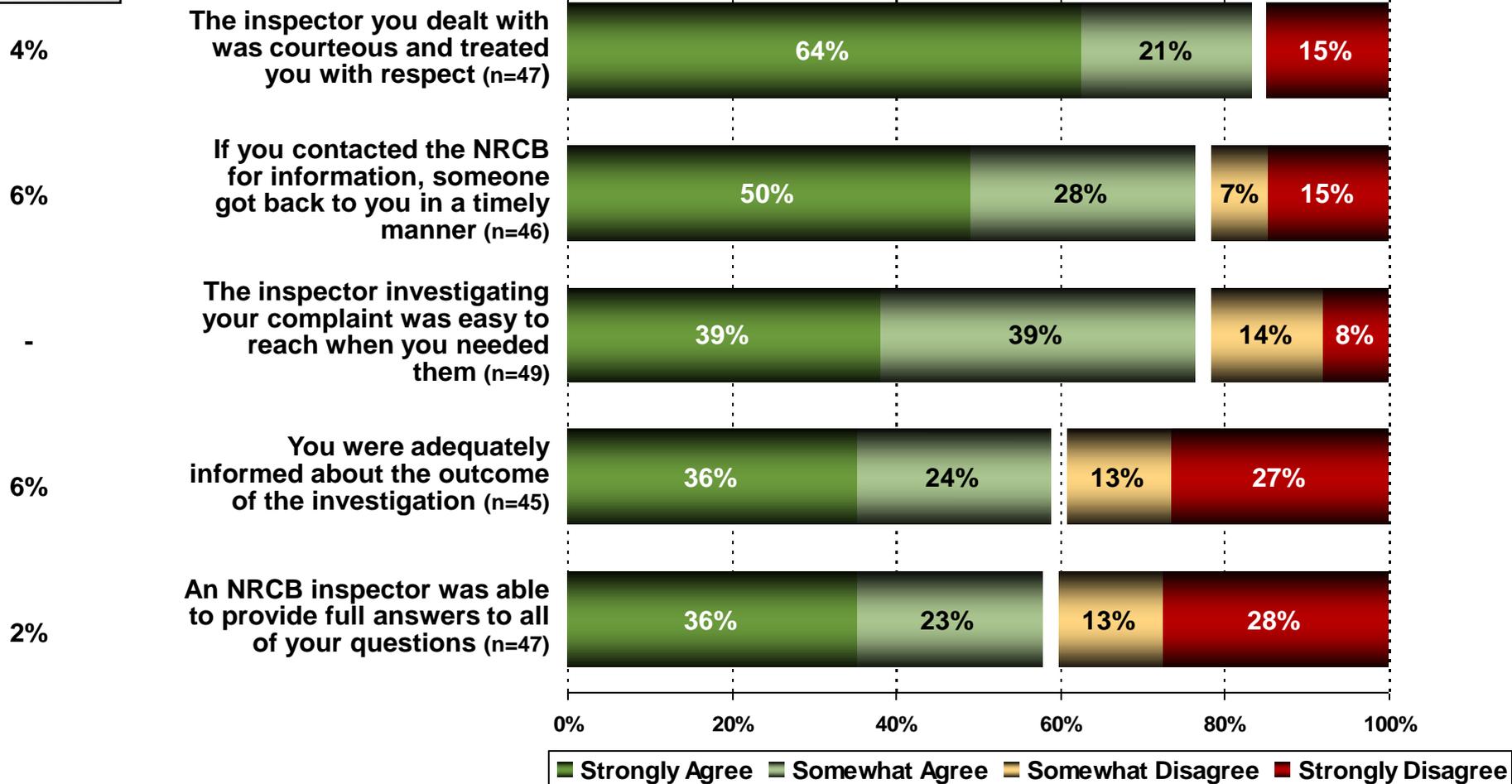
NRCB Complaint Process



Four-in-ten Complainants *disagree* they were adequately informed about the outcome of the investigation and that the NRCB Inspector was able to provide full answers to all their questions.

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?

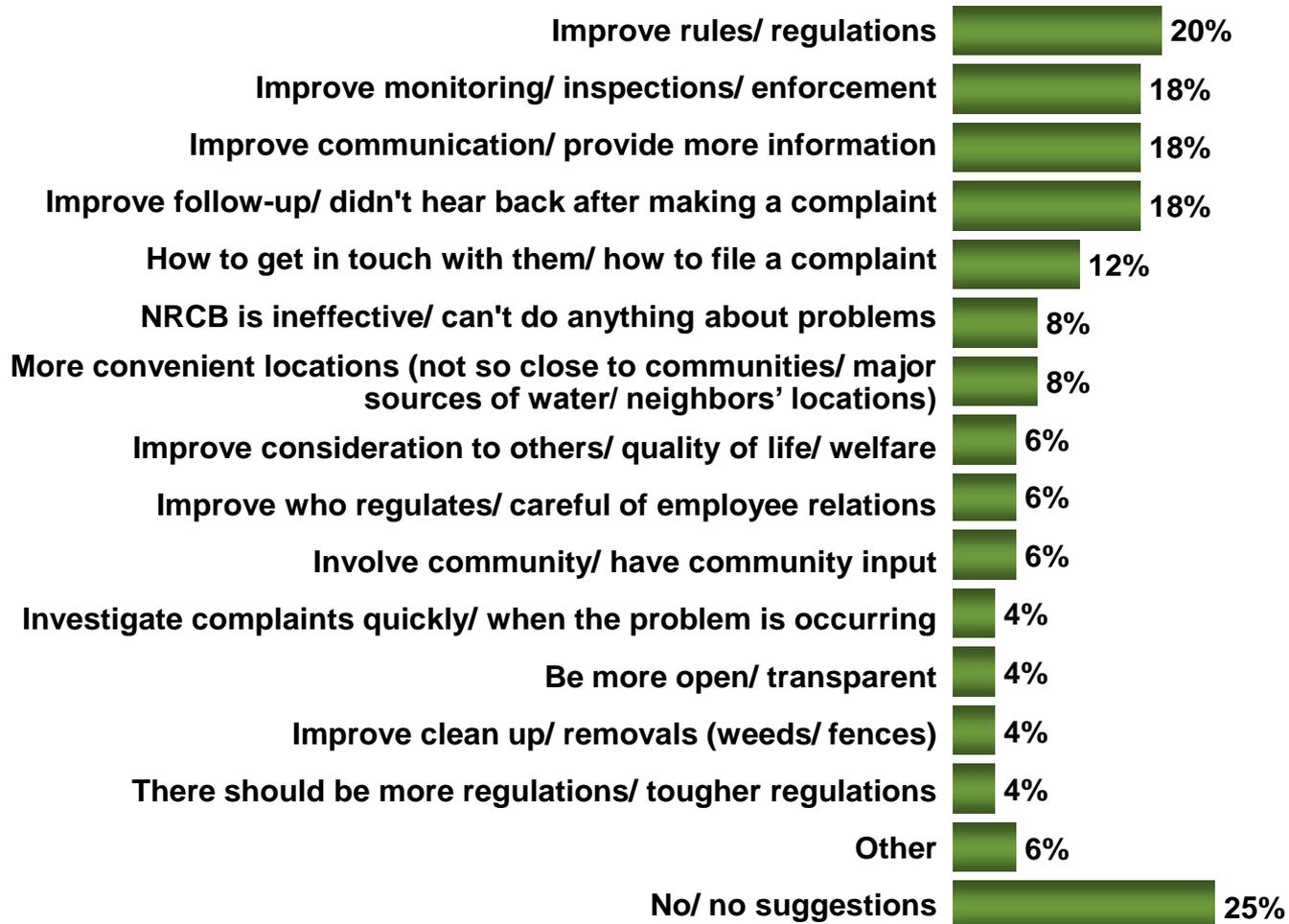
Not Applicable





Providing more information and improved follow-up are the two most frequent suggestions for improving communications when dealing with a complaint.

Q13. Keeping in mind the NRCB cannot change the regulations or legislation, do you have any suggestions for improving communications or processes when dealing with a complaint?





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