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# **Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri- Food**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, October 18, 2018**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Pat Finnigan**



## Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

Thursday, October 18, 2018

• (0845)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC):** Good morning, everyone. Welcome.

Since our chair is a little late, I have decided, with the agreement of my colleagues from each party, to start the meeting so that we can hear from the witnesses. We look forward to hearing what they have to say.

Today, we are continuing our study on the mental health challenges that Canadian farmers, ranchers and producers face.

Today we have the opportunity to have with us, as an individual, Stewart Skinner, the Director of Agriculture at Imani Farms, as well as Maria Labrecque Duchesneau, Founder of the organization Au coeur des familles agricoles and the farm outreach worker project. Also with us is Patrick Smith, Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Mental Health Association.

Thank you very much to all the witnesses for being here today.

We'll start right away with Stewart Skinner.

You have six minutes for your opening remarks.

[*English*]

**Mr. Stewart Skinner (Chief Farming Officer, Imani Farms, As an Individual):** Thank you very much.

Good morning. I'd like to thank this committee for undertaking this study. I'm grateful to have been asked here today.

This committee has heard from academic experts such as Andria Jones-Bitton. You have heard the overarching statistics that demonstrate that we need to address this problem. I want to use this opportunity today to share my personal journey in hopes of giving those statistics a face.

I returned to my family's pig farm in 2010 after completing my Master of Science degree in agricultural economics. In 2012 I planned and executed an expansion of the business. The project did not go well. A combination of poor performance and difficult market conditions drastically eroded our family's financial position.

The financial stress triggered a depressive period. The bottom for me came on a cold winter morning in December 2012. I had an extension cord in my hand, walking through the barn, trying to figure out where I could hang myself. In my darkest moment, a voice

fought through and convinced me to call my parents for help, which started my pathway to recovery.

My treatment was unconventional. I walked away from farming. I travelled to Kenya to reset my outlook on the world. Then I worked in the political world, first as a candidate in the provincial election in 2014 in Ontario and then as a policy adviser to the Honourable Jeff Leal at Queen's Park in the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Today I operate Imani Farms, a diversified hog production company that produces conventional and niche market hogs, generating over \$3.6 million in direct economic activity while supporting approximately 15 full-time-equivalent jobs through direct employment and contract production arrangements.

Understanding mental health requires acceptance that it is unlike other medical issues because of the individual nature of each case. Both the triggers and solutions will vary from situation to situation, but I would like to share what I see as some shared agricultural stressors.

As farmers, we are exposed to a multitude of uncontrollable risk vectors. Disease, weather, and geopolitical issues can all impact our bottom line, while the tools to mitigate these risks are very limited.

Another stressor stems from what I would describe as legacy pressures. One of my greatest sources of pride is that I am a sixth-generation farmer; however, one of my greatest fears is that I will be the generation responsible for destroying the family farm, that I would become responsible for destroying years of hard work by previous generations by losing the farm. This issue is complex, full of nuance and goes far beyond simple financial considerations.

Finally, there is the difficulty with understanding our consumers. While public opinion polls may indicate a supportive public, the rapidly growing distrust that people have of modern food production has fostered poor public policy choices and has forced farmers to defend the very tools that ensure Canadians have access to a safe, affordable, and healthy food supply.

We are the first generation of producer that has to defend making food cheaper. Saskatchewan dairy farmer Cam Houle summed up this paradox well by saying, "Farming is the art of losing money while working 400 hours a month feeding people that think you're trying to kill them."

Beyond a confusing general public, there is also a small minority of people who attack my integrity and question my morality because I raise animals for food. Our ancestors only had to worry about weather and prices. Today, we farmers have the added worry of being a target of an extreme activist, something that takes a serious toll on me mentally.

What can be done by you to help address this situation? As a livestock farmer, I say the first thing the Government of Canada should do is prioritize the development of a national livestock insurance plan that would allow me to have coverage for major disease disasters, as my crop farming colleagues have. Our greatest threat to financial stability in our farm is animal health, and AgriStability cuts by the previous government neutered the program's ability to act as a de facto insurance program for livestock farmers. Alternatively to a national insurance plan, the restoration of reference margins within AgriStability to 85% could help alleviate some of the challenges.

I recognize that the federal government does not normally deliver health care directly to Canadians. However, I would propose a \$25-million fund within Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada for the creation of a front-line response system for Canadian farmers and their families.

• (0850)

Funds should be directed to build capacity within rural and remote communities on platforms that are accessible to farmers regardless of location, while partnering with the groups already focusing on this specific issue, even if they are outside the traditional health care delivery system.

I want to thank you for this time this morning. I look forward to your questions and will make myself available following this meeting for any members or staff wishing to speak further.

**The Chair (Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.)):** Thank you, Mr. Skinner. I offer my apology for being late and not welcoming you here.

[*Translation*]

Welcome to you, too, Ms. Labrecque Duchesneau and Mr. Smith.

Ms. Labrecque Duchesneau, you have six minutes for your opening remarks.

**Ms. Maria Labrecque Duchesneau (Founder, Au coeur des familles agricoles, As an Individual):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, everyone. Thank you for your keen interest in the plight of our Canadian farm families.

This rural distress is something I experience, and I have been for part of my life, coming from the agricultural sector myself. It prompted me to found the organization Au coeur des familles agricoles, or ACFA, 20 years ago, by integrating an innovative approach, that of the farm outreach worker.

I have followed the previous meetings closely, and I can only agree with what has been said. However, I believe that the time for research is over. It is urgent that concrete actions be taken to reduce as much as possible this distress that causes the disappearance of farms, which contributes to the devitalization of our rurality.

How did we get here?

Agriculture is first and foremost a profession that is practised out of passion, a profession that contains its share of unexpected events. Agricultural businesses must be efficient and meet many requirements. This profession necessarily requires self-sacrifice, since farm work must have priority over everything else to be profitable. All this daily work that weighs on the whole family contributes to creating certain distress at one time or another.

While farm families are highly resilient to many challenges, from bad weather, to diseases affecting the herd, to market fluctuations and to imports and exports, emotions such as uncertainty, insecurity and doubt slowly and insidiously infiltrate the system, causing deep damage over time. Indeed, it is difficult to guarantee the farm's profitability when the pillars of the economy collapse and the family's livelihood, which is sometimes also the ancestral heritage, is reduced because of guaranteed debt. The ability to manage stress may have limits, and the farmer may need help or support from a resource person who understands the realities of the rural environment.

Agricultural producers give priority to their business and activities at the expense of their health and family relationships. This is why the concept of outreach workers, who play a front-line role by answering the call, going on location and adapting their intervention based on each case, must be promoted. Farm outreach workers are first and foremost an agents of change. From a clinical point of view, the main component of their functions is the identification of farm families, their support and assistance in meeting their health and well-being needs.

It often happens that the people who need help don't ask for it themselves. Thanks to this proactive approach, it is the people in the neighbourhood, family members, friends and others who will see to it that the intervenor present in the community, in other words, the farm outreach worker, is called on.

The intervention philosophy of the farm outreach worker is based on a proactive preventive approach and a sharpened knowledge of the network specific to agricultural businesses. This allows the worker to intervene with an agricultural producer before he or she even applies for assistance. It is essential that the farm outreach worker be seen within the agricultural network and frequent it in order to gradually get to know the actors in the field, who will come to collaborate with the worker in all confidence. The ultimate goal of the farm outreach worker's support interventions is to keep farms active by influencing the well-being of farmers and their family members, who support them in their efforts.

Keeping agriculture healthy means keeping agriculture in business. The economic health of the farm contributes to the vitality of the outreach and that of its municipality. The impact of the economic health of family farming extends beyond regional and national borders.

The farm outreach worker makes sense in the strength of the network. If the outreach worker is able to detect the farmer's greatest cause of stress through the existing network, he or she will be better able to respond to the situation by suggesting appropriate solutions or resources. If, for example, the farmer's problem is debt, the farm outreach worker will explain the benefits of the federal mediation service to the farmer. Farm outreach workers will even be able to support farmers in their approach. This service is free of charge, which is not insignificant. If the problem is more of an alcohol or drug dependency, farm outreach workers will support farmers and talk to them about the resources available. For outreach workers, there are as many resources as there are problematic situations; all they need to do is know about them.

● (0855)

Right now, you, the members of the committee, are part of this network.

However, this network lacks some innovation in terms of resources, such as creating a position for an agriculture ombudsman for agricultural businesses. Many producers told me about their frustration with disputes that were going nowhere because the cost of legal counsel was far too high and the process was far too long. Given this lack of justice, people in the agricultural business community know full well that farmers will have no recourse. Without an agriculture ombudsman, acting as a negotiator, we will have a David and Goliath situation.

Knowledge of the farm community and the commitment of field workers to respond as quickly as possible are two key factors that give confidence to farm family members and encourage them to open up to talk about their problems. The openness of the field workers when making contact with those people is essential to overcoming mistrust. I often say that producers have three traits: they are proud, arrogant and suspicious. They are always doing business. Knowledge of farm work is essential for field workers. They work based on the farmers' work situation, taking into account the farm schedule. They therefore need to know the timing for seeding, milking, caring for animals or cutting hay, among other things.

I will conclude by inviting you to consult the documents I submitted to your analyst, so that you can get an idea of those 20 years of work.

I am offering my help in establishing the field workers all across Canada, and I do so on a voluntary basis. In my opinion, money is not important when you want to save lives.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Labrecque Duchesneau. You will have the opportunity to elaborate later when you answer questions from committee members.

[*English*]

Mr. Smith, you have six minutes.

**Dr. Patrick Smith (National Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Mental Health Association):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me here today. I'm Dr. Patrick Smith, the national CEO of the Canadian Mental Health Association.

CMHA/ACSM is a Canada-wide organization with divisions in every province and the Yukon territory, soon to be in the Northwest Territories. We provide direct services to more than 1.3 million Canadians in more than 330 bricks-and-mortar communities across the country. Those 330 bricks-and-mortar community footprints provide services far beyond their boundaries in rural and remote areas across Canada.

For today's remarks, I want to focus on the mental health needs of the people who feed our communities: our farmers, our ranchers and our agricultural producers.

Canadian farmers experience high rates of anxiety and depression. A 2016 survey from the University of Guelph found that 45% of producers across Canada reported experiencing high stress and emotional exhaustion and that one-third experienced anxiety.

One reason for the high prevalence of mental health problems is that farming is, as we've heard, a volatile occupation. Farmers must deal with not only the physical stressors of the farm environment, but also the regulatory frameworks of production, shifting trends in trade and volatile commodity markets, while managing the high financial burden of operating a farm.

Producers must also deal with the realities of crop and animal losses caused by weather, pest and disease. With climate change, extreme weather events are becoming more commonplace. Just over a month ago, we watched as Saskatchewan received a late-September snowfall, a psychologically stressful event for the farmers in the northwestern region, who woke up to discover their unharvested fields blanketed in snow. Although farmers have always contended with the stressors of unpredictable weather, the higher prevalence of extreme weather means that farming is a riskier business and that heightened risk will likely mean more psychological stress.

We also know that Canadian farmers are reluctant to seek help when they need it. The survey from the University of Guelph found that 40% fear the social stigma associated with accessing services and would feel uneasy about seeking help.

Gender is an important factor here. In Canada, men are more likely to die by suicide and are less likely to seek services, likely an effect of the social expectations for men to tough it out—and I'm from farming country myself—an ideology that is even more pronounced, I think, in the farming communities and farming industry.

We also cannot forget some of the most vulnerable and invisible members of this community: migrant farm workers. Every year, roughly 47,000 workers come to Canada to fill labour shortages in the agricultural industry. Migrant farm workers often live in poverty and have little control over their working conditions. They are exposed to occupational, social and environmental stressors that can negatively impact their physical and mental health.

In addition to the usual challenges associated with working in a rural area, migrant workers also experience stressors related to their precarious status as migrants, including social isolation, fear of deportation, language barriers, dislocation from family, limited access to health care and restrictive working conditions that prevent community integration.

In September, CMHA released a policy paper calling for the Government of Canada to introduce a mental health parity act, legislation that proposes to put mental health and the treatment of mental illness on a par with physical illness. Our proposal is rooted in the fact that many Canadians do not have access to the mental health services they need. Although we have a health care system that's considered universal, the basic primary mental health care provided by addiction counsellors, psychologists, social workers and specialized peer support workers is not accessible by most Canadians.

Other countries rely on these disciplines—I myself am a clinical psychologist—as the bedrock, the foundation of their mental health provision. In Canada we're mostly sitting on the sidelines of a publicly funded system. Collectively, we spend \$950 million on counselling services each year, 30% spent out of pocket by Canadians.

• (0900)

For Canadians who don't have private insurance and cannot pay, lengthy wait-lists for publicly funded services mean that they may never access the mental health care they need. For rural and remote Canadians, including our farmers, the challenges to service access are even greater. A lack of services, high demand, the need for travel to receive treatment and stigma are often significant barriers. As a community-based organization with a long history of supporting people at a local level with mental health challenges, mental illness and addictions, CMHA knows from experience that providing the necessary supports early in the care of people can greatly change the course of their lives.

What we advocate for is greater investments in community-based services, which not only support people with mental health needs but also reduce their reliance on more expensive care delivered in hospitals, and prevent them from cycling through the acute care system, thus saving precious health care dollars.

CMHA offers a basket of services in the community, including an innovative program called Not Myself Today, which is designed to foster mentally healthy workplaces. Although farming and ranching often involve working outdoors, in what most Canadians might now consider a non-traditional setting, they are workplaces like any other. They require psychological wellness to enable the people who work there to do their jobs. Workplaces subscribed to Not Myself Today receive a tool kit for building a greater understanding of mental health in the workplace, reducing stigma and fostering safe and supportive work cultures.

• (0905)

**The Chair:** We're out of time. Thank you.

We'll go to our rounds of questions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Berthold, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to the witnesses.

I think we are getting into something very concrete.

Ms. Labrecque Duchesneau, I really liked what you said earlier. We already know there are problems. During the meetings at which the committee has studied this sensitive issue, we have heard from a number of witnesses such as Mr. Skinner. We have heard a lot about the stress of transferring a farm from one generation to the next, the financial stress, the stress of farming. As a result of all those factors combined, there are problems, and we know it. Today, you are telling us that this is not the time for new studies, but for action.

Who funds field workers in Quebec?

**Ms. Maria Labrecque Duchesneau:** Quebec has taken the “*travailleurs de rang*” or field workers approach. Part of our funding comes from the Quebec department of health and social services. The rest comes from all sorts of fundraising campaigns.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** How many field workers are there now?

**Ms. Maria Labrecque Duchesneau:** I have been retired for two years. I think there are six or seven right now.

The field worker is revolutionary. It is a concept that works. Street workers must become known and recognized on the street and must be trusted. It is exactly the same process for field workers.

We must always remember that agricultural producers are always doing business with people who live near their farms, on either side. When producers are in distress, the neighbour on the left hopes to be able to buy the land. Producers will therefore not open up easily, in order not to show that they are weak. They are there to do business.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** That's something that people generally don't know. A farmer's neighbours are both friends and colleagues, but at the same time, they hope that the farmer will fail, because this will allow them to expand their own farm. A farmer's land is next to that of another producer. We can't move land. You can't buy the land of the fourth neighbour along to expand your farm. You have to buy the land next door for things to go well.

**Ms. Maria Labrecque Duchesneau:** That's right.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** That highlights one of the problems. This explains why farmers do not talk to their neighbours about their problems.

**Ms. Maria Labrecque Duchesneau:** No, they can't do that.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** You volunteered your services to many people to set up the field workers. Based on your experience, do you think this is the beginning of a solution? Without mentioning specific cases, can you give me an example of an intervention that you or another field worker made that changed someone's life?

**Ms. Maria Labrecque Duchesneau:** I have saved many lives and many farms.

Earlier, I mentioned mediation at the federal level. That's a little-known option. I demystified the service for farmers and told them how important it was.

The banking system offers the services of a consultant agronomist to solve debt problems, except that you have to pay, which adds to the debt. This makes no sense. So I tell farmers that there is free mediation at the federal level and that the government appoints a consultant agronomist to handle the case. Farmers are afraid to take that route because they think the government will know everything about their debt. I explain to them that the government already knows that information. Why not take advantage of a service that is free?

By the way, the services of field workers are also free. There is a free mediation system and farmers are not benefiting from it. This means that they will pay nothing for the service.

● (0910)

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** You have to go to them.

**Ms. Maria Labrecque Duchesneau:** We have to go to them.

If you only knew how many farms have remained in operation only because I have re-established the value of the succession, because I have re-established the value of the neighbour, who was also the farmer's brother, because I have re-established the value of the family work. That's all they need.

Farmers know full well that if they sell their assets, they will become millionaires. You know that, too. So what do they have to do now? Will they continue to work the family farm or will they pay off their debts and live the good life under palm trees? It is important to stop there, because our municipalities are being drained and emptied. We must keep people on our land.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Absolutely.

Mr. Skinner, what do you think of what Ms. Labrecque Duchesneau is doing? Do you think this approach could really help farmers who have to deal with this sort of situation? Clearly, I am talking more about farmers in crisis situations.

[English]

**Mr. Stewart Skinner:** The short answer would be yes, I do. The most important thing to take away is that mental health requires such varied tools for intervention because every person may be different. For one farmer program A might work, and for another farmer, program B might work.

In my own personal experience of trying to access services through our public health system based on where I lived and the availability of said services, I didn't necessarily find the care I needed in the traditional health care system. I have gone out and have found a private therapist and that works for me.

One of the challenges with that is that because it is outside of that universal system, it's covered out of pocket.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Skinner.

I will have to cut you off there.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Poissant, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (La Prairie, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for their presentations.

Ms. Labrecque Duchesneau, you mentioned earlier that the federal government has a mediation system. Which organization is responsible for the system? Is it Farm Credit Canada or Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada?

**Ms. Maria Labrecque Duchesneau:** It's Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

**Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant:** In your presentation, you began to list solutions. You mentioned an ombudsman, for example.

Could you briefly explain the other solutions you wanted to talk about?

**Ms. Maria Labrecque Duchesneau:** I often say that the farm is attached to the main artery of the heart. That is no small thing; it is true.

Before addressing the personal problems of the agricultural entrepreneurs, I ask about their farms, I visit their farms, I walk on their land, I take information, I tell them what a great business it is. After a while, we talk about their problems. We do not address the problem first. We determine the stressors of the farmers. If knee pain is the cause of the stress, since they have to bend their knees twice to milk each cow four times a day, what can be done? They can receive treatment for their knees, but we can find other technical ways to improve the way they work, we can find people who would be happy to help them.

So I created the Maison de répit en agriculture. In order for farmers to be able to take leave, I would find them a replacement. So I worked a lot with the agricultural schools. I asked the teachers whether a young student was willing to work a few hours to milk in order to give the producers some rest. It has always worked.

If there is one thing I am convinced of, it is that farmers are people who, despite everything, want to help each other. That is a fact. When a producer has to deal with a fire, all the farm workers go to his farm to help him out. For example, someone can take the remaining cows and take them home. In short, they are not just people who want to acquire the property of other farmers, as I said earlier, but people who want to help. They may have preconceived ideas, but I don't want to hear about that. What I like most is that they always say yes when I ask them for help. In fact, in the agricultural community, people always say that you never say no to Maria. This helps the process.

To help farmers, anything goes. I can call people to say hello and ask them if they can help me. They may say no, but I will insist. That's how I roll.

● (0915)

**Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant:** That's perfect. Thank you, Ms. Labrecque Duchesneau.

Do other places in the world have field workers?

**Ms. Maria Labrecque Duchesneau:** The Japanese came to us to set up something like it in their country. People from France also contacted me and I went there last spring. France has started to have field workers, just like Switzerland. Haiti has some too, but it is more complicated and it would take too long to explain the situation today.

In short, there are a lot of questions. There were many newspaper articles all over the world as a result of what I did. It is a need. I am telling you again and I cannot say it enough: it is a real need.

**Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant:** Mr. Skinner, what motivated you to return to agriculture? You had a very difficult time. What can make a person who has experienced what you have experienced come back to this field?

[English]

**Mr. Stewart Skinner:** Thank you for the chance to answer that.

One thing is that I was commuting from southwestern Ontario into Toronto a few times a week, and that alone—travelling to Toronto—can crush happiness.

On a more serious note, my wife and I were expecting our first child, and while I talked about the legacy pressures, as I called them, within my introductory statement, I wanted to be at home. I wanted to be doing what previous generations had done in hopes that I could show my children that if they want to take the opportunity, the opportunity is there to take. My family has been farming in Canada longer than Canada has been a country, and the drive to give my children the opportunity—not that they would have to take it, but that it could be there—was something that pulled me back.

I also would be remiss not to say that we felt we had a plan to build a viable financial business. Ultimately, you can have all the warm and touchy-feely things you want, but if you're not making money, it's not going to work. We had an opportunity to grow our business and make room for me, and it fit with our goals as a family.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant:** Your story is very inspiring and should be more widely known. Many farmers think it's the end if they don't succeed.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Poissant.

[English]

Thank you, Mr. Skinner.

Now we go to Mr. MacGregor for six minutes.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP):** Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Skinner, I'll start with you.

It's pretty hard to listen to this, that you found yourself walking down to the barn with an extension cord in your hand. I know it happens to a lot of farmers. You talked about some of the federal programs that could be there in support.

So many farmers get to that point and we don't reach them before it's too late. Do you think that if those programs had been in place in

2012, their presence would have made a difference in your case—if you had known there were other options; that despite such a terrible year, there are people in the government who could support you with some kinds of programs?

**Mr. Stewart Skinner:** I don't think that.... Well, at that point AgriStability hadn't been cut. I think we are very fortunate as Canadian farmers to have the business risk management tools we have. I wouldn't want to appear to be somehow saying that they were inadequate, although I do think they could be improved. For me it was more of an internal...of some of the challenges. When I came home in 2010, I was convinced that I was smarter than I was, and that was my first time facing actual, real defeat. I think it was more of a personal journey rather than a failure of public programming, in my case.

The only counterpoint I would give to that is that it goes back to accessing services. At that point I did try to go to the free therapist in town, but it just didn't work. Because we didn't have any money—my wife was a grad student and I was a pig farmer—we couldn't afford to have me go to a private therapist.

I was joking beforehand that it costs about eight market hogs, in terms of market hog margin, every time I go see my private therapist, and I only have so many market hogs to sell in a year. Most of those are used to pay the feed bill. Access to a service that could have helped was a challenge at the time I needed it.

● (0920)

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Thank you for that.

Madam Duchesneau, we had Nancy Langevin give some testimony. You've been following this testimony. I was asking her about the impact of trade agreements on our supply-managed sector. Whether it's the agreement with the European Union, the CPTPP, or the one with the United States, every time, supply-managed farmers, who operate on a system that gives them some certainty, have seen a little bit more of the market share cut off.

You've talked about how those small family farms are really the heart, the artery of so many small communities in Quebec. Is there anything you want to add to her testimony about the kind of stress that's adding for farmers that you know?

[Translation]

**Ms. Maria Labrecque Duchesneau:** I listened to the presentations, and it's all true. As soon as there's a small misstep, producers become concerned. They are really very concerned. Their worry creates stress, and the stress leads to distress. They need to be reassured.

The comments on social networks, on television about all the negotiations allow them to build up an image, which is not positive. They are wondering what will happen to them and how they will cope. The more information comes in, the more they feel they are losing. Payments have to be made. They get up at 5 a.m. and when they milk the animals, they have time to think. They think, and it's not always positive.



Yes, I have seen a producer try to hang himself with a string of Christmas lights. Fortunately, those strings of lights are not strong, and his broke. I understand what Mr. Skinner's going through. I understand the insecurity people experience on a farm.

I'm thinking of a farmer who lives near me and whom I invited for coffee. He's disappointed and angry, and I'm there to ease the pressure. The farmers are not the ones making the decisions. The decisions are being made elsewhere, as you know. So what do we do with all the distress that each farmer experiences in isolation?

Take the example of a son who told his father that the only thing left for him to do was to find a rope. He said it laughing, supposedly. Two weeks ago, his mother called me to ask whether I thought it was true. Can we take such a risk? So I called their house. They are practically my neighbours. In the same family, 10 years ago, the grandfather ran over his grandson. Every year, for the past 10 years, I have been going to the father's house with two beers. That's what I use. I sit with him. We have our beer without saying much, we give each other a kiss, and I go home.

**The Chair:** Thank you for your presentation, Ms. Labrecque Duchesneau.

[English]

Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

Next is Mr. Longfield for six minutes.

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.):** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

It's breathtaking to hear the stories.

I want to go back to Mr. Skinner.

I've been meeting with a teenager in my riding named Noah Irvine. We've been meeting regularly for several years now. I met with him over the Thanksgiving weekend. He's been researching mental health systems. He's 17 years old now. He might be 18. He told me about the P.E.I. report on farms. The Prince Edward Island Federation of Agriculture is proposing an assistance program for farmers.

You worked with the Ontario Minister of Agriculture. You're proposing policy development around farmer assistance and mental health. Is that something the Province of Ontario has considered?

• (0925)

**Mr. Stewart Skinner:** To the best of my knowledge, I'm not aware of any such thing, but that also does not mean there is not something being done by the province.

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** Some of the frustration for us is in there being the provincial jurisdiction and the federal jurisdiction.

Mr. Smith, I briefly looked up the mental health parity act in Canada that your organization proposed through Saskatchewan this past September, a month ago. The United States has had a parity act since 1996.

When I skimmed through the proposed parity act, one other frustration that emerged was how to measure success. How do we bring together Prince Edward Island's experience, Saskatchewan's experience, possibly Ontario's developing experience? How do we bring the provinces together? How do we measure success? With \$5

billion going into the system, how do we know whether any of it is getting to the farm?

**Dr. Patrick Smith:** That's a very good question.

I recently had the opportunity to join the Canadian delegation to the United Nations. There was a side meeting on mental health.

We can look to other jurisdictions that have similar federal, provincial, state...different ways of structuring. The U.K. did their parity of esteem act when the Honourable Norman Lamb was the minister of health. They were able to have legislation that could actually support...so that it wasn't just crossing our fingers and hoping that provinces did the right thing; that it was actually setting a bar, a standard that provinces needed to have to fund mental health commensurate to the burden of illness.

It's important for Canadians to know that even though the Honourable Ginette Petitpas Taylor is leading the global alliance of champions for mental health and well-being, we're still the lowest-spending of all G7 countries. We spend the lowest percentage of our health care budget on mental health of any developed country. That's really important. That's our platform. The U.K., though, recently found themselves in a similar situation and years ago did the parity of esteem act. They can't fix something like that overnight. Years of deferred maintenance on the mental health file isn't going to be fixed by one budget or one sitting government. What it can do, however, is set the standard, because not having those basic services exacts a toll from every Canadian.

It's important to mention that even though the delivery of service on the ground in the provinces and territories falls under provincial and territorial jurisdiction, what we're asking for from the federal government, the Canadian government, is, much to Mr. Skinner's point: Every situation is individual. There may be differing individual solutions, but as a workplace.... The Canadian government has made some investments in workplaces in setting a culture, in setting a standard. We're requesting that \$5 million go to a targeted Not Myself Today campaign that can help to set the standard and help shift the culture of the workplace for farmers, ranchers and producers, so that people can reach out more for help and feel more supported as a culture in a workplace.

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** In your report you mention that 13% of the health care budget in the U.K. goes towards mental health—

**Dr. Patrick Smith:** That's right.

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** —and it's about half that in Canada.

You also mentioned the assertive community treatments whereby groups come together and mentioned, maybe building on other testimony, including farmers or people with farming experience in the ACT teams.

**Dr. Patrick Smith:** Absolutely. What I think we're all saying is that it needs to be by the people for the people. One thing the Canadian Mental Health Association.... It's not hospital units. It's not fly-in teams. It's people in your community on the ground who work that is bedrock.

We're celebrating our 100 years this year, as you may know. That's the foundation for us. It's by the people for the people. It's helping to leverage the strengths of the community and have it be part of the solution. In other workplaces where we have implemented Not Myself Today, it's engaging the farmers themselves, the ranchers, in developing and delivering the service from a specialized peer support perspective.

● (0930)

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** Terrific. Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Longfield and Mr. Smith.

[Translation]

Mr. Breton, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Pierre Breton (Shefford, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to each of the experts for being here today.

Ms. Labrecque Duchesneau, the concept of a field worker seems very interesting to me. You said that we must be proactive and focus on prevention. In mental health, I really believe that's where we have to act even though there are always other aspects that we have to deal with.

I want to know in more detail how it works.

You said that there are seven field workers in Quebec.

**Ms. Maria Labrecque Duchesneau:** There are six or seven.

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** Clearly, compared to the number of farms, that's relatively few.

How does it work?

You said that you do what you call milk runs to go and see farmers. The field workers cover certain areas of Quebec. Are the visits made at random, unannounced? For example, will field workers decide that they are going to visit a certain part of Quebec on a certain day? Are visits done in response to reports? Can people call you to say that they are concerned about a certain person so that you can then respond? How does it work? Can you tell us more about the process?

**Ms. Maria Labrecque Duchesneau:** Field workers must make themselves available in their environment. For example, they go to auctions—

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** To auctions?

**Ms. Maria Labrecque Duchesneau:** Yes. They go to auctions, they go to agricultural shows and events. They have to make themselves known. Why go to auctions? Because someone may be at the auction and not want to be. He may not be doing well.

Personally, I walked around, I said hi to people, I made myself known. I have given a huge number of lectures. In agriculture, we always need lecturers. Perhaps you have a role in that yourself. Lecturers are in great demand. I was often called on to respond and I

offered my services. So many people came to see me that, in winter, the cloakroom was full of coats. People came to see me and I made appointments with them. I made myself available when I went to a region.

Let me give you an example of a talk I gave in Chaudière-Appalaches. When I got there I was told that a farmer had committed suicide and I was asked if I could go to his home. It was raining hard. I had not yet given my talk. So I gave the presentation and then I went to see the lady in question on the farm. Did I have the time to do that? No, but I went anyway. You have to make the time.

Field workers have to be available and visible. They have to give talks and make it known that they are there.

I even go to funerals, because, after farmers hang themselves, they leave other people behind.

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** Other farmers.

**Ms. Maria Labrecque Duchesneau:** Other farmers, yes, and it can give them ideas. But families are left behind. I make myself available for the family members. I tell them about the resources available to help them after a suicide. I tell them where to go, if they wish to, and I mention that there is no cost. The fact that there is no cost is important. They do not want to pay for services like that; they prefer to make payments on their tractors. You have to be available and you have to understand them. That's all it is; you have to give them courage and help them to want to get up in the morning. When a veterinarian calls me and tells me that a farmer is no longer milking his cows, it's serious, because soon the cows will not be doing well. So off I go.

I also want to tell you that we have to fight the health care system a lot. As an example, let me tell you about a farmer's son who was not doing well. When I arrived, the kid was smashing a lot of things with a baseball bat. I told my husband to be ready to call 911 in case he wanted to hit me. I told the kid that, if he did not come with me to get some psychiatric help, I was going to call the police. The young guy followed me. The psychiatric unit kept him for 24 hours. Explain that to me. The parents were so afraid of their son that they kept the doors locked all the time. The unit kept him for 24 hours.

In Quebec, we in mental health are the poor cousins. I can't talk about Canada as a whole, but, in Quebec, we are the poor cousins. In less than 24 hours, the young man came back to my house.

● (0935)

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** Thank you, Ms. Labrecque Duchesneau.

Let me turn to you, Mr. Smith. I have barely a minute left.

In Canada, are problems with anxiety and mental health prevalent to a greater or lesser extent among young farmers, compared to the others? Have any studies been done on that? What are you seeing at the moment?

[English]

**Dr. Patrick Smith:** It's distributed across the age groups among farmers and within rural and remote communities. As in other countries, the mental health challenges for the younger generation are somewhat different because they are addicted to their phones and screens. There is that kind of capacity, but it also creates another opportunity for us to reach out to people who are in rural and remote communities. We're finding that e-mental health for the younger generation—not the older generation—is a way to be able to reach out and meet the needs of people.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Smith.

Mr. Dreeshen, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Again, thank you to our witnesses.

I am a farmer. Right now, in some places in Alberta, we are still under snow. We have grain dryers that are going steady. That's happened in the past, so when people say it's all because of the changes that are happening, we also know what happened 50 years ago and 20 years ago, and how it continues. Ironically, this is one of the added stressors that farmers have because they've done so many things regarding mitigation of climate change, sequestering of carbon and so on, yet they feel like they are being attacked. Right now in Alberta, the average farm is probably paying \$10,000 to \$12,000 per year in carbon tax alone. These are different types of things.

We have government decisions in CRA that basically have called small business people tax cheats. Those are some of the kinds of things that take place.

We have governments that come in and say they can help the farm worker, but there's a difference between someone you are hiring and that owner-operator who is trying to deal with it, so you often feel as though you are being looked at in negative ways.

As for the scenario that has been talked about, there is unease about seeking help because if you show weakness, there's always somebody there who will help you out, but they're out looking for land to rent or buy. Are they helping you out in a positive way to say, "Hey, I think we can give you the best you can possibly get," or are they waiting until you're at the stage where you can't do anything? That just adds to your stress. That's one of the key things.

If a child dies in a farm family, you know people are going to rally around and help get the crop off. If somebody is sick with cancer or whatever, you know there is going to be assistance there, but how do you get to the stage where people are going to help you out in that short term or potentially long term that is required? Having somebody like Maria around, to whom you can't say no, would be great, but how do we get that group of people together so that they are there, and so that you know that if they are talking to you they're not going to be talking to the neighbour down the road about when to start buying new equipment so they can cover your farm off? That is the key thing.

Maria, when you speak about the agricultural ombudsman, is that concept similar to what you were speaking of when you were saying

there are mental health solutions or things that you have seen done? Is that what you would expect to see from an agricultural ombudsman, or is it simply another bureaucratic operation that we'd have to deal with as farmers, which we wouldn't trust anyway?

• (0940)

[Translation]

**Ms. Maria Labrecque Duchesneau:** I hope that it will not be too bureaucratic.

When a seller shows a sheet of instructions to a farmer, the farmer expects the figures to be correct and accurate. If a farmer is seeding his land and notices that the instructions for the seeds do not match what he is seeing, or if he buys a tractor that does not work and is then told that the warranty does not apply, he will not go to a lawyer because that takes too much time to get a result. He does not want to get involved in that kind of situation. I have spent 20 years in this area and I can tell you that a number of producers have abandoned approaches like that because it was simply not worth it.

I will speak for Quebec and I apologize for not knowing what the situation is in the rest of Canada.

The ombudsman in Quebec is for the public sector. You can go through the Financière agricole du Québec or work with public servants in government matters, but that does not apply with the private sector. For example, say a producer has lost \$10,000 because of an incident. In a case I saw, some business people told a farmer that he should get a lawyer because they knew full well that he would not do that. They told him to get a lawyer but that they would give him the runaround.

It really is David against Goliath. An ombudsman is a kind of guarantee that tells companies to be careful what they are selling farmers.

[English]

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** I understand that. One thing that was mentioned before is the burden on the whole family. The work, though, is seldom the source of the stress. When we had hogs, being out with the animals was the important part; that was the best part of the day. It's all of the other pressures that are associated with it. It's coming up with coping mechanisms for the situations in which you see yourself being bombarded from so many different directions.

I know my time is up. I appreciate your comments.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Dreeshen.

That will wrap up this hour. We want to thank all our panel.

Mr. Skinner, thanks for sharing your experience. It's going to help us tremendously in our report.

[Translation]

Ms. Labrecque Duchesneau, we almost felt that we were in the fields with you today. Thank you for coming to testify about what is happening in Quebec. It is all very cutting edge.

[English]

Dr. Smith, thank you so much for sharing the Canadian Mental Health Association's perspective.

[Translation]

Thank you, everyone.

[English]

We're going to break for two minutes and we'll be back for the second hour.

Thank you.

- \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_
- 
- (0945)

**The Chair:** Welcome to our panel for the second hour.

I want to welcome, from the Canadian Young Farmers' Forum, Mr. Paul Glenn, Past Chair.

Welcome, Mr. Glenn.

Also we have, from the Centre for Research and Intervention on Suicide, Ethical Issues and End-of-Life Practices, Madame Ginette Lafleur.

[Translation]

Ms. Lafleur is a PhD candidate in community psychology at the Université du Québec à Montréal.

Welcome, Ms. Lafleur.

We also welcome Lucie Pelchat, from the same organization. She is a training consultant at the Association québécoise de prévention du suicide.

Welcome, Ms. Pelchat.

[English]

Mr. Glenn, you'll have six minutes for an opening statement.

Thank you.

**Mr. Paul Glenn (Past Chair, Canadian Young Farmers' Forum):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the committee for the opportunity to come before you today.

I'm Paul Glenn. I'm from the Canadian Young Farmers' Forum, a national organization dedicated to young farmers 18 to 40 years of age from across Canada.

Agriculture producers face unique struggles and stresses, time constraints, and demands on their time, young farmers especially, because they are building businesses and families and typically doing the heavy lifting in family farming operations.

Farmers, like everyone, want to succeed for themselves and their families, but failure is a common occurrence and mostly from uncontrollable forces. Farmers also have financial worries and uncontrolled challenges, from weather challenges to political, social and economic challenges, and the list goes on. Young farmers can experience not just days or weeks but months and years of relentless pressure and uncontrolled stresses that can compound, causing physical and mental health issues.

Three years ago during an open forum consultation, we asked participants at the national young farmers forum to identify ways that Canadian Young Farmers' Forum could support them and ideas for programming that they felt were needed. A young man stood up and suggested that the agriculture industry needs to provide support and training on stress management. This was a humbling moment, because farmers in general do not openly speak of what is considered in their minds to be a sign of weakness.

Since that conference we have added education for stress management and self-care presentations to our annual conference. We have delivered a few more provincial sessions on these topics and have discovered a great need for more action.

The majority of young farmers are stressed. What we have learned is that our members are ready to ease the burden of their stress by opening up to their peers. We have witnessed producers weep during presentations on this topic and have learned that producers are willing to discuss this tough but growing concern in our industry. It was also easy to see that stress is very common among young producers.

As you are also aware, there are several statistics that clearly tell us that mental health is a growing concern in our industry and that an alarming number of people are taking their lives.

Not only is stress affecting the mental health of our producers; it is also taking a toll on the physical health of many. Farmers residing in rural communities have limited access to facilities and health care that can support their stage of being. Often, the services required for mental health are services that individuals must pay for. The unfortunate truth is that farmers rarely invest in anything other than their operation, let alone in themselves.

Another challenge is that farmers aren't clear on when to reach out for help. There is a need for education and self-identification in mental health and on timing for treatment before it becomes an emergency. There needs to be training on mental health first aid, because it is hard to know what mental health conditions look like and when it is time to help. Stress is a daily way of life. I can see the stress in the faces of my neighbours, but what is the right course of action?

Resources are limited for many producers, and they vary from province to province. Producers don't know where to go for help, other than to the family doctor. It can take months in wait times to see a specialist for treatment in non-emergency situations.

Taking time off from the operation to address health issues is often very difficult for producers and is offset by more time being needed to catch up or to struggle to find employees just to take time off, let alone make an appointment in some place hours away, causing more stress.

We need to encourage self-care and increase the understanding and awareness of the signs and symptoms of when to intervene, as well as of the types of mental health issues people face, such as depression, anxiety, social anxiety.

We need to create spaces for more social interaction and face-to-face events to bring young farmers to share vulnerabilities and experiences to support each other. We need to increase knowledge of not being alone and have more conversations and consultation with farmers by region to learn what symptoms farmers are facing and what support they need by region, as this will vary.

The Canadian Young Farmers' Forum intends to help by doing consultations, such as open forum discussions to find out directly from producers what they are facing and what they need; presentations and education sessions across Canada to raise awareness, provide education, and help producers understand the signs and symptoms and what to do and when; social media outreach to increase awareness of self-care practices, posting articles and resources to guide farmers to where resources exist; and collaboration with other organizations to work together to find solutions.

In conclusion, I have realized that there is a lot about mental health that I don't know, but we still need to find ways to address this growing issue. The future of agriculture depends on it.

Thank you.

• (0950)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Glenn.

[*Translation*]

The floor now goes to Ms. Pelchat and Ms. Lafleur. I gather that they are going to share their seven minutes.

**Ms. Ginette Lafleur (PhD Candidate, Community Psychology, Université du Québec à Montréal, Centre for Research and Intervention on Suicide, Ethical Issues and End-of-Life Practices):** Just a second, I'm going to start my little stopwatch, because I have a tendency to go over time.

Thank you for the invitation.

My name is Ginette Lafleur. I am a PhD candidate in community psychology at UQAM. My doctoral thesis is on suicidal behaviours among farmers.

The mental health challenges faced by the Canadian agricultural community are significant. I would say that they are even more so in times of uncertainty, or during economic or sectoral crises. The financial or relational consequences of these upheavals can jeopardise mental health and bring about an increase in deaths by suicide, at least among men.

Daily financial problems, the inability to pay debts, or financial losses can cause mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. Financial difficulties can also contribute to deteriorating relationships between spouses or family members. Those are the people who traditionally provide some protection in cases of mental illness and suicidal behaviours among men.

A sectoral crisis also creates a climate of uncertainty in which farmers may have major decisions to make. Should they, or should they not, expand the operation? Should they, or should they not, sell it? Should they change crops? Dealing with such changes can generate a lot of anxiety.

As I said, the challenges are significant.

As for suicide prevention, many international studies show that male farmers have a much higher risk of dying by suicide, compared to other groups of workers or the general population.

Moreover, Canadian researchers have observed that, in the period from 1971 to 1987, the suicide rate among Quebec farmers was double that of men of the same age in the population of Quebec. In addition, the suicide rate increased during the period being studied, the end of which coincided with an economic recession.

However, we do not know the current extent of the problem, either in Québec or in the rest of Canada. It would be appropriate for Québec and Canada to gather statistics on deaths by suicide by employment sector, as is the case in Scotland or France ever since those countries adopted a national suicide prevention plan. France specifically has had statistics on farm suicides since 2007.

According to the World Health Organization, farmers are one of the professional groups that is most at risk of suicide, mostly because of their stressful work environment, their isolation, and their access to lethal means. Their reluctance to express their distress and to ask for help complicates the work of prevention.

It is important to know that, by committing this ultimate act, farmers want mostly to put an end to their unbearable suffering. They see no way out. With farm suicides, the losses are often painful. These are loved ones like husbands and fathers. Financial difficulties are also an issue, with all the potential losses that it can represent: the farm, the family heritage that could not be preserved, the role of provider, self-esteem and even identity, because, for some, if they are no longer farmers, they are nothing. Records of suicides also note losses in mental or physical health that bring about major changes in the roles and tasks on the farm.

Farm suicides also cause painful family conflicts, including those between fathers and sons. Family is very important in agriculture: you work and you live as a family. You support each other but you also live through extremely painful conflicts. Family relationships in conflict are even more significant in agriculture because of the couple-family-work relationship that is more entangled than in other sectors of activity.

So the challenges are great, not only in preventing suicide but also in preventing stress.

Here is a statistic from the research I was able to do in 2006 and in 2010-2011 with Quebec dairy producers. In 2010-2011, 42% of them felt that most of their days were somewhat or extremely stressful, compared to 20% with other Québec men.

I would like to quote an eloquent testimony to the degree of stress that some producers can experience. It comes from the "Enquête sur la santé psychologique des producteurs agricoles du Québec" that I conducted in 2006:

Stress? Tell me about it! I ground my teeth so much for a number of years that they wore down about 3/8 of an inch. I am now seeing a dentist who has found a serious problem with a displaced jaw. I am also seeing a physiotherapist and a chiropractor because of problems with extreme tension in the neck and shoulders.

That producer left farming, because he could longer take it.

I see that my time is running out.

• (0955)

In conclusion, let me read you another comment on stress that I received from another farmer:

The environmental pressure is heavy. The administrative burden is overwhelming... The company debt. The pressure on yields, on performance. Climate change. The uncertain future of supply management. The pessimism of the media... All those things increase the stress in agriculture. All farmers want is to make a living from their work, feed their families and pass on a legacy to the next generation. Is that too much to ask?

Apparently, in the current situation, it is.

I want to leave some time for Ms. Pelchat. So I will just briefly say that the challenges in preventing psychological distress are also great. Those figures are also alarming.

How can we face up to those challenges? As my answer, I will add to my researcher's hat the one as second vice-president of Au coeur des familles agricoles. The challenges can be met by responding in a way that is tailored to the farming population.

You have heard the presentations on the field workers from the representatives of Au coeur des familles agricoles. I am in total support and I could give you more details if you have any other questions. In Quebec, we have made good progress in setting up a safety net for farmers.

For the last minute, I will pass you to Ms. Pelchat, who will introduce the topic of agriculture sentinels.

**Ms. Lucie Pelchat (Training Advisor, Association québécoise de prévention du suicide, Centre for Research and Intervention on Suicide, Ethical Issues and End-of-Life Practices):** In Quebec, we offer a training workshop entitled "Agir en sentinelle pour la prévention du suicide — Déclinaison agricole" through which any adult volunteer can learn to be proactive in suicide prevention among farmers.

For example, we train agronomists, farm veterinarians, inseminators and even milk truck drivers to identify farmers in distress, to check whether they are having suicidal thoughts and to steer them to the assistance and resources available in their area.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Pelchat and Ms. Lafleur. Perhaps we caused you some stress too with the speaking time you had, but we have to move to questions now. You will be able to provide more details in your replies.

Mr. Shipley, you have six minutes.

[English]

**Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC):** A comment was made earlier... I farmed all my life, also. I went through some of the issues and the concerns back in the 1980s. I can tell you with certainty that it isn't the work that causes the stress. When you change the circumstances around the work, it's a great

day. You go forward. You look forward. That's part of it. We all want some stress in our business. That's what drives us.

Then it becomes not the work but the circumstances around that work that distract us. We have had some incredible witnesses who have opened up to us. I think all of us are learning so much from it.

Paul, when you had your group on social media, the Canadian Young Farmers' Forum, you talked about the benefits, but did you talk about the impact of the negative comments and the negative narrative that comes through? Andrew Campbell was here the other day. He talked about being called a murderer, being called all these things because he raises Holstein cattle and is a dairy farmer. Did they talk about that?

It's a forum. We need some suggestions. We're looking for help here in terms of recommendations on the ground.

Do you have any thoughts at all? I'll turn it over to the others also, please.

• (1000)

**Mr. Paul Glenn:** Thank you, Mr. Shipley.

Some events we did in some provinces across Canada included self-care. It was a small gathering of about 15 to 20 young farmers, just to talk about some of the stresses that they're going through. It was refreshing to hear that I wasn't alone in these stresses, in talking about the pressure from parents and other family members to be successful, or even just the way to take the operation. There are definitely a lot of outside stresses, as you say, on social media. Farmers only care about doing the best.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Can we turn that social media around, in terms of some initiatives, so that we actually use that as our platform to promote what we're doing right to come out against these activists who are out there? They cause incredible stress on us as farmers—not just livestock producers—around the production of our crops because of what we use to grow these crops that are the healthiest.

Is that a thought, that we can actually put together something at a national level, talking about the health of our product, how it's well maintained, how we produce it, and how we look after it? I mean, we can't particularly do things for certain provinces. They do that, but we've never heard that come forward. I was just wondering.

**Mr. Paul Glenn:** In agriculture we dropped the ball a bit on public trust and showing what we do and how we do it. We've been struggling for the last few years to really catch up and get ahead of the activists because they have a very strong presence in social media, obviously.

That's something we've been trying to do by sharing our story. As young farmers that's what we've been doing. At CYFF that's what we've been doing, to show everyone we care about our animals and we care about the land. That's how we make our living, so it's absolutely paramount that we take care of it.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Okay. I'm looking for some direction. I think that's a real opportunity that we may be missing.

Earlier, Mr. Skinner mentioned that the key is to leverage the strength of the community. There have been individuals, and I would like to comment that, actually, you have gone through and trained professionals of all types to come in and assist in training farmers. As we invest the community, I have to tell you that the legacy issue is a huge issue. If you're generational, and you're the one that you think is going to lose it, that is a huge burden and stress upon you. It gets complicated more so by the other issues around it.

I think that as governments...and you mentioned the red tape. The farmers in my area are so concerned about the trades. We have supply management now that has been really tested. We have taxes coming forward. These are things they can't control, and yet they have to write the cheques or it becomes a deduction.

Is there any recommendation you could help us with—if you don't have one right now, please consider sending it later—of what we can do as a government? We always talk about what the government can do to help, but would you actually give us a hand in what the government can do to back away from the stresses they are putting on the families and the farmers? Is that an opportunity that you would see available to you?

● (1005)

**Mr. Paul Glenn:** I think so. I can send some further information for you, but agriculture as a whole is an extremely fragile thing. Obviously, margins are very low. When it's good, it's really good, but when it's bad, it's really bad. We have to make sure we strengthen the industry as much as possible.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** How much time is left? I guess I'm done.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Glenn. Thank you, Mr. Shipley.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Breton, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the experts who are with us today.

Ms. Pelchat did not have much time for her presentation.

**Ms. Ginette Lafleur:** We set it up that way; I did not take any of her time.

**Voices:** Ah, ah!

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** Okay. Very well, I am not blaming you or stressing you out, especially not today.

The fact remains that Ms. Pelchat is an expert and, since she came to meet with us today, I would like her to give us more details about the solution she mentioned, the sentinels. I did not hear enough about it.

I feel that it is an interesting option, but we really did not have the opportunity to find out what it is all about. Could you tell us some more so that we can then ask you questions?

**Ms. Ginette Lafleur:** I would like to point out that Ms. Pelchat was the one who adapted the sentinel training to agriculture. Quebec has sentinel training, but this is the agriculture component.

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** That is great. We often talk about prevention here, and the importance of being proactive.

Ms. Pelchat, we are all ears. I will even give you the rest of my time.

**Ms. Lucie Pelchat:** Thank you, that is kind of you.

As regards our project, I would like to add to that we wrote the agricultural component for sentinels in collaboration with the Union des producteurs agricoles in 2016. There is a great demand. In just two years, more than 1,200 professionals and farmers have been trained to identify distress among farmers and to know how to act. It is great. However, we must not stop here. More than 10,000 professionals work with our farmers. So we must continue our training efforts.

I said that we train workers and professionals, but we also train producers so that they can identify distress among their neighbours and colleagues. These are mostly farmers involved in committees and associations. Our sentinels receive a full seven-hour day of training. They learn to identify the signs, to ask questions, to talk openly about suicide. They also learn some tricks to make it easier to ask for help. Farmers can come up with a thousand and one reasons to not meet with a responder, whether it is the distance they have to go to get services or the time they need for a meeting with a professional. Our sentinels are equipped to reduce this resistance and to act as a bridge between farmers and the resources providing help.

However, it must not be any resource, it must be from a professional who is able to tailor the response to a farmer. Sentinels do not become professional providers of help. At no time must sentinels remain alone in a situation where they have identified a person thinking of suicide. They must always deal with a responder that they have been assigned. Sentinels have access to help professionals around the clock, seven days a week. They can then discuss the situation and make sure that the farmer does not commit suicide.

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** So these are people who are already in contact with the farmers, in a way.

**Ms. Lucie Pelchat:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** You mentioned bankers or other professionals who learn to identify this kind of problem among farmers. So they can then have a frank and open discussion with them.

● (1010)

**Ms. Lucie Pelchat:** Exactly.

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** What happens then? Do the sentinels direct those people to other professionals, doctors or psychologists or psychiatrists, for example? How do things move forward?

**Ms. Lucie Pelchat:** That is a good question.

The sentinels act a little like first-aid people. They see the problem and connect people with those who can help.

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** With the health care system?

**Ms. Lucie Pelchat:** Yes. Actually, the people training the sentinels determine which responder is in the best position to support the sentinels they train in their area. Sometimes, the designated responder is the field worker for the region. Sometimes, they are in the suicide prevention centre. Sometimes, two organizations work together, because someone is needed around the clock, seven days a week. For example, the field worker can be the designated responder during the day on weekdays and responders from a suicide prevention centre take over during the evening, at night and on the weekend to support the sentinels when they identify a person in distress. In addition, we make sure that the designated responder is trained and adequately attuned to the needs of farmers asking for help.

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** Have you trained a lot of them?

**Ms. Lucie Pelchat:** In agriculture, we have trained more than 1,200 professionals in the last two years.

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** Ah, yes, that's what you said just now.

Are they all over Quebec?

**Ms. Lucie Pelchat:** I think we have them in all regions, except the Côte-Nord.

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** How do the professionals find out that they can get this training?

**Ms. Lucie Pelchat:** That is a good question.

Our collaboration with the UPA is absolutely essential in that respect. Those in the UPA who are responsible for psychological help regionally promote it in their areas. We also work in close collaboration with Au coeur des familles agricoles and with the suicide prevention centres to advertise it.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Pelchat.

Thank you, Mr. Breton.

[English]

Now we go to Mr. MacGregor for six minutes.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Thank you very much, Chair.

Mr. Glenn, the part of Canada that Mr. Peschisolido and I come from has some of the most expensive farming land in the entire country: the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island. We're lucky to have an agricultural land reserve, but the real estate pressures of neighbouring cities is leading to a skyrocketing cost of land.

We've heard about the legacy stress, but another set of farmers, whom I don't think we talked about enough, are those who are looking to be the first generation into the farming business. They're in their twenties. They have the drive, they see agriculture as a viable way of doing things, and they're really interested in producing something of value out of the land and putting the hard work in.

I'm wondering whether this kind of conversation comes up: just getting your foot into the game and buying your land, making those huge capital costs of buying the machinery, setting up a barn, and buying your first set of cows.

How is that conversation going on within your group with respect to the mental health study that we're doing?

**Mr. Paul Glenn:** One of the sessions we held was in Vancouver. That was definitely a hot topic.

With most farming operations there is a lot of off-farm income. Young farmers coming into agriculture typically are working off the farm as well. They're starting very unique agricultural businesses now, because they have to be very small, on small land bases, so it's a high-value crop that they're growing. They're even using social media to market directly to their market, basically, to be able to succeed.

It's a very tough thing, especially in B.C. with extremely high land values. It's a tough situation, because you want to farm but you can't farm in the Yukon. You can actually farm in the Yukon, but it's very difficult. That's an opportunity that maybe the Canadian government can provide stimulus for or land programs for young farmers.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** In the conversation we have about farmers versus activists, I don't believe it's as simple as setting it up in black and white terms. I think that, much as having one really bad farm with a really bad case of animal abuse gives everyone a bad name, such is the case with activists. Some use really dastardly tactics, but I think that by and large many are just trying to make sure that the animals' health is looked after.

I agree with what you said, however, that the communications side needs to be done better and that for farmers, it's not just about earning a living; it's a way of life. It's what you do. Being attacked in that way, sometimes with completely unfounded claims, does lead to a lot of stress.

I think there is an opportunity here whereby, through the recommendations we make in our study, we may be able to mount some kind of campaign to help farmers explain what they do, the hours they put in, and the fact that they're usually on the front lines of climate change and are trying to be the best stewards of their land, and that healthy, well-raised animals are actually in their best financial interest.

In what ways can the federal government help to build you up? Do we start a national ad campaign? Do we build up some social media platforms to give you that voice?

● (1015)

**Mr. Paul Glenn:** The biggest thing we need is education starting from a young age. We seem to have missed generations of young people who have been off the farm. Many families now are three or four generations off the farm. The disconnect from what farming and agriculture is presently in our day is very different from what it was 50 or 60 years ago. We need to start educating people on what agriculture is to explain that this is why we're doing it, why we're using new technologies and genetics in crops to grow the food we can with less water, less sunlight—all these more efficient things.

I think education is one of the most crucial things we need to undertake right away for the next generation, and then to support with more media to tell the current population how we do it, why we do it, and why it is a good way of doing it.



**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** We also heard testimony during the course of the study about how important it is to get rural broadband infrastructure set up. Because health care professionals are usually far away, maybe one way we can solve this problem is by having the necessary bandwidth so that while you're out on your tractor you can actually do a FaceTime video conference with a health care professional.

Is that something you think we should be pursuing support for?

**Mr. Paul Glenn:** Definitely. Internet is a big issue in rural areas, especially anything high-speed. It's something that's needed tremendously. It's the same with three-phase power, natural gas or all these cost-cutting items that agriculture needs to stay competitive in the global market.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Okay.

Thanks, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

Next is Mr. Peschisolido for six minutes.

**Mr. Joe Peschisolido (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, thank you.

I'd also like to thank Mr. Glenn, Madame Lafleur and Madame Pelchat for coming here.

I guess where you stand depends on where you sit. As Mr. MacGregor mentioned, both he and I are from British Columbia, and throughout the past six or seven presentations I've been struck by the anguish, the poignant tales. Here we are in an agriculture committee and we're talking about end of life. We're talking about suicide prevention.

I'd like to follow up on Mr. Shipley's point about bringing people together. I've always been impressed with your presentations here, Mr. Glenn. I was struck by your statement that the future of agriculture depends on collaboration.

On the whole point of stress, up until now with the witnesses, we've discussed tactical things, which are very important, things like how to get services. We have a lot of that on the record. I was so pleased to hear about the innovative approaches in Quebec. Hopefully we can transfer them to other parts of the country.

At the end, I'll provide you with an opportunity to keep speaking because I think there are a few more points that you'd like to make, Madame Pelchat.

Mr. Glenn, are there any structural changes we can do? It seems as if finances are the problem. It seems as if the problem is different visions of farming. Someone's activist is another person's concerned citizen who may be misguided in how they're proceeding on things.

How do you foresee, as the Young Farmers' Forum, that we can get that connection back to the people, between farmers and people who eat the stuff?

• (1020)

**Mr. Paul Glenn:** It does lead back to education. Maybe there could be more programs to visit farms, more opportunities for people to visit farms. A lot of young farmers are actually doing just that. Do you want a vacation? You can go to the farm. You take your family

to the farm on the weekend and see the cows, the pigs, the horses and how you care for the animals.

Education is needed. It's hard to explain in a very short time—in an elevator speech—what we do, why we do it and why we care so much about it to someone who isn't from agriculture and doesn't know anything about it.

**Mr. Joe Peschisolido:** One of the best groups I found with youth and education is 4-H. Do you think we can get them involved in spreading the message to parents and communities?

**Mr. Paul Glenn:** Yes, 4-H is a wonderful organization that is doing quite a lot now to spread the word and to encourage young people who are in agriculture to join 4-H groups and learn more about agriculture.

**Mr. Joe Peschisolido:** You talked about collaboration with a variety of sectors in society. One of the frustrations that I believe Mr. Longfield chatted about earlier is that health is a provincial matter. Farming is joint. Everyone is involved in farming.

What can we do better? What can the federal government do better to help you deal with the other sectors of society?

**Mr. Paul Glenn:** I think the mental health challenges agriculture is facing right now...when they speak about mental health first aid, that is such a huge issue. The first time I heard about mental health first aid, I thought, wow, that is the perfect thing that everyone needs. I don't understand it enough. We weren't educated enough as youth to know that I'm not feeling well, but it's okay to say that I'm having these odd thoughts and I need to talk somebody about it. We need to release that stigma. If I broke my arm—not cool—but if I'm sick, then I need to get some help.

**Mr. Joe Peschisolido:** The future of farming... As you mentioned, Canada is a diverse country. In British Columbia we have water but we also have drainage and we don't have frost, which is an amazing combination. It's a trifecta.

**Mr. Paul Glenn:** It's a beautiful place.

**Mr. Joe Peschisolido:** It's a great place.

What can be done with institutions? For example, in Steveston—Richmond East, which I'm honoured to represent, there's an educational institution called Kwantlen and there's an individual named Kent Mullinix who's head of the Institute for Sustainable Food Systems. He's focusing on small parcels, 10 to 20 acres of land, with a more place-based focus.

Do you think that would relieve the stress, having both types of agriculture—the larger industrial farming sector and smaller organic locally based farming?

**Mr. Paul Glenn:** The struggle with agriculture is that we're affected globally, and it's very hard to compete with some of these other countries, because they have a very low cost of production. I find it amazing that we can compete at all in Canada, quite honestly.

Young farmers are very innovative. They're coming up with some really amazing ideas to create small businesses to really engage with the public, and that's what they're doing. They're direct marketing to the public.

[Translation]

**Mr. Joe Peschisolido:** Ms. Pelchat, I don't know if you are aware of the situation—

[English]

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, Mr. Peschisolido, we're out of time.

[Translation]

**Mr. Joe Peschisolido:** Okay. Forgive me.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mrs. Nassif, the floor is yours for six minutes.

**Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for being here today.

My question goes to Mr. Glenn.

You mentioned ways to help our farmers face mental health problems. You talked about social media. Are there other things that we could do for our young farmers who will be forming the next generation?

[English]

**Mr. Paul Glenn:** The biggest thing we found coming from these small groups dealt with creating a safe place for young farmers to come together and to speak and realize that we're all facing very similar issues and are not alone.

I've reached out across the country to friends in B.C. and said, "I'm having a hard time with this. How did you get through it?" It's the small things like that: just to let everyone know that it's okay and that we're all facing these struggles and to provide a safe place where someone can let their feelings out and share with another small group of young farmers, even from across the country.

These groups were just provincial ones, but when we've done things on a national level, it's amazing that while the country is very different from coast to coast, the problems are very similar.

• (1025)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Eva Nassif:** I am now going to turn to Ms. Lafleur, who is doing doctoral studies on suicidal behaviours among farmers.

I also include you, Ms. Pelchat.

We all know that there are problems and we are already familiar with a lot of factors that cause farmers stress: insecurity, the climate, the long work hours because of the labour shortage, debt, prejudices, and so on. There are a lot of factors. We are dealing with an epidemic; farm suicides are a plague.

Tell us about the studies you have done in Quebec and whether the statistics apply to Canada as a whole.

**Ms. Ginette Lafleur:** I cannot tell you whether my statistics apply to Canada, but, in general, they match the trends demonstrated in international studies.

As I said, I am a doctoral candidate but I am also very involved in the field. There are certainly a lot of problems beyond the farmers' control. Farmers are often isolated and they will not go and look for help. So we have to be proactive. If we wait for the telephone to ring in order to solve a problem with stress or distress, we will be waiting a long time. Quebec therefore decided to be proactive.

The objective of the sentinels is to have eyes and ears everywhere in the field in order to detect signs of distress. However, you then need people to look after those who have been identified. That is where the field worker concept comes in. Ms. Labrecque Duchesneau talked about that. I also believe that you have heard another presentation about it. The field worker concept is modelled on the street worker principle, the concept of outreach. We go out to the farmers, we do not wait.

We are also working to eliminate the stigma associated with asking for help. We are making some progress. After 14 years, it is being talked about much more openly. A lot of work still has to be done, but things are moving forward nevertheless.

We work proactively to help people, first with the sentinels and then with the field workers. We spread ourselves around the area. With those front-line services alone, we are meeting a huge number of needs.

The main problem that we have had with the sentinels and the network of field workers we have established in Quebec is the uncertain funding. However, the formula works. The field workers are trained to respond and they know agriculture. The two go hand-in-hand because knowing agriculture makes establishing trust with farmers a great deal easier. The formula works and I believe in it, but we are always looking for funding. Money makes the world go around, as they say. Still, in Quebec, we continue to establish a safety net for farmers.

As I was saying, we do not have recent statistics on the suicide rate, so we are not able to say whether there is a real impact. However, I choose to believe that all the measures we have been putting in place for 15 years are bearing fruit.

Finally, after meeting a number of dairy producers following the negotiations of the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement, I was very concerned, but I told myself that at least we had our networks in place. That is very fortunate because—

• (1030)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Lafleur.

Unfortunately, your time is up, Mrs. Nassif.

**Mrs. Eva Nassif:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Mr. Berthold, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Ms. Lafleur, please use my time to finish what you were saying.

**Ms. Ginette Lafleur:** I have spoken to a lot of people who felt discouraged and abandoned. They had no real idea of what was going to happen nor if the next generation should be put in the same situation. For milk producers, that hurts a lot.

We do not identify everyone in distress, but we have a net that allows us to identify a good number. It allows them to express themselves in other terms.

It is true that social media can be a very helpful medium, but what they were conveying during that period was more likely to increase the level of stress. So I was happy that we were able to direct people with a deep feeling of distress to field workers everywhere. We do not have the solution, but we can help them to release the pressure a little. At the moment, we do not know much about that, but it is—

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Thank you very much. This is very enlightening. I will come back to it in a few minutes, but I just want to say one thing. You are in the process of getting organized to make contact with farmers. The sentinels and the field workers are doing it first. I was very impressed with the field workers. However, I believe that there is a major problem with providing the services that farmers need.

Let me give you an example of someone very close to me. He has a problem with addiction. He called a CLSC and then dialled 411. He had to go through a 40-minute interview on the phone to determine if he was eligible to receive services. That is all done with no human contact. The first time, he refused and hung up. Finally, someone succeeded in convincing him to call back. That happened two weeks ago. His appointment is for November 7. Who knows what might happen by then? The lack of help is a disgrace. This person, however, was deemed to have problems, but the system did not take care of him. That is unacceptable.

**Ms. Ginette Lafleur:** I agree with you completely. When farmers go to a CLSC or call to get a service, it often takes time to get it. The action must start as soon as someone reaches out for help.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Besides, the questions asked during those 40 minutes have nothing, absolutely nothing, to do with agriculture.

**Ms. Ginette Lafleur:** We are told that at Au coeur des familles agricoles. We are aware that we could completely lose those people, that it deters them from looking for help. It happens.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** That is what happened the first time. The person called first to get the State's services at no cost. He was discouraged and then turned to the private sector, because it was impossible to get into the State system as quickly. It is a real problem and it is good that you are making us aware of it.

Let me go back to what you mentioned earlier about the current negotiations. That is one of the things that is happening to people, whether they like it or not.

I will take advantage of the fact that you brought the matter up to submit a motion and to ask my colleagues to study it.

Mr. Chair, let me read the motion and you will see where I want to go with it.

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food conduct a study on the consequences of the draft USMCA on Canadian farmers, particularly as related to:

- 1) producers under supply management,

- 2) any limitations placed on Canadian exports

- 3) any limitations placed on Canada's ability to make independent regulatory decisions within the agricultural sector

in order to gather feedback from those who will be impacted by the USMCA, and its consequences on farmers' mental health; that this study be comprised of no less than four meetings to be held at the committee's earliest convenience; that the minister and departmental officials be in attendance for at least one meeting; that the government produce all studies, evaluations, analysis, and reports that touch on the matters of this study and that the findings of this study be included in the Committee's report on mental health.

Mr. Chair, I am submitting this motion because we have a very specific situation at the moment and we can attempt to understand what is happening.

I have sent everyone a copy of the motion, May I talk about it a little?

• (1035)

**The Chair:** It is certainly a source of stress, as is every other stressor in the world of agriculture, and we are going to raise the profile. However, I believe that it exceeds the scope of our study. If the committee decided to look at the issue, we could do it as another study.

[English]

Mr. Longfield, I think you had a question.

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** Yes. I'm sorry to the witnesses. I was really hoping to get some questions in, but it looks like our time is going to get hijacked here.

I'm wondering if it is permissible under the rules to go ahead with this.

**The Chair:** It would have to be the choice of the committee.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Mr. Chair, I just want to remind you that the notice—

**The Chair:** Excuse me, Mr. Berthold, but I don't think Mr. Longfield had finished.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** You spoke after he did, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** That is because he had asked me a question.

[English]

Did you have further to add to this, Mr. Longfield?

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** I was going to say we should just adjourn the debate on this.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** I had not even said anything yet.

[English]

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** It's a motion.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** The motion was submitted and I decided that it is not in order for...

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Mr. Chair, the motion is in order because it deals with the topic we are studying. You cannot refuse to accept it.

**The Chair:** So you are challenging my decision.

Personally, I decided that it exceeds the scope of what we are studying at the moment. It is a stress like all the others. We can talk about it, but in the context of another study.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Mr. Chair, are you—

**The Chair:** You challenged my decision and that is not debatable. [English]

Shall the decision of the chair be sustained?

(Ruling of the chair sustained [See Minutes of Proceedings])

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** It's incredible. I have never seen this before, Mr. Chair. I have never seen this before.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Let us move on.

Your time is up, Mr. Berthold.

[English]

Mr. Longfield, I don't know if we'll have six minutes, but we'll be fine.

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for your patience.

Mr. Glenn, it's great to have you back. Thanks for what you've done for us on our studies on the ag policy framework, on our debt review, and now on mental health.

I'm looking at the organizations. I visited the Grain Farmers of Ontario. They have a lot of young farmers involved. I've met with the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario. Again, families are involved. In terms of the support through these organizations, do you see that as something that's growing or is it at risk? Do the young farmers who are working on the farm and off the farm who you mentioned in previous studies still have time for these types of organizations?

**Mr. Paul Glenn:** I think a lot of agricultural organizations are stressed in their own way to find producers to sit on them who have time to do it, especially young farmers. As I said before, for young families starting operations, it's very hard to accommodate some of these other organizations, so even those organizations have their own succession planning, basically to make sure that those organizations continue to operate, but young farmers are stressed for time.

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** Yes.

In Wellington County, just around Guelph, I was surprised to see that opioids and alcohol are prevalent in the rural communities. We think of that as an urban problem. Is that also something that young farmers are addressing or concerned with, or is there a policy around that we can be thinking about?

**Mr. Paul Glenn:** I don't think it's been addressed by our young farmers, but if we can educate people to understand that people use drugs and alcohol because of what they're feeling or the lack of feeling.... They're looking for something to feel something, so it's more of an understanding that there's not a negative connotation for

someone who's using drugs or alcohol to feel. That person needs help and is reaching out for help. He's trying to feel better.

• (1040)

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** It's self-medication sometimes.

**Mr. Paul Glenn:** Yes.

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** When we talked about our ag policy framework, we were looking at programs. You gave us some good suggestions on that, and some of those found their way into our ag policy. A previous witness today, a hog farmer from Ontario, talked about farmer assistance around mental health as something we could consider in a future policy framework. I thought it was an interesting idea.

**Mr. Paul Glenn:** Absolutely. Any way we can educate people on mental health and release the stigma I think would be a great option.

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** Thank you.

Ms. Lafleur, we were looking at research about the impact of climate change on mental health. There were 28 specialists last week who met, and The Lancet, a medical journal, listed climate change as among the greatest threats to mental health globally. In your research, have you done any work around mental health affecting farmers as it relates to climate change?

[Translation]

**Ms. Ginette Lafleur:** It is not one of the factors I identified. In fact, like all the changes that happen whether we like it or not, it can require additional adjustment and can generate stress. Personally, I cannot say that it has particularly jumped out in my research.

If I can answer the question that was asked earlier about alcohol and drugs, I would have more things to say.

According to what I have been able to see in my research and to read about the situation internationally, the farming population at this time is less affected by alcohol and drugs than the rest of the population. However, that may change because we are beginning to see the appearance of drugs like cocaine that allow people to work longer and do more. We are going to have to stay alert. That said, up until now, that problem is less prevalent than elsewhere.

[English]

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** Okay, that's interesting. Thank you. That's different from what I've seen. That's why we have these conversations.

When we're looking at the research you are doing and tying into—Guelph has done some research in other parts of Canada. Is there a mental health research network within Canada that you participate in, or is that something...?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Ginette Lafleur:** No.

[*English*]

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** No. It's all disjointed. When it comes to provincial jurisdictions, as a federal government, it's very hard to see how we can convene these types of discussions. Maybe it would be through the Mental Health Commission of Canada.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Ginette Lafleur:** Yes, you are right.

Personally, I have more connections in Europe than in Canada. That is an issue for me.

[*English*]

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** For our report, is that a recommendation I'm hearing?

Very good. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for giving me time.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Longfield.

[*Translation*]

My thanks to our guests. Unfortunately, that is all the time we have.

Ms. Pelchat and Ms. Lafleur, your presentations were very interesting.

[*English*]

Mr. Glenn, thanks for being here with us today. Your testimony will certainly be part of our report.

The meeting is adjourned.

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