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

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, November 22, 2018**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Pat Finnigan**



## Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

Thursday, November 22, 2018

● (0845)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order.

We welcome everyone to our meeting this morning as we pursue the mental health challenges that Canadian farmers, ranchers and producers face.

With us this morning as an individual and a former member of Parliament is the Honourable Ted Menzies. Welcome to our committee, Mr. Menzies.

Also, from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, we have with us Mr. Rick James-Davies, senior director, western operations. Welcome to our committee, Mr. James-Davies.

Now we'll start with opening statements of up to seven minutes.

Do you want to go ahead, Mr. James-Davies? The floor is yours, or whoever...

**Hon. Ted Menzies (As an Individual):** You looked at me and asked for him.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Menzies.

**Hon. Ted Menzies:** Thank you. I'm always willing to relinquish the floor to one of our CFIA representatives.

Thank you very much to the committee for, first of all, taking the time and the effort—and the passion—to listen to some of the witnesses you've had. This is a very important subject.

It's great for me to be back with the committee. I've had the pleasure of sitting on both sides of the table. I started my career long before politics on this side of the table, and it's good to be back here.

It is a very important and, I would suggest, overdue subject for us to discuss, and when I say "us", I mean farmers. I want to speak from the heart today; you won't have any prepared text in front of you to read.

I was involved in farming for 30 years. I grew up on a farm. I was farming for 30 years before I came here in 2004. It's a great life.

Farmers are a tough bunch. We're six feet tall and bulletproof—and don't ever tell us we're not—until we start having troubles. Also, that's not just for men; it's for women as well. I know a young woman who has unfortunately become a casualty, a statistic—but

she's not a statistic; she left children and a husband behind, and no one quite knows why. We are very reluctant to speak about it or to anyone about it, and that's our biggest challenge as farmers, and when I use the term "farmers", I mean farmers and ranchers.

We have many stresses, and so does every industry and every sector have stresses. Some of the farmer's stresses are unique: commodity market fluctuations; trade deals around the world, which we're hearing much about; skeptical consumers who want to know how we're producing this food; government interference, to be very frank; and food trends.

One of these that farmers have a unique challenge with and that creates great stress is the weather. There's no larger stress than watching your entire year's investment and effort become the equivalent of this carpet on the floor in 10 minutes. That's a challenge for any producer, whether there are issues with livestock or grains.

We also have more serious stresses coming from social media right now. I think you've had some presenters who actually reflected on that, on the attacks on public trust. That's one of the biggest issues. How do we gain the public's trust that we are doing the right thing?

We have financial stresses as farmers. There's no doubt about that, but we're such an easy target. Anybody can drive down the road and see the great big equipment out in the field, the big shiny red, green or yellow equipment. Wow, these big farmers: they must be greedy. They must be selfish. Are they worried about the food they're growing for me?

The same people who begrudge a farmer becoming larger to survive used to shop at a corner grocery store and now shop at the big box stores for the same things.

Don't forget that we consume the same food that we sell to our customers, and we do the best to provide a safe and nutritious food supply.

Farming is a solitary life, whether it's on horseback out checking cattle or spending hours in a tractor or in a combine, with 18- to 20-hour days. I can remember many of them myself. In our busy season, there would be weeks on end, days on end, where I would never see a bed; you would just lie down and nap for a while. We're against the weather. This fall was a prime example across the Prairies with the snow, and it wasn't just the Prairies, but Ontario as well.

We have a very unique work-life balance. We live on our factory floor. You look out the window and you see something to do every time you look out—this should be done, that should be done. How do you balance it with making sure that you spend time with your family? That's one of the challenges: the guilt of not spending enough time with your family.

I want to share one experience.

● (0850)

As politicians, you've all given many speeches. The most difficult one that I ever gave was a eulogy to a church filled with over 500 people, two children, a mother and wife, and the grieving parents of my best friend. What do you tell them? Do you say, "I failed because I didn't see that?" You can't tell them they failed because they didn't see it.

Therein lies the importance of what you're studying at this committee, because I still wouldn't know what to tell them, and I don't think many of us would. That's why we need professional help. We need to encourage people to speak up, to stand up for themselves and not succumb to the stigma of it being a mental problem, because it's no different from any other challenge we face or any other disease. It's good that we're talking about this at this committee.

It's not only that, but we can be our own worst enemy as farmers: "I can do this all myself; I don't need help." I did that for a while, until I got a phone call one Sunday morning from a little girl who said, "Daddy's on the floor and mommy's in church, and I can't wake him up." And neither could I when I got there.

He was the same age as me. I went home and said to my wife, "I'm going to change my way of doing things", and I hired a couple of people to help me and I took some of that stress out of my life. If you can't recognize that, if no one's helped you recognize those sorts of things, you continue doing it until you end up a casualty lying on the floor.

I rethought my responsibility to the farm and I rethought my responsibility to my family, and I knew which one needed to take priority.

I'll just wrap up here.

**The Chair:** Okay, yes; we're just about done.

**Hon. Ted Menzies:** How do we overcome the stigma? That's the biggest issue. We have many organizations that are working on it, and if I'm running out of time, Chair, I'd be happy to—

**The Chair:** Yes, we'll have questions.

**Hon. Ted Menzies:** —elaborate on some of those.

Thank you for your time.

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

Mr. James-Davies, you have up to seven minutes. Thank you.

[Translation]

**Dr. Rick James-Davies (Senior Director, West Operations, Canadian Food Inspection Agency):** Good morning, Mr. Chair. My name is Rick James-Davies. I'm a veterinarian. I'm also the senior director of west operations at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

[English]

I appreciate this opportunity to speak about this important subject, mental health in the agricultural sector, and specifically the impacts on farmers, ranchers and producers when they must hear stressful news.

[Translation]

I'll be speaking today about the CFIA and the way we approach and deliver difficult news.

[English]

To set the stage a bit, I want to explain that CFIA is a science-based regulatory agency. Our business stems from a very broad mandate that encompasses food safety, market access, plant protection and animal health.

Mr. Chair, as a regulatory agency, sometimes the CFIA has to make the hard decision to depopulate herds or flocks to protect animal health from the spread of disease in Canada.

[Translation]

We do this to protect all of Canada's producers, farmers and ranchers, and the country's economy.

[English]

We've had to do this during avian influenza, BSE, bovine tuberculosis and others. They are not simple decisions, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

They're not taken lightly.

● (0855)

[English]

The CFIA is aware of the impact such decisions have on producers, farmers and ranchers.

[Translation]

The way in which the news is delivered can make a big difference.

[English]

We start in how we train our inspectors and veterinarians. We take recruitment and training of our staff very seriously. We select the best person to do the job. To become a CFIA inspector or veterinarian, the candidate needs to demonstrate analytical thinking, interpersonal skills, teamwork, planning, organization, dependability, good communication, initiative and judgment. Once hired, our employees are required to attend a prerequisite training program, or PREP, which covers all the fundamentals of not only inspection but also values and ethics and how to have difficult conversations.

[Translation]

The training doesn't stop there.

[English]

There is additional operational guidance provided for program- or situation-specific activities, such as how to respond to a disease outbreak.

[Translation]

Let me explain a bit about how we operate when an outbreak occurs.

[English]

In the event of a disease outbreak, CFIA mobilizes experienced staff from across the country to assist in the area where the event has been identified. CFIA inspectors, veterinarians and other staff who respond to the high-stress situations are acutely aware of the potential impacts on producers. Those responding are well trained in the specific outbreak on how to work with and speak to producers, farmers, and ranchers regardless of whether it's avian influenza, BSE, TB or something else.

I want to add that this approach also provides mentoring to our more junior staff in a buddy system so that younger inspectors learn from their more seasoned colleagues.

I have some real-life examples of how we interact with producers. One I lived through in 2016 was the bovine TB outbreak in the west.

I'll give you a little bit of context. CFIA doesn't work in isolation.

[Translation]

We partner with other federal departments, provincial counterparts and industry associations to the greatest extent possible.

[English]

We also take all the necessary precautions to maintain producer confidentiality. Provincial health authorities are one of the key partners so that producer health and mental health remain a focus. When necessary, we refer producers to the appropriate provincial partner to support their health.

When it came to TB in 2016, a representative of the Alberta Beef Producers was fully embedded in our emergency operation centre. They were able to provide valuable insights on the impacts of CFIA's activities on producers and on how we might mitigate some of them. We held regular twice-weekly calls with the Alberta and Saskatchewan cattle associations to make sure the right information was getting out. In addition, those associations were able to help direct producers back to CFIA or one of our partners to get the answers they needed.

[Translation]

Regular town halls were held in the producers' communities.

[English]

Several CFIA specialists were present at each of these town halls so that specific questions on testing, surveillance and compensation could be addressed.

As well, our partners were there so that the producers had direct access to those other departments.

[Translation]

Case officers were assigned to every producer.

[English]

These case officers were CFIA inspectors trained and knowledgeable in all of the elements of the investigation. They could

answer most of the producers' questions as well as ensure that the producers were able to speak to the specialists on very specific technical issues.

We visited producers on their farms and in their homes, and we sat down with them as much as we needed to. Every situation is unique. Every farm is unique. Every producer's needs are unique.

[Translation]

We recognized this.

[English]

Producers who said they were not satisfied with the information they were getting from their case officer or the specialists were referred to me as the senior person in charge to see what more we could do to help, and what other resources we could bring to bear.

I can say that CFIA takes special measures to make sure that producers involved in an event are seen as individuals. They're not simply part of an investigation. Thus, after an investigation, we always take the time to do what we call a "hot wash" to review how the overall operations went and what we could have handled better or differently. We also routinely review and revise our guidance to inspectors who work in these challenging situations, and the agency and its inspectorate are involved between disease outbreaks so we can learn from our hot washes, continue best practices, review those challenges, and put plans in place to address them moving forward.

Additionally, feedback from the affected producers, farmers, ranchers and their associations is taken into consideration with a view to how we will respond to these events in the future.

Mr. Chair, as I said at the beginning, the CFIA is a science-based regulatory agency, and we as a regulator at times must deliver difficult news to producers, farmers and ranchers. We walk a very fine line in balancing the obligations we have as regulators with those of being understanding and sympathetic to the situation the individuals find themselves in. We try to do both with the help of our partners to the best of our abilities.

● (0900)

[Translation]

Thank you again for the invitation to speak today.

[English]

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, sir.

Now we'll go to the question rounds.

Mr. Dreeshen, you have six minutes.

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

Thank you to both of our witnesses. I appreciate the testimony.

Mr. Menzies, I know you have come here as an individual; however, you have a wealth of experience working with producers throughout the county and again throughout the world as far as agriculture is concerned. You mentioned some of the stressors, and I think that's really what is important for us to consider. There are the threats we have by anti-farm activists. We have social media attacks. People have probably recognized, by listening to the testimony, just how difficult it is.

We also see the role of government. There are the carbon taxes and the regulations. There are the rules on neonicotinoids. Those of us in the west see the idiotic approach that is happening on that issue. There's the food guide and front-of-package labelling. All of these things are added stressors that agriculture people have to deal with.

I think back to, as Mr. James-Davies mentioned, the bovine spongiform encephalopathy. I was so frustrated watching the cow from the U.K. flopping around on Canadian television. We were dealing with that for years. If nothing else, I wish the CFIA had gone to the CBC and told them that this was inappropriate and had nothing to do with what was taking place on the ground. However, we allowed that type of media presence to frame the issue, unfortunately.

There are lots of these kinds of stressors. If people think that wasn't a stress, I think they're mistaken. I'll also throw in the potato cyst nematode issue out of Edmonton, where no one ever found it afterward. To most people, it looked as if it were a lab issue, not a health issue. There was frustration associated with that. It's another industry that felt it was being decimated.

Mr. Menzies, you've also worked on Ag for Life. I know that last year the key approach to that had to do with farm safety. This year the organization in which you are involved is talking about education and the opportunity to educate the public about what agriculture is truly about.

I need a minute or so at the end, so I might cut you off, but perhaps you could explain what the thoughts are here and how your organization is looking at trying to educate the Canadian consumer, even those living on the farm, about what is really taking place.

**Hon. Ted Menzies:** Thank you for that question. It is very important—and I've been cut off before, so I accept that.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Hon. Ted Menzies:** This is one of the joys after politics: You're allowed to take part in some of these not-for-profit boards. You think, "I've spent my years in politics. What can I do now?" You can give back; I am, through Ag for Life in Alberta. There's also working with Ag in the Classroom across Canada. The two are partnering together on this. There was a successful safety trailer put together by Ag for Life. It went out in June last year across county fairs, schools, and all sorts of different community events. About 90,000 people,

including children, got to go through this and learn about farm safety in interactive, technological ways that the kids love. We're going to mimic that with an agriculture education trailer that we think will be as effective.

There's a disconnect. Everybody used to have an auntie or a grandfather or a great-grandfather on the farm. There's a huge disconnect. Farmers are the best stewards of their land. They live on their land. They survive on their land. They want to pass it on better than the way they got it. They do their best to produce a safe and sustainable food supply. It's so easy to criticize them, and it's because of a lack of understanding of what goes on on the farm. Farmers are very vulnerable to this, so the more education....

This committee needs to be commended for raising this as an issue and in the broader context of the attacks on modern agriculture. We in this country are the benefactors of climate change; because our climate is changing, we can produce more food. We now have the responsibility to feed more people, because others will not be the beneficiaries of this changing climate.

Anyway, go ahead and cut me off, sir.

• (0905)

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** Thank you very much, sir.

What I want to present is a motion:

That the Committee request the testimony of representatives from Farm Credit Canada, 4-H Canada and Farm Management Canada to explain how their programs will address the mental health needs of those in the agricultural sector and that their testimony be included in the Committee's study on the mental health challenges that Canadian farmers, ranchers, and producers face.

Hopefully I have read it slowly enough that it can go through. We had this announcement a couple of days ago. There was a certain sense of frustration on the part of those of us on this side that we were not engaged with that. However, there were government members who certainly were up to speed on what was happening.

If these are the three groups that have been charged with this, as the minister's announcement presented, then because it's tied into this study, I believe it is something that we should make a decision on very quickly and it would still be in order for us to discuss.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Is there debate?

Go ahead, Mr. Drouin.

[Translation]

**Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.):** I have no objection. I agree that the witnesses should appear. I just want to mention that not all the members of the government were there either. It was an announcement by the government, and not by backbenchers. I don't have all the details of the announcement either, since I attended only part of the announcement. These witnesses should appear before us. We completely agree.

[English]

**The Chair:** Are there any further comments?

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** To that particular point, it was unfortunate that you weren't, but certainly there were two S. O. 31s presented in the House and a question to the minister from members of the committee. Maybe they can explain why it is that they left a couple of people from the Liberal side out of the announcement.

**The Chair:** Are there any other comments?

Go ahead, Monsieur Berthold.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC):** I simply wanted to support my colleague's motion.

We're preparing to make recommendations to the government. If a program is announced during our study, I think that we must take into account the government's proposals and new program, to avoid proposing the same things. I think that we've all worked extremely hard together and without partisanship on this study. It would be a shame if our report were to end up on a shelf, if the government has already decided what it will do. I think that we must have the opportunity to speak with the program participants and the minister next week. I'm sure that we'll have questions for the minister about this matter.

• (0910)

**The Chair:** Okay.

[English]

Go ahead, Mr. MacGregor.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP):** Yes, I will be supporting this motion.

The only way I found out about yesterday's announcement was through *The Hill Times* brief announcing that the minister was giving a press conference on this issue. I welcome it, although it would have been nice to maybe have had a bit more warning, given the work that we're doing.

It's a welcome announcement. I just hope that this committee's hard work on this subject and our eventual recommendations will also factor into the conversation. It's very worthwhile to have the people who appeared at the press conference yesterday come before this committee, because I'd really like to see flexibility from the minister and the government to pay attention to the valuable work that we're doing here during the course of this study. Therefore, I will support Mr. Dreeshen's motion.

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

Go ahead, Mr. Shipley.

**Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC):** I don't need to add any more.

I'm very pleased that they're coming together. I am disappointed at how it happened. The minister knew and has actually complimented the committee for the work that it's doing on mental health, but nobody gave us any heads-up about what was coming.

All of a sudden, out of the blue, people are standing up, doing S. O. 31s and asking questions, and we're saying, "but we're in the middle of a study here", which makes me begin to wonder why we're doing the study when the minister is coming out with an advisory

group and asking them and what they're going to be putting forward. That was the disappointment.

I think we've been working very well through this study and others. That was a bit of a downside to it.

Obviously we support the motion. I'm glad to hear that you would do that and that we would get them in and that it needs to be a part of the end result.

I do not want to see what this committee has done being lost because we get trumped by that report. I'm not sure how that's going to unfold, because we're likely going to have a report done before whatever happens with the Farm Credit and the 4-H people. I'm not sure how that's actually going to end up and what impact it's going to have on our report. We'll have to deal with that as we go forward.

Thank you.

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

If there are no other comments, I shall seek consent to add these witnesses.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** We're all good. We will have the three groups. We'll fit them into our calendar as we go. Thanks so much.

Monsieur Drouin, go ahead for for six minutes.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses.

I'll go with Mr. Menzies first. They probably just took the dust off your cardboard sign there and put it back up.

**Hon. Ted Menzies:** I don't know if they save things like that.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** They're souvenirs.

Your testimony came from the heart. You spoke from experience. I've had some friends who have committed suicide, but not on a farm. Personally I think we've probably all lived that. We've all known somebody who has gone through that.

With regard to your time in farming, you talked about social media and the pressures that exist now. I remember when I was in school that if a rumour started, it was just in the classroom, and if you were unlucky, it made it through the school, but nowadays, something starts and for farmers there are animal rights activists who really point fingers.

I'm not sure if they're really aware of the mental health challenges that doing that can pose for somebody who is 5,000 miles away and disconnected, but connected to their own community, working on acreages and acreages of land and, as you said, living where they work.

How do we prepare farmers to be better equipped to sustain that pressure, to take that pressure, but at the same time how do we inform the other side to understand the potential impacts that they're causing when they do that? I think there is a way to have a debate about these issues in a respectful manner. I'm just wondering if you've done some work through your organizations in terms of educating the public.

●(0915)

**Hon. Ted Menzies:** Thank you.

That's a very tough question. If we had the answer or the solution to that, I think we'd all be better off: those who don't understand, those who are living the agricultural life, and those who are worried about their food supply—and they should be concerned. We have issues with food safety. They're absolutely unintentional, but those things happen.

To me it comes back to the findings of a committee such as this that brings it out in public. I would hope that some of the people who don't understand the stress they're putting on producers could actually hear some of these witnesses speak and say, "I follow social media, and you're attacking me and suggesting that I don't produce sustainably or safely the food that I'm going to provide to you." To those people, that cuts deeply and, yes, it's going to be a stress to them.

I hate the word "educate", but how do we get farmers to stand up and tell their story? It's a good story: the sustainability, the way we're—and I repeat myself—leaving the land better than when we....

Thirty per cent of the land that I first took over back in the seventies was alkaline. It was pure white. It wasn't growing a thing. Through continuous cropping and modern farming practices, now it's totally productive, except for the fact that it didn't rain this year. We've improved it. We've improved the way that we produce food. We've improved the volume of food that we can grow that helps feed the world. How do we tell that story to convince those people who are justifiably concerned about our producing it in a safe manner? It's education.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** I have to say that Mr. Shipley, Mr. Berthold and I were just at a chicken farm. Mr. MacGregor had some folks there as well.

The difference in my short political career from 2015 to now is that some farmers were somewhat reticent to show pictures inside their farms and whatnot. The issue with that is that they let the other side tell their story on their behalf, and it's a picture that is false. They're creating a narrative that is not true.

I was speaking with a young farmer there, and he said to take pictures. He thought it was important that we show that chicken farmers are good stewards of the land. They take care of their animals. It's not in their interests to not have safety on their farms.

Speaking of safety and food safety, I want to speak to you, Mr. James-Davies, with regard to training. When CFIA goes on the farm, do they offer that particular hand in saying that it's their hope that they don't have to shut down the whole operation because of TB or whatnot? It will have a mental health impact, so do they give farmers a number to call in case they need some help? Is that offered through CFIA agents?

**Dr. Rick James-Davies:** That's a good question.

In our last couple of outbreaks.... There's a lot of information that a producer has to grapple with early on: the regulatory side, why we are here, and what we are doing.

As I mentioned, we try to work really closely with our partners, whether that is the industry association or the provincial one. We actually put that together in a package, and part of that package is the key contacts, the provincial health authorities—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. James-Davies. I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to cut you off.

Mr. MacGregor, you have six minutes.

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

Mr. Menzies, I also want to echo the comments of my colleague about your heartfelt opening testimony. Thank you for sharing your experience not only as a farmer but also from the regulatory side. Having been a member of Parliament and a member of the government, you really have seen this issue from all sides.

One of the most rewarding jobs I've ever had was when I worked at a blueberry farm as a teenager. The only constant thing on the farm was the fact that we were bringing blueberries up from the field. As you said, when you look around a farm, there's always something to do.

Even though it wasn't my farm, I can remember the huge sense of pride I had in seeing customers leave with blueberries that I helped bring out from the field and seeing the value that was placed on that product. We really cared about how we looked after those plants and the quality of the product that was going out the farm gate.

We've heard from a number of witnesses who were talking about the problems with social media. It's a new challenge that farmers are now having to deal with.

When you look at this committee's work and the possible recommendations that we can make, tailored in with the experience that you have, in what ways can we help re-establish—because I think the value has always been there—the value that farmers have for our society in terms of telling their story to the public and trying to provide that counter-narrative about the real worth they have?

●(0920)

**Hon. Ted Menzies:** Once again, that's a great question. I guess my answer would go back to education, but maybe we need to take it back a step.

Yes, there's Ag for Life in Alberta, and we're going to provide this unit to go to the schools, but there's always the challenge of fitting that into the curriculum. Is there time in a curriculum that's so full now to help young people who are going to grow up and maybe work on a blueberry farm—or maybe not—as they mature? You were privileged to be able to work on a farm. I always say that farm kids are so fortunate because they have to learn to live in both worlds, the city world and the country world. They're lucky. Our kids were lucky that they were able to do that.

How do we get this instilled in education? How do we get it to fit into the education system, not to show biases but just to teach them how important food production is in terms of where our food comes from, how it's produced sustainably and that it's healthy? We have to start at a younger age, in my view. The challenge, as the educators will quickly tell you, is in where it can be fitted into the curriculum.



**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Yes.

**Hon. Ted Menzies:** To me, it's a good fundamental education. We should be teaching people how to cook: how to prepare food, how to clean it and how to make sure that you are putting it on the table as safely as it was provided by a farmer. That's not even in the schools anymore:

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

Dr. James-Davies, the CFIA of course plays a hugely important role. You've talked about some of the challenges in being a regulatory agency. It's necessary to enforce certain rules to give the public confidence, but sometimes that can be tough for farmers to deal with. In your opening testimony, I think you very clearly underlined how difficult it can be to share bad news with farmers and so on.

I think you're in a unique position in being within an agency of the federal government. You really have seen this issue from a unique perspective. In going forward with what this committee's work is right now, do you think there are any specific recommendations that you would like to see from your unique vantage point? In ways specifically related to the federal government, what could we be doing better? Where do you think more resources could be put to address this problem?

**Dr. Rick James-Davies:** That's a great question. As we've talked about, I think it's really about that balance and taking the time when we can take the time to balance the needs of an individual producer versus the needs of the country as a whole and the sector as a whole.

Agriculture is an export industry in Canada, so our strong domestic programs and our regulatory base keep those borders open, but as I say, I think that as we continue to evolve our programs and the training of our staff, it's to always keep that balance in mind that there are real people on the ends of those regulations.

I think we continue to make really good progress. It's at the forefront of the minds of the people who go out there every day. I have a lot of confidence that my colleagues here in Ottawa who write those things on behalf of the minister have that in mind. They're writing for the national herd while remembering that it has an impact on an individual farm. We continue that good work and make that our norm.

● (0925)

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

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. MacGregor and Mr. James-Davies.

Now we have Mr. Longfield for six minutes.

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

Thank you both for being here.

I will start with Mr. Menzies.

As a former MP, you know we get into situations sometimes that are difficult to handle when we're working with our communities.

Last Saturday night I was at an event. The parking lot attendant from the University of Guelph is losing his son to cancer, probably by Christmas, so I went to the event to celebrate the life of his son while he is still alive.

There was a person at a table who looked like he'd had a stroke. Part of his face was not doing well. I started talking to that person, and it turned out that he was a farmer. He had put a gun in his mouth and blown away part of his brain. His wife was there. His wife got the suicide note. Now this person goes to talk at schools. There's a program in Waterloo Wellington called Beautiful Minds, and he will talk to school kids about suicide and the stress of being on the farm.

You mentioned Ag for Life as a school program. We have a school program locally. There are a lot of disjointed efforts, and as a former member of Parliament, you know that trying to pull all this together....

From your work in the not-for-profit sector with regard to things like Beautiful Minds or Ag for Life, could you maybe comment on some of the direct connections you might have had with people who are benefiting from the programs or are courageous enough to stand forward and talk about their challenges?

**Hon. Ted Menzies:** I think the most courage I have witnessed is from some of your witnesses who have come before you. Once again, I will highlight how important this study is.

With regard to Beautiful Minds, I don't know that I've even heard of it. I know where Guelph is, of course. I've been there many times.

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** I said there's a movie, and he said, "No, no; this has been going for eight years—before the movie."

**Hon. Ted Menzies:** I think that was *A Beautiful Mind*, not minds.

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** That's right.

**Hon. Ted Menzies:** But you nailed it: it's working together.

I happen to sit on the board of Ag for Life, but there's Ag in the Classroom and many others. I hate even starting to talk about them because I don't know them all. I'm sure in Atlantic Canada there are some that are trying to do the same thing. Hopefully you have brought people in that you've given the same question to and asked why they aren't working together.

We used to struggle with this. This is why we put together the Grain Growers of Canada. We had wheat growers in the Peace River country talking about the same thing that was happening in Nova Scotia, and yet they weren't communicating and raising the same issue. We can do that with this too. I'm working with our Ag for Life to coordinate more closely with Ag in the Classroom and any other group that wants to come together.

Hopefully this report will stimulate and overcome the inertia of doing this alone. I go back to the comment that farmers want to do it alone, and so do a lot of associations. Well, let's do it together, and let's have more impact.

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

Dr. James-Davies, Farm Credit Canada was a witness at our committee. They talked about the fact that they weren't mental health experts, but they were being tasked by the federal government to help to deliver some programs. They showed us a pamphlet this week that they've mailed out to all MPs. It's something they have developed. They are also using 4-H as partners to deliver programs—this pamphlet that they developed—to school kids.

When you were giving your testimony, I was thinking of when I was in business and I had to cut back on staff. I would quite often have counsellors in the next room for staff who were getting the news that they weren't going to be working with us for at least a period of time. There was a layoff or whatever.

When you go in, do you have, let's say the FCC or other partners—the Canadian Mental Health Association—deliver the bad news, or do you take the bad news and then go back to the partners, or is that an opportunity maybe for future support that you could provide through partners in the next room?

● (0930)

**Dr. Rick James-Davies:** That's a really interesting question. It's a little in that balance around anonymity and when that news breaks. We work very hard to maintain the privacy of producers.

You talked a bit about social media. After that first call from the CFIA, the first reaction is to hunker down and not let anybody know, so we try to be really sensitive to that. We talk about resources that are available, the possibility of bringing.... When we make that first visit, it's a very delicate time—and I would use that expression—but absolutely, I think that's a place we can continue to make progress.

As I said, we do it with provincial health partners and associations. Producers' relationships with their own associations are a little different in all of our sectors. In some of those circumstances, they would like to talk to someone from their association first, or a neighbour—somebody who understands what they're going through. We often see, in the animal health space, that new farms reach out and talk to somebody who went through it last time. I think we can see that.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Peschisolido, go ahead for six minutes.

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

Thank you, Mr. Menzies and Mr. James-Davies, for appearing before us.

Mr. Menzies, those were phenomenal words. You're a man who is able to communicate, and I think that's what we need. We need two things, and you said that Mr. Longfield nailed it. I think he did, but you did as well when you said that you have to work together.

For all of the various folks involved in the farming industry and those who are outside, I think the ultimate goal is to have a safe supply of food. However, the folks looking in don't fully understand the challenges that farmers deal with. You talked about a solitary life and how you see it. How do you actually bring people together in concrete ways?

I'll give you an example from my neck of the woods of Steveston East Richmond. The farming is a little bit different. It's blueberries and cranberries. We used to have a hog industry, but not any longer. We have some chickens, organic and non-organic.

There's a movement headed by a great chap, Dr. Kent Mullinix, who heads up the food sustainability program at Kwantlen Polytechnic. He's trying to bring all the levels of government together, as well as the social groups, to head out to the schools and talk about where food comes from and try to connect with the guys in Richmond who buy the food—and not only the farmers in East Richmond and in Steveston, but farmers all across the country.

Based on your experience, what should he and other organizations who want to do this look at, and what factors should they focus on?

**Hon. Ted Menzies:** I'm not claiming to be an expert in this field at all, but how many of these groups do we have across the country that are all starting to do the same thing? Some of them have been doing it for some time, and you and I don't know about the other ones. There's the disconnect in that. It's about getting us together—I can't emphasize that enough—to share our story.

Another not-for-profit board I sit on is the Canadian Agricultural Hall of Fame, and we just inducted Peter Dhillon, whom you know, and recognized him for the work he's done on cranberries. What a success story—taking what was waste land and growing cranberries. That's what farmers do.

**Mr. Joe Peschisolido:** His dad did.

**Hon. Ted Menzies:** His dad did. We had to recognize Peter and how he extended what his father did.

There are some great success stories in a healthy supply of food. How do we get the Peter Dhillons of the world to share with people, to help that story, to help those who are feeling the stress of being attacked because, “Oh, you're a big cranberry grower. You don't care what the food's like.” Well, yes, he does. Of course he does.

It comes back to getting these organizations together and having one solid message, whether it's working with the 4-H or FCC or whatever group it is, and telling that good message that will hopefully avoid some of the attacks that put such stress on farmers. That's part of it.

● (0935)

**Mr. Joe Peschisolido:** You also mentioned overcoming the stigma of mental health. You described the stereotype of farmers being six feet tall and bulletproof, but obviously no one is.

**Hon. Ted Menzies:** I'm living proof of that.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.):** Me too.

**Mr. Joe Peschisolido:** What can the federal government do to help organizations and professional groups get at that stigma?

**Hon. Ted Menzies:** They can be the organizer. I know some CAP funding, Canadian Agricultural Partnership funding, has gone to some of the educational components of this. I hope your study will make some recommendations, whatever funding is going to be spent on this, on getting those groups together and letting the farmers deliver the message.

Ag in the Classroom sends farmers in to speak to students. Here again it's a small snippet of their day, but they share with them the story of farmers.

It's about getting farmers to tell their story. If government can provide the avenue for these folks to get together so they can get that message out, that will take a lot of stress off the farmers. We need to get farmers to stand up and say, "You know what? I went through a lot. I was stressed because of weather; I was stressed watching my neighbour try and destroy himself."

**Mr. Joe Peschisolido:** Mr. James-Davies, it's obviously a stressful situation when you and others need to go in and tell farmers that you're going to have to kill  $x$  number of animals. You talked a bit about that process. What factors do you use in coming to a determination on whether you will kill animals?

**Dr. Rick James-Davies:** At the foundation of it all is the science behind it. Yes, it's a question about animals, but it's equally true in our plant and food space. It is the realities of those diseases, how fast they move, the impact on those herds—

**The Chair:** I'm going to have to cut you off again. Sorry, Mr. James-Davies.

Mr. Shipley is next, for six minutes.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Thank you both for coming out. We have the greatest industry in the world in Canada, and that's agriculture. I believe that to be true. It sustains life for Canadians and many people around the world, because we export. I don't believe food safety is an issue here in Canada. It's often because of the foods that come in. We've never had a situation where it hit the marketplace. If we have, like BSE, it got stopped. The media coverage of what that was going to do was really detrimental to our agriculture industry, but we never stopped it. It went on.

Mr. James-Davies, I always get concerned when we review the transportation of livestock and the length of time livestock can stay on a truck. Coming from the west to Ontario, they want to unload them at Thunder Bay. Every time we unload livestock, we create an opportunity for risk. If an animal were to injure a leg or break a leg, actually there's nothing wrong with that animal except for its broken leg, but that producer has lost that whole animal. Those are stresses that are brought on by regulations driven by outside sources that actually don't understand the industry but are having a huge impact on farmers' mental health and the stress put upon them.

I mention that not to blame you, but to get assistance from people such as your inspectors, who actually understand the livestock industry and the transportation of an animal. We're not talking about

moving people. If we had their assistance, perhaps we wouldn't get drawn into these things that place extreme stress on our producers.

Mr. Menzies, I also want to thank you for what you said. I'm just wondering how we train the trainers. You talked about the professional people, and we do too. Some of us here actually went through the eighties. Maybe you did too, although you don't look old enough.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

● (0940)

**Hon. Ted Menzies:** Do you think? I don't dye my hair grey.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** There's an incredible wealth of knowledge there to help. Is there something we can do here in terms of government programming? I think there are many people who walk through that, but they may not know more than how to come alongside. We heard that from witnesses, not unlike what you talked about this morning, who have experienced it.

The academic side of it is the professional side. The academic side isn't necessarily what the farmer needs to come alongside. Sometimes that person will need some help. Is there something you can suggest in terms of how we might train the trainers, the trainer being a person who's gone through it before? I'm wondering if you have any suggestions, because that really is what it's coming down to.

**Hon. Ted Menzies:** You mean mentorship.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Yes.

**Hon. Ted Menzies:** One other privilege of having the experience of being involved in agriculture and having this role is that I've been asked to mentor young farmers and other people and to share some of the experiences, including what we lived through and how we dealt with 20% interest on our farms.

I think I shared with you before, Bev, about the first farmland I bought. By the time I'd finally paid it off, I'd paid for it for four times over. To live through that kind of stress, number one, you need a strong marriage. Your wife has to slap you upside the head, not physically but just to get your attention, and say, "Put this in perspective. You still have your health. You still have your family. We'll get through this."

I think we have a lot to pass on to some of these people. This too shall pass, so be strong and stay with it. I think there's a huge opportunity for mentors.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** I'm glad you mentioned that, because our spouses or significant others play such a significant role, and often we may not include them in everything. I think we've talked about that. We hold back because we don't want to expose them sometimes to the full difficulty of how we're feeling. We want to try to protect them. On the other hand, when they don't understand what we're going through, they sometimes don't understand how we're reacting to them.

I think that goes back to that professional assistance coming alongside those who have walked it. I think we heard that a number of times.

I do want to go to Ag for Life—

**The Chair:** Mr. Shipley, we're out of time. I'm sorry.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

That was the last question, but if I may, I'll permit myself to make a short statement as a lifelong farmer myself.

I agree with what you said. First of all, you have to surround yourself with your wife, your family, your good friends. I think that's the key to keeping a sane mind. You might come in and say, "The plastic on the other greenhouse just blew away. We lost all of what we had." You need somebody, as you said, waiting for you on the other side to say, "We still have our family. We still have our health." I think that's very important.

The other thing I might say is that we've heard testimony that we should shut down this site or whatever. I welcome people into my greenhouse at any time. I'm glad they're there. I'm glad we don't have DDT today. I'm glad we don't have chlordane or diazinon. That killed my dad. I'm glad the CFIA is there to protect us.

I'm glad, too, that in terms of the maple leaf, when we sell our product outside the country, people know we are a safe place. I welcome it. I'll stand up any time when people come into my greenhouse and show them what I do for them—any time.

Thank you, Mr. Menzies and Mr. James-Davies, for being here today as part of our study. You've certainly contributed to it very well.

We shall break and come back.

• (0945)

(Pause)

• (0950)

**The Chair:** For our second hour, I would like to welcome the Canadian Psychological Association and Dr. Karen Cohen, chief executive officer. Thank you very much, Ms. Cohen, for joining our study this morning.

Also, from Prince Edward Island, my part of the country, we have the Prince Edward Island Federation of Agriculture, with Mary Robinson, past president. We're glad to have you here, Mary. Thank you very much.

We'll start with opening statements of six minutes each.

Ms. Cohen, do you want to start?

**Dr. Karen R. Cohen (Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Psychological Association):** Good morning.

The Canadian Psychological Association, the CPA, is the national association for the science, practice and education of psychology in Canada. Thank you very much for inviting us to speak to you today about the mental health of one of Canada's vitally important communities.

Farming is a stressful occupation that can lead to depression, psychological distress and suicide. High levels of mental health disorders and suicide are significant health issues for male farmers worldwide. In Canada specifically, men die by suicide more often than women and are typically more reluctant to seek help.

Data collected in 2015 at the University of Guelph as part of a farmers mental health survey revealed that farmers experience higher rates of stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion and depression than the average population.

Research has also demonstrated that psychological treatments are among the most effective of treatments for mental disorders, notably depression and anxiety, yet access to psychological services is an issue across the country for farmers, ranchers and producers, and every Canadian. Psychological services provided outside of hospitals and schools are not publicly funded. Canadians either pay out of pocket or rely on the private health plans provided by their employers, plans that often do not provide enough coverage for an effective dose of psychological treatment. Those who cannot afford to pay for treatment end up on long wait-lists or depending on prescription medications, which at present are also not publicly funded, or simply do not get help at all.

Being self-employed, farmers, ranchers and producers may not have private extended health insurance. Publicly funded mental health services in rural areas are often in short supply and wait-lists are long. Even for those who have private insurance or who can pay for care, the per capita ratios of all health providers are lower in rural than in urban areas.

Travelling to urban areas to get specialized mental health care means absences from work that farming may not permit. It means leaving families and support networks and losing revenue. For some farmers, ranchers and producers, seeking mental health services may not seem worth the cost of recovery.

The recruitment and retention of psychologists to work in rural and remote communities is part of the problem. It's estimated that the psychologist-to-population ratio in rural areas in 2012 was approximately 1:28,500, as compared to an average of 1:3,848 in urban areas.

Mental health service providers who do practice in rural communities often have large caseloads. The federal government can take immediate steps to help recruit mental health workers to work in rural and remote communities to ease caseloads and wait times.

In 2013, the federal government launched the CanLearn program that forgives a portion of Canada student loans for new family physicians, nurses and nurse practitioners who agree to work in underserved rural and remote communities. CPA has long asked to expand the program to include psychologists to improve the recruitment and retention of mental health care providers in these underserved communities.

There are other factors related to the values and experiences of farmers that may prevent them from seeking and receiving care. These include the stigma attached to mental illness as well as a lack of understanding of farming and its realities on the part of health care providers.

E-mental health services that include psychological treatment may help overcome some of the barriers to seeking care. According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada, e-mental health care shortens wait times, reaches across time zones, improves accessibility in rural and remote areas and is cost-effective. E-mental health treatments have also been shown to be just as effective as face-to-face treatment for certain illnesses and work for several kinds of mental disorders, including depression, social anxiety, post-traumatic stress and eating disorders.

Internet-delivered cognitive behavioural therapy, offered through the online therapy unit at the University of Regina, screened 1,046 patients for Internet therapy last year. Of these, 8.6% identified as living on a farm and 23.2% lived in small rural areas.

It is the CPA's view that all care, whether delivered in person or virtually, should be delivered by or under the supervision of regulated and specialized mental health care providers and should be monitored for, and be guided by, their treatment outcomes.

In closing, the CPA would like to make the following recommendations: First, the government should fund research and programs delivering evidence-based e-mental health services. More can be done to promote these programs with farmers, ranchers and producers and to tailor programs and train providers to work with these communities.

Second, while we applaud the federal government's 2017 investment of \$5 billion over 10 years in mental health, mental health spending should be increased from 7.2% of total public health spending to a minimum of 9%. The U.K. spends on average 13% of their total health care budget on mental health.

Third, the CPA has been part of a steering committee of the Mental Health Commission of Canada, working to advance e-mental health by calling for investment in proven innovations, addressing knowledge gaps and identifying and sharing best practices. We hope that the government continues to invest in the commission and this important work.

● (0955)

Fourth, we ask that the government expand the CanLearn loan forgiveness program to include psychologists working in underserved or rural communities. Doing so will improve the recruitment and retention of mental health service providers in these communities where mental health need is great and underserved.

Thank you.

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

We'll go now to Ms. Robinson for six minutes.

**Ms. Mary Robinson (Past President, Prince Edward Island Federation of Agriculture):** Thank you for the invitation to speak with you today.

I am Mary Robinson, past president of the Prince Edward Island Federation of Agriculture, P.E.I.'s largest general farm organization. Our federation's mandate is to help improve the sustainability of island farmers and farm families.

Today I will focus on the services we are delivering in P.E.I., speak of some specific concerns and give you my two cents' worth

on what I feel our Government of Canada could and should do to better protect and fortify Canada's farmers, producers and ranchers.

First off, what are we doing in P.E.I.? In the 1990s and early 2000s, there were a couple of major stressors for agriculture in P.E.I. We had a potato virus that shut us out of fresh markets in the States, and BSE hit our beef producers hard. We saw a significant jump in the number of farmers and their family members seeking counselling services. National research highlighted farmers and their families being underserved with regard to mental health services.

A local counselling firm put these two points together and approached the provincial government in hopes of helping the P.E.I. farm community. Our Department of Agriculture approached our federation to discuss how we could partner to deliver a valuable program to P.E.I. farmers.

In 2004 our farmer assistance program, FAP, was launched. FAP offers confidential professional counselling services to P.E.I. farmers and their family members. Designed to help address issues that impact mental health and well-being, the program offers confidential sessions with a professional counsellor. On the front lines delivering the program we have two registered social workers and one registered psychologist.

The numbers from April 1 to September 30 of this year illustrate how important the program is. In those six months, 47 people used the counselling services and we delivered over 95 sessions. Topics addressed included marital issues, depression, anxiety, grief, life stages, PTSD, addictions, child management, and, suicide prevention.

FAP has been cost-shared between the P.E.I. Department of Agriculture and the P.E.I. Federation of Agriculture, and until recently had been allocated just under \$13,000 per year. Uptake continues to grow. In some ways, this is a good problem, but it does result in continued and increasing budget overruns. In 2017 it became clear the program needed at least 50% more funding. We discovered that to avoid disruption of counselling services, the service providers had quietly been absorbing program losses.

For the last two years, the P.E.I. Department of Agriculture has increased its contribution. There were discussions with our Department of Health in hopes they would commit to topping up the program when necessary, but so far nothing has come of this.

After coverage in local media, Farm Credit Canada's Charlottetown office contacted our federation to express their interest in directly contributing this year. Since 2004 over 800 farm clients have accessed mental health services through FAP, with more than 2,000 sessions delivered in total. We continue to have strong feedback on the value found in these services.

Now for some specific concerns.

I know that this committee has been given several examples of producers' mental health issues. I would like to bring you one from P. E.I. Over the past four years, we have watched one farm family in particular be pushed beyond reason.

In August 2014 there was what we now call "a significant weather event". These are really common now. They're common and they're more destructive. This one dumped three inches of rain in less than one hour. You can imagine that volume of water falling on a field. It resulted in water that was laden with silt and crop inputs—yes, pesticides, fertilizers, seed, what have you—running off the fields, busting through our established buffer zones—because farmers establish buffer zones—and ending up in ditches and streams.

Days later, 1,155 dead fish were found over a 3.5-kilometre span in the river. As a result of the fish mortalities, this farm family has been in and out of court for the past four years facing charges, acquittals, Crown appeals and now sentencing. Ironically, this farm was celebrated in 2012 for its environmental stewardship.

• (1000)

This family is a valued community member. They are employers, notable contributors to our local economy, and they work hard hand in hand with the local watershed group. Recently they took on more debt, reinvesting in their operation to expand it and to access more markets, so they've taken on more financial stresses. Most recently, one of their daughters has been diagnosed with cancer, and her baby's almost a year old. At the last court date, they were told that the Crown, pursuing DFO charges, is seeking a minimum fine of \$175,000. I don't know about their farm, but I don't know if our farm could sustain a \$175,000 fine and continue to operate. I can't imagine being faced with these stresses.

As in many regions in Canada, P.E.I. producers face many uncontrollable risks: weather, disease, pests, tight margins, trade vulnerability, buyer amalgamation, public trust issues, labour shortages, BRM shortcomings, and the list, unfortunately, goes on.

What can government do?

Now I get to the emotional part of my presentation. I was working on my Christmas card list earlier this week, and I had to remove two names, two producers I know who committed suicide. They died by suicide this year alone. If we want to be effective in quelling the losses and negative impacts resulting from mental health struggles, we must find the resources to implement a pan-Canadian approach to agricultural mental health research and to strongly support mental health initiatives across the Canadian agricultural community.

As a primary producer, I encourage this committee to take into consideration the potential negative impacts from different campaigns, for lack of a better word, such as front-of-pack labelling and access to temporary foreign workers. We know that producers are being held up, because they're being randomly audited. There is increased regulation. I have no trouble with common sense regulation, but it seems unending, and there is a lack of leadership, in particular from Health Canada and PMRA, to help instill a sense of confidence that our food is safe, that our farmers are doing good work, that we should be proud and we should be damn well happy.

I found Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton's statement summed it up well: "We can't have a sustainable food system in Canada if we don't have sustainable farmers." This historically stoic profession, "six feet tall and bulletproof", as I heard earlier, is highly vulnerable right now and needs help right now. Canada cannot expect its agriculture sector to grow and expand if it does not invest in farmers' foundational well-being.

Thank you.

• (1005)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Robinson, for your testimony.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Berthold, you have the floor.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Mr. Chair, unfortunately, we're currently hearing the bell indicating that a vote will be held in 30 minutes.

I want my colleagues to agree to allow each of us to ask the witnesses a question before leaving, without using all our speaking time.

**The Chair:** I need unanimous consent to give a question to each party.

**Some hon. members:** Okay.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** I was thinking more along the lines of one question per person.

**The Chair:** Okay. I'll stop you after two minutes.

Mr. Berthold, you have the floor.

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

Ms. Robinson, I just wanted to thank you for your presentation. It was important for us to hear this story. What this family has been through is unbelievable.

I also want to thank you for addressing all the other factors that are under the government's responsibility and that add to the farmers' stress. You specifically mentioned front-of-package labelling and foreign workers. We must open our eyes and expand our horizons. The decisions that concern farmers shouldn't be made by only one sector. The decisions should involve more people who are familiar with the potential impact on farmers. Thank you.

Ms. Cohen, I'm interested in one issue in particular. People who are involved in agriculture are passionate and dedicated to their work. They know the challenges ahead. That said, we must anticipate rather than simply react. Therefore, when does agriculture become an issue or risk for them?

[English]

**Dr. Karen R. Cohen:** I think one of the challenges when it comes to mental health is that we talk about it as if it's a solitary phenomenon and a solitary issue, and it isn't, of course. There are any number of issues that people face. They have different predispositions to different kinds of problems.

I think the kinds of investments that were announced this week around mental health first aid and prevention promotion are critical, but they won't necessarily address or prevent someone from developing depression. There are many, many factors. However, I think that if care, resources and support are given to people early.... The earlier you can identify something and get someone the assistance that they need, the better the outcome.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Monsieur Berthold.

Monsieur Breton is next.

[Translation]

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

Ms. Robinson, thank you for your courage during your presentation. I'm sorry that we can't take more time to ask you questions, as a result of the vote this morning in the House.

You mentioned an assistance program for Prince Edward Island farmers. I gather that it was established in 2004, and I find it interesting. Can you tell us a little more about it?

[English]

**Ms. Mary Robinson:** It's a joint-funded program, partly by our provincial Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and partly by our P.E.I. Federation of Agriculture. We had FCC come to the table this year, after there was extensive media coverage, to offer some financial support as well.

We typically have a \$13,000 budget, but we discovered in 2017 that we had a 50% overrun. Since both 2017 and 2018, our provincial government has stepped up, as have we, and with the help of FCC, we're hopefully meeting that budget. However, to think what we could do with additional money there is pretty powerful.

[Translation]

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

[English]

Mr. MacGregor is next.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Thank you both for appearing today.

Ms. Robinson, I know that took a lot to talk about, so I just want you to know that we all appreciate that. It's important to get it on the record.

You talked about the seasonal agricultural worker program, and we've heard from many producers about the shortage of labour, how long application periods are, and the fact that producers don't know what's going on when they're audited.

A lot of producers have suggested maybe having trusted employers. Employers who have decades-long relationships with their employees should not have to go through the same process if they have consistently demonstrated that they have a good work environment.

In the short time that we have, are there any other recommendations that you just want to put on the record to at least put that stress maybe at ease for many producers?

**Ms. Mary Robinson:** I think a lot of what we could do is incredibly low-lying fruit. We could change the terms "seasonal agricultural worker" and "temporary foreign worker". These have negative connotations to people who don't understand that the program has been in place for five decades and is incredibly valuable on both sides of the equation.

The workers who come to Canada are typically very happy to have the opportunity to come here and to make the money that they make. It's like what happens in eastern Canada: We see our guys go west to Fort McMurray and make big money, and they're isolated from their families and it's very similar. However, the public lens is very unfavourable.

I encourage government to have a look at everything it does to contribute to or erode public trust. I think that for producers, typically it's like having a billion feathers stacked on you. It's going to kill you. Every little thing that we do to make people look sideways at farmers ends up having a massive impact on mental health.

• (1010)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Robinson and Dr. Cohen, for being here.

As we said, we would love to have had a bit longer time, but we certainly appreciate your testimony and will include that in our study.

Thank you again.

The meeting is adjourned.







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