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Tuesday, September 19, 2017

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Chair

Mr. Pat Finnigan

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

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• (1535)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.)): Welcome to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

I would especially like to welcome the new members of the committee. They are Luc Berthold, John Barlow, Sylvie Boucher and Eva Nassif. Greetings also to Karine Trudel, who is replacing Ruth Ellen Brosseau today.

And welcome back to those who have been members of the committee before.

[English]

I'm looking forward to a great fall session. We'll start immediately, because we have to replace the vice-chair. By the way, we also have a new clerk, Marc-Olivier, and we're really happy to have him here. He has some good experience, and I'm sure he'll help us do a great job here.

Marc.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Marc-Olivier Girard): We have the election of the first vice-chair for the committee because the position is now vacant. I'm now prepared to receive motions for the election of the first vice-chair.

Are there any propositions?

Madame Boucher.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): I would like to nominate Luc Berthold as vice-chair.

The Clerk: It is moved by Mrs. Boucher that Mr. Berthold be elected vice-chair of the committee.

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. Berthold duly elected as first vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: For the benefit of the new members of the committee, let me remind you that our most recent project is the study of a food policy for Canada.

Today, we will be hearing from witnesses who will share with us what they would like to see in that study.

First of all, we welcome Scott Ross.

[English]

He is with the Canadian Federation of Agriculture.

Bonjour, Mr. Ross.

From Soy Canada we have Dale Adolphe, interim executive director, and Mr. Chris Masciotra, director, corporate affairs.

Welcome.

[Translation]

From the Conference Board of Canada, we have Jean-Charles Le Vallée, Associate Director, Food Horizons Canada.

Welcome, everyone. Thank you for being here today.

We will begin by going around the table, with seven minutes per witness.

Mr. Ross, the floor is yours.

[English]

Mr. Scott Ross (Director of Business Risk Management and Farm Policy, Canadian Federation of Agriculture): Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members, for the opportunity to provide a brief overview of CFA's vision for an effective and successful food policy for Canada.

As you are likely well aware, we've advocated for a national food strategy for a number of years now, and we're very pleased to see this discussion unfolding as it is today.

To begin, I want to briefly read a quote from the CFA's earlier work on a national food strategy. I've included it because I believe it captures the essence of why CFA and its members believe a food strategy or policy is required.

Few Canadians give their daily food a lot of thought. Our abundance has allowed this luxury for many, but not all Canadians. Few Canadians understand what goes into bringing food to our plates and how the choices we make at the grocery store affect our food chain and our health.

Perhaps because of our abundance we have not, as a nation, comprehensively planned to ensure an adequate and wholesome food supply for future generations.

This quote speaks to the growing disconnect between the average Canadian and where their food comes from.

To maintain this abundance and capitalize on our sector's immense potential, we need a strategy that increases the understanding of people in Canada as to how their food reaches their plates, while laying out a comprehensive plan to move the sector forward. On that note, I want to commend the federal government on moving forward with a food policy for Canada and the discussions we're having today.

While we've long advocated for a national food strategy rather than a policy, the label isn't what's important. Whether it's a strategy or a policy, we see a few critical elements to successful implementation.

First, a food policy must bring together stakeholders to address emerging concerns around a common vision.

Second, it must provide a framework enabling all orders of government, departments, and stakeholders to align. This is critical. We continue to see misalignment between policy initiatives, with the agrifood growth targets being the most recent example, where subsequent initiatives, like the current suite of proposed tax reforms or proposed front-of-package warnings on food, would impose new costs and uncertainty that would seemingly undermine the industry's capacity to grow.

Third, a food policy must be grounded in clear, science-based objectives that allow for key metrics, benchmarking, and defined progress.

To achieve these outcomes, we believe that the policy must first focus on creating a common understanding that bridges that divide between expectations of the Canadian public and modern food production practices. Without this basic understanding, any policy will repeatedly push up against misunderstanding, division, and misalignment.

A starting point can be found in the consensus that exists between the previous Canadian food policy proposals put forward by CFA, CAPI, the Conference Board, and Food Secure Canada. These were developed through extensive, wide-ranging consultations that brought together diverse stakeholders. While they differ in a number of areas, they also have significant common ground upon which a food policy can build. For example, all these proposals speak to the need for a whole-of-government approach to get at the silos we all face when dealing with food-related issues. Silos between different departments, orders of government, or within the value chain result in duplication, contradictions, and unintended consequences.

Developing a food policy presents a means of better understanding various viewpoints, cumulative impacts and synergies, and an opportunity to promote more comprehensive, coordinated, and informed action on the part of all stakeholders.

The Barton report and the 2017 federal budget highlight the importance of this approach, noting the value that a whole-of-government approach provides. By focusing on obstacles to growth that span multiple policy areas, this approach looks to align decision-makers around solutions. This agenda's momentum presents a foundation upon which a food policy can build by providing a long-term forum for the cross-sector relationships needed to truly realize this vision and address issues that span any single policy domain.

In order to move from a vision to measurable success, CFA has outlined four key recommendations with regard to governance of a national food policy.

First is a whole-of-government approach. While we support Agriculture Canada's continued leadership in this initiative, this policy must be made explicit in all departmental mandates to ensure accountability and continued engagement.

Second, it can't be limited to the federal government and must engage and align all orders of government to address issues that span any one jurisdiction.

Third, industry leadership is critical. A successful food policy requires buy-in. If this is to be possible, it requires contributing to the vision and strategy required to get there from the outset.

Fourth, it needs clearly agreed to roles and responsibilities. These are essential. This not only ensures accountability and coordination, but it also directs stakeholders and their resources to appropriate priorities. Access to affordable food is a prime example.

● (1540)

Farmers play an important but limited role, and that is efficiently producing food on an affordable basis. By acknowledging our strength in producing affordable food, the policy can focus on socio-economic policies while ensuring they don't undermine the affordability and sustainability of Canada's food production.

When it comes to where to start, CFA has identified three key recommendations as well. First, a national food policy can easily be bogged down with complexity and competing priorities. We continue to advocate that the strategy must begin with those areas where there's already common ground. By building on the existing work already done by CFA and others as a starting point for early action, we can reach this common ground as a starting point to build upon.

Second, in terms of moving from policy to action, data is critical. By first collecting and looking at data within a single framework, the policy can establish a foundation to convert desired outcomes and to clear actions based on science-based metrics and targets.

Third and finally, we can all point to areas where silos lead to seemingly contradictory policies. This policy can bring together the necessary actors to understand and address those contradictions before they become reality.

While much work is still to be done, the CFA believes these critical guiding principles are essential to an effective national food policy.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to any questions you might have.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ross.

Soy Canada, I don't know which one wants to go first. Go ahead.

Mr. Dale Adolphe (Interim Executive Director, Soy Canada): Good afternoon everyone. Thank you for the invitation to share our perspective on the development of a food policy for Canada. We always welcome the opportunity. Your chair has already introduced me as Dale Adolphe. I'm the interim executive director of Soy Canada, and Chris Masciotra is Soy Canada's director of corporate affairs.

I'm going to start by providing a bit of an update on the growth of the Canadian soybean sector before discussing our recommendations related to a national food policy.

Soybeans are new to parts of Canada, particularly western Canada, and Soy Canada is relatively new, in that we're only three years old. Our members include producer associations representing farmers from across the country, seed development companies, soybean exporters and processors.

Our goal as Soy Canada is to unite the soybean sector, facilitate co-operation, and represent the industry on domestic and international issues surrounding market access, trade, market development, and research.

The Canadian soybean sector is currently experiencing what could be called explosive growth. This year our industry has reached new heights, with all segments of the industry seeing strong growth and development.

In 2017, seeded acreage increased by a third over last year to 7.3 million acres. Production is set to climb by 20% over the same period to 7.7 million tonnes. Much of this growth, as I mentioned, is taking place in western Canada where production has more than doubled in the last 12 years.

In 2016, farm cash receipts from soybean production rose to \$2.9 billion, an increase of 20% from the year before, and exports of soybeans and soybean products continue to trend upward. In 2016, exports reached 4.84 million tonnes at a value of just under \$3 billion.

We are now in our 10th consecutive year of growth, and more and more producers are turning to soybeans as a reliable and profitable commodity to include in their crop rotations. Today, more than 31,000 Canadian farmers are growing soybeans, and that's up about 16% over the last five years.

Now I will turn it over to Chris.

• (1545)

Mr. Chris Masciotra (Director, Corporate Affairs, Soy Canada): Thanks, Dale.

Soy Canada welcomes the Government of Canada's work towards the development of a food policy designed to provide consumer

guidance and address issues related to the production, processing, distribution, and consumption of food.

From our perspective, a national food policy must include a strong agriculture presence. An effective policy will outline the conditions that will allow the Canadian agriculture sector to thrive and build on the expansive growth forecasted by the Prime Minister's Advisory Council on Economic Growth. This should include a focus on overcoming market access and regulatory hurdles to enable more production and exports, calling for increased processing capabilities for high-growth commodities like soybeans, and increasing marketing support for shippers.

A national policy must promote science-based decision-making, the harmonization of international standards, and the liberalization of trade through tariff reduction and other non-tariff barrier obstacles. These are some of the key ingredients to developing a meaningful policy that meets the needs of consumers and industry stakeholders.

We've seen these priorities built into the national food policies of other like-minded countries. Australia's national food plan contains chapters dedicated to capitalizing on opportunities, addressing business and regulatory challenges, growing agriculture exports, promoting healthy food consumption, and food sustainability. Similarly, the United Kingdom's strategy rallies support behind enhancing competitiveness, promoting free trade, and improving transportation infrastructure, benefiting all members of the supply chain.

These strategies are good models for the Government of Canada to draw from as it develops a domestic policy. They focus on issues beyond identifying the nutritional value of food and delve into the complex policies that impact all members of the agriculture value chain. Just to underscore the importance of trade-friendly food policies, international food trade now accounts for 23% of global food production.

A national food policy should also underscore industry and government efforts towards food safety in Canada. Quality assurance standards put in place by our industry are world-class and recognized internationally as the gold standard in food quality and safety. For example, soybeans produced for food consumption in Canada undergo robust private and government certification systems that trace the production and supply of identity-preserved soybeans. The Canadian identity preserved recognition system, or CIPRS, is a grain traceability standard administered by the Canadian Grain Commission and audited by third parties to ensure CIPRS-certified grain shipments are pure and adhere to the highest food quality and safety standards.

Similarly, seed developers work with Canadian regulators, such as the Pest Management Regulatory Agency, when establishing residue limits on crop protection products. The processes for establishing these limits are extremely robust. They are science-based and have multiple built-in safety factors that enhance food safety when products are brought to market. Consumers need to be made aware of these practices through a national food policy that educates Canadians on the high level of safety and care that goes into food production and handling.

It is about excellence, transparency, speed, continuous improvement, and least cost. It's about providing Health Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency with a world-class foundation to continuously improve their performance and process standards, policies, and resource allocations for the benefit of consumers, businesses, and the taxpayer.

Finally, a Canadian food policy should feature a healthy foods section that focuses on the nutritional value of agrifood products. It is extremely important for a food policy to highlight the health benefits of agrifood products grown right here at home. Canadian soybeans and processed soy oils are well positioned to serve as strong examples of locally grown grains with tremendous health advantages.

Consider that in 2015 Health Canada approved a health claim linking the consumption of protein-rich soy food to lowering cholesterol levels. Scientific studies behind the claim show that consuming 25 grams of soy protein per day helps reduce both cholesterol and the risk of heart disease.

We are seeing other countries come to the same conclusion, linking soybean consumption to a reduction in the risk of coronary heart disease. Just last month the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved a similar health claim on soy oil food labels in the U.S. In Canada, the health benefits of consuming soy oil in a country where soybeans are one of the fastest-expanding crops is a net positive story for Canadians and one that could be featured as a success story in the upcoming food policy.

• (1550)

I'll pass it back to Dale.

The Chair: If you could wrap up, we're past time.

Mr. Dale Adolphe: I'll quickly wrap up.

The policy cannot remain silent on important agricultural issues such as market development and market access. It must also take care to demonstrate the agriculture industry's commitment to food safety and quality assurance. Food safety is not just about consumer protection, it's also about enhancing the competitiveness of the Canadian food chain.

We strongly believe a national food policy must facilitate the growth of crop sectors like soybeans, and the grains and oilseeds industry in Canada, and we look forward to working with the Government of Canada as it develops this strategy.

The health, safety, and economic well-being of Canadians is greatly determined by the integrity of the ecosystem, the natural resources, and infrastructure that we share, which is climate,

airsheds, fresh water, natural landscapes, fisheries, agrifood systems, and the transportation, telecommunication, and energy networks.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Adolphe and Mr. Masciotra.

[*Translation*]

We now move to Jean-Charles Le Vallée, from the Conference Board of Canada.

Mr. Le Vallée, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Jean-Charles Le Vallée (Associate Director, Food Horizons Canada, The Conference Board of Canada): Thank you.

My name is Jean-Charles Le Vallée.

[*English*]

I'm with the centre for food. Some people might remember we worked for four years on developing a food strategy for the country. I have a copy here, which I'll pass on to Mr. Poissant when we're done. I'll refer to it as we go along.

The policy is a fantastic initiative. Our thanks for inviting us to the standing committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): If possible, could you send a copy to all members of the committee, not just to the parliamentary secretary?

Mr. Jean-Charles Le Vallée: I will send an electronic version to the clerk.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Great, thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Jean-Charles Le Vallée: Food is horizontal. It needs a full supply chain view. You've heard from primary agriculture, but really, before agriculture, there are inputs. There are land issues, credit issues, which are not always easy to access. There are pesticides, fertilizers, chemicals, or organic matter. There are lots of inputs. Labour is an input. In Canada, we just finished a study. The current labour gap in agriculture is 58,000 workers. It will grow to 114,000 workers by 2025. We are using many temporary foreign workers, but that's all part of the input to primary agriculture.

You then have many, many products, and you have a great policy for growth in that, and the value-added is fantastic. In trade as well, you're going to \$75 billion by 2025. That's amazing. The world needs more of Canada, and we can supply more food. The world population will grow to 8.3 billion by 2030, maybe 9.7 billion by 2050. Canada will grow to maybe 55 million. The world will grow much more than Canada, so we can feed more of the world, rather than internally. That doesn't mean we can't do more locally, or shift from imports—substitution, for instance—to grow those regional economies. There's more trade in Canada than outside Canada in some instances. It's fascinating.

You go along the supply chain, and you get processing as a leading sector, more than automobile in Ontario, for instance. You have retailing, food services, and the consumer. You have this whole supply chain view, which this national food policy must look at. The mandate is an initial mandate; that's how we see it. It was a few words put together right after the election, so we need to add to that, and we need to grow that mandate beyond the wording that's in there now. For instance, it doesn't say "fishers". It says, "ranchers and farmers". It's forgetting the sea. That's part of a national food policy too. Canadians tend not to eat very much fish. It's been stable for 30 years. Recommendations in the guidelines are two portions per week. Right now, we're at one portion per 10 days.

It's the same thing with fruits and vegetables. We recommend eight per day. We don't even measure that at Statistics Canada; we measure five a day. The consumption is that about 30% to 40%, to 50% in some cases—women more than men—match the five a day, which is great, but we need to do more.

On industry, you have issues relevant to legislation. For instance, on the fisheries side, there's no aquaculture act. We can do more there. On the Food and Drugs Act, we can get rid of drugs but stick to food. On regulations, we tend to add regulations instead of cleaning the system up. There are ways we can improve our regulatory system and standards.

On food safety, we do really well. I led a report with Sylvain Charlebois which compared 17 OECD countries. We came out on top. We're number one in the world. That doesn't mean there isn't more we can do. We have four million food-borne illness cases in the country and 240 deaths per year. What else can we say? On food safety, we're behind on traceability compared to the Europeans, for instance. We don't rest on our laurels; we move ahead. There is always more we can do.

We've talked about industry and we've talked about prosperity, so competitiveness. Food policy should address the issues of profitability for farmers along the supply chain, the different businesses, so they remain viable and grow. That's what we want, so they contribute to the economy. In the end, you have issues of demand and supply.

We've spoken a little about the supply side. On the demand side, you have issues about health and well-being. I spoke to you about consumption, but we don't have enough data. The last data we have is from 2004, and before that, it was the 1970s. I would highly recommend we do this every five years. It's something easy we can do, and it doesn't cost that much. Food is a huge determinant of health, and the largest budget item is health care. If we can have a

healthier population, then we can reduce the costs of health care. Regarding health or chronic diseases, two-thirds of the population are overweight or obese, we have diabetes issues, and we have people who are anemic, vitamin D deficient, vitamin A deficient. There are some forms of malnutrition in the country. It's quite rare.

What you see more is on the energy side, what you call food insecurity, which is a bit different from food safety. It's about availability of the food supply, responding to food emergencies. You saw a lot of flooding, even in Gatineau. Where we live, we had flooding this year. Suddenly, we had people who were food insecure who never thought about being food insecure. Food emergencies come that way.

Climate change is a food issue also, very, very long term. That can affect the growth of crops and where we grow food in the country going forward 10, 30, or 40 years. We're talking about potential desertification, if we look at certain areas in the Prairies. We have to prepare for that. A food policy can help support that

● (1555)

On the environmental and sustainability side, there are soil quality issues: soil erosion, organic matter issues. You can look at air quality issues—the greenhouse gas issue is a big one, as well as ammonia and particulate matter—or water quality issues, such as nitrogen and phosphorus certification, and runoffs from agriculture. It could be a food waste issue, a very hot topic.

I don't know if you know, but one of the things I do at the Conference Board is develop a food report card—A, B, C, D—of how Canada performs in the world. Then I compare all the provinces. Next year, I'm looking at comparing the cities, and I'm looking for funding for that.

When we compare Canada and the world on food loss and food waste, we are among the most wasteful societies on the planet. We're last. Food loss is before purchase, and food waste is after purchase. Consumers represent half of all the food waste in Canada. We need to do a lot more on tools and engagement with different jurisdictions to raise literacy, and a national food policy can support that. It turns out a lot of Canadians can't read food labels, because they have very low numeracy skills, let alone everything else. They can't do the math.

We did all these reports, which fed into the national strategy, and we came out with 62 recommendations and goals. All of these can be useful in your thinking as you develop a national food policy.

You might consider a national food council that is permanent. I would try to avoid political risk. The examples that were given, the Australian national food plan and U.K.'s food 2030, are great, but as soon as the government changed, they were shelved. I'm hoping that this policy will remain viable irrespective of government change.

Thank you, sir.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Jean-Charles Le Vallée.

We will now go into our question round.

On the opposition side, we have Mr. Berthold.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Berthold, you have six minutes.

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

First, I would like to thank the witnesses for coming to present to us their various opinions on the food policy. We sensed their great passion for the subject in their presentations.

Mr. Le Vallée, we could sum up the work of the committee by using your document alone. It has 66 recommendations. We could wrap up the study today and we would already have plenty of work.

Before I ask my question, Mr. Chair, allow me to bring up two matters.

As you know, the composition of the committee has changed. On Friday, my colleague Mr. Gourde submitted a motion, of which committee members received a copy. As Mr. Gourde is no longer here, the motion is not valid. So I would like the committee's unanimous consent so that we can study the motion today, given the urgency of the matter and the fact that the Minister of Finance is currently consulting on the tax changes.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the motion reads as follows:

That the Committee immediately undertake a study on the proposed changes to the tax system in order to assess their impacts on small farm businesses, particularly family farms and the inherent risks in the proposals on transfer of ownership; and that the Committee report its findings to the House no later than Friday, December 1, 2017.

I make this recommendation given that there have been changes to the committee. The first version of today's agenda set time aside for the discussion of this motion, but it was withdrawn when the committee members changed. So I am asking my colleagues for permission—

• (1600)

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Berthold, a motion was submitted. But, as you said, it became invalid because of the changes to the composition of the committee. Without unanimous consent, we will have to wait 48 hours before we can deal with the motion.

Is there unanimous consent for Mr. Berthold to move the motion?

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): No, that would be difficult, because Mr. Gourde is the author of the motion and he is no longer here. If Mr. Berthold wants to submit the motion again, he can do so.

The Chair: Mr. Berthold, you can submit the motion again. Then, in 48 hours, we will set time aside at the end of the meeting to discuss it.

Mr. Luc Berthold: So, to be clear, the governing party is refusing to give me unanimous consent to discuss the motion I have just read, which is now my motion, not Mr. Gourde's.

The Chair: The issue is not the content of the motion; the issue is the person making it.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I asked for consent for the motion. As I understand it, we have no consent to discuss it today.

The Chair: That is correct.

Mr. Luc Berthold: So I will introduce it right away so that we can discuss it during next Thursday's meeting.

As has already been said, on our side, we are all new members, so please excuse the many questions.

I had the opportunity to meet Mr. Poissant this summer in my constituency. He is holding his own consultation on a future food policy. I would just like to know what the committee's contribution will be to the study he is conducting. I see that people have a lot to say.

I do not know whether the minister has met with you. I would first like to know whether you have had the opportunity to meet any departmental officials about the food policy. Then I can come back to my question.

Let's start with Mr. Ross.

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Ross: We've had a series of meetings on this subject with the department itself and have raised the issue with the minister in previous meetings. I can say that we have had a series of discussions over the past, at this point looking back, years, as we've been advocating for this to various governments for quite some time.

We have met with the minister to discuss the subject, but also have met with the department a number of times on the matter.

Mr. Dale Adolphe: We have not met recently with the minister or any part of the department about a national food policy. Some of the elements we've talked about have been the subject of various discussions, but not a national food policy per se.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Charles Le Vallée: A whole process is under way in the country, both regionally and nationally. We have been part of it directly and indirectly. Tomorrow, I am going to meet with the deputy minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. We have been involved in this matter for a long time, especially because we were a source of factual data.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I noticed that in your presentation.

Mr. Jean-Charles Le Vallée: Thank you.

Mr. Luc Berthold: So you are saying that a double process of consultation is under way and that you will be called on to participate.

Actually, Mr. Poissant, is the process over?

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (La Prairie, Lib.): No, it will be at the end of September. Then we are going to have to put it together. A first draft should be ready after the holidays.

Mr. Luc Berthold: If the department has already produced a consultation report, how will the committee's report be able to influence the department?

We have heard extremely interesting comments this morning and I want to be sure that they will be considered. Mr. Poissant, how will the input and the testimony that we have heard here be able to influence the people in the department?

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: You will have to ask them.

• (1605)

Mr. Luc Berthold: You were answering, so I gave it a shot.

The Chair: We had planned six meetings, and they should be over on October 5. That leaves us plenty of time to table the report. Then they will be able to see what came out of our meetings.

Mr. Luc Berthold: That's fine. Thank you very much.

The Chair: We are perfectly coordinated: your six minutes just ended right now. Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

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

[*English*]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Thanks to all the witnesses for participating in this.

I have had a town hall meeting in Guelph discussing this with about 80 people from Guelph, ranging from farmers to scientists to civil society. We also had one of the national consultations at the University of Guelph. That included indigenous people.

I want to address the first question to Mr. Le Vallée.

An item came up in our discussion at our community town hall around food waste. One of the people there said that France, as an example, has a policy under which restaurants are not allowed to throw out food, that they have a policy whereby they have to find a home for food, not the garbage can.

Has the Conference Board done any study, maybe through Mr. Charlebois, who came from the University of Guelph and now is the dean at Dalhousie? Have you done any work about food waste policy in other countries that could be submitted to this committee?

Mr. Jean-Charles Le Vallée: We've done a study for the National Zero Waste Council based in Vancouver to make the business case for incentives to have business supply edible food to charities, so as to reduce the waste at the retail site. That's the research I have that I can share. I will definitely share it when I share the Canadian food strategy.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: If you could put that in through the clerk so that we can all have access, that would be wonderful.

Mr. Jean-Charles Le Vallée: Absolutely. It will be my pleasure.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you.

You also mentioned inputs and jobs. The University of Guelph has just finished an update to a previous report in which the Ontario Agricultural College now says there are four jobs for every graduate. Five years ago there were three jobs for every graduate. We're going in the wrong direction, clearly, in terms of meeting the needs of the market.

Do you see a role that the Conference Board could play in connecting youth to opportunities through education? Is the Conference Board thinking of any programs to engage youth in agriculture?

Mr. Jean-Charles Le Vallée: We're happy to supply research services. We're not an organization that does advocacy or training. We offer training to train the trainers, but we don't work directly to create such programs. We have educational tools, however, and a whole centre behind—a peer group of mine—that works on this issue on a full-time basis.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: It's interesting that you're tying this into food policy, because it could be labour policy. It could be economic policy.

Mr. Jean-Charles Le Vallée: Food is horizontal. That's the first thing I said.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Exactly, and we all need it, and the youth all need jobs, so somehow there's an opportunity.

I mentioned the University of Guelph. Maybe there are other universities or other schools that have said their graduates can't find jobs. Are you aware of any such statements that will help us with our study?

Mr. Jean-Charles Le Vallée: We have a centre that looks at post-graduate education, coming with a national strategy around education. I'm happy to put you in touch—

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: If you could put it in a little paragraph for us, that would be terrific. Thank you.

I'll go over to CFA and Mr. Ross.

In looking at what can connect us, what we agree on, you made a couple of controversial comments at the beginning concerning what could be dividing us in tax policy, which is under review right now. We're hoping to see a substantial report coming to the House of Commons to discuss. We know that farmers are a key part of our tax regime, so we need to protect them as a small business. Beyond that, concerning where the key areas of agreement are, has the CFA identified some areas of strength that we really need to focus on and preserve in our policy?

Mr. Scott Ross: We held a series of discussions throughout the year bringing together fairly diverse stakeholder groups to start exploring where there is and where there might not be consensus.

I have to say, building on the question—you referred to the Conference Board and Jean-Charles—food waste is an issue that we see as a very common concern across all the different stakeholder groups that have been involved in the discussions. Food literacy is another area, which we see as very closely related and which has many knock-on effects.

A regular refrain, which we've heard from a number of groups and which I think our membership would support very much, is building on the strengths that Canada already has: looking at data, at our strength in our food safety system, as Mr. Le Vallée referenced; also, looking at the agrifood growth targets that have been set and mobilizing around existing areas in which we see significant strength in the Canadian agrifood industry.

•(1610)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you. I hope that in subsequent meetings we can also discuss affordable food, but I'm running short on time, so I'll have to leave that for another witness, possibly.

I want to touch base with Soy Canada.

Guelph is a centre for soy as well. It's great to see it expanding into western Canada. Western Canada is more canola than soy, but there may be some similar properties.

There was a recent report around policy on hydrogenated oils. Have you developed a policy position on soy versus hydrogenated oils and on the banning of the use of hydrogenated oils?

Mr. Dale Adolphe: We don't have a policy per se, but I think you're referring to trans fats, and oils in their liquid form don't contain trans; it's the process of hydrogenation that creates the trans. I think there's still some debate within science as to the relationship between trans and saturates and which are worse, but I think trans may be losing the argument.

Fats are made up of fatty acids, and the fatty acid composition is what basically determines what they're best used for. Something such as canola, which is low in saturates, is a natural liquid oil. Soybean oil has about twice the level of saturated fat. It needs less hydrogenation than a canola would.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Adolphe, and thank you, Mr. Longfield.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Trudel, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for their presentations.

In my constituency of Jonquière, agriculture is really important. We have a lot of farms there. There are a number of vegetable farms, which I was also able to visit this year, and farms that specialize in organics, either dairy or produce.

Could you tell me how the next food policy could promote local products, including those produced on a small scale? These are not producers whose products are distributed very widely. There has been a lot of talk of exports, but, in the policy, how can we promote local purchasing and make sure that local producers are not left out?

Mr. Jean-Charles Le Vallée: Today, local products make up a good part of the retail market. Short channels, public markets: it's all great. Some provinces are further ahead than others and have a better supply of local products in retail outlets. Actually, most local products are sold in retail outlets, not by direct transactions between producers and consumers. You can buy products directly from producers, but Canadians are net consumers, meaning that they buy their products in retail outlets. Local products represent from 5% to 20% of the market, depending on the season.

To start with, there is a definition problem. Are we going to say that they are Quebec products, Jonquière products, or Chicoutimi products? How do we define local products? Are we talking about a radius of 100 km? Can we consider strawberries from the Île d'Orléans as local for consumers here in the Outaouais? Personally, I prefer to buy local strawberries. Local for me means that they come from the Outaouais. Does that include Ripon?

No system is in place to promote local products because the term is not clearly defined. For the promotion to happen, there has to be some agreement on it.

People are interested, but it is not their priority. We surveyed consumers and their priorities are about quality and freshness. Price is in fourth place. Nutrition and health are very important as well. Products having to be local is in sixth, seventh or eighth place. It is not the priority.

However, during the season, people prefer community-supported agriculture. People go to buy containers once a week. That's more popular than buying products directly from the farm. We are seeing growth there too.

We did a study on that and I will send it to you as well.

•(1615)

[English]

Mr. Dale Adolphe: This is not so much a comment from Soy Canada as it is from just kind of grassroots agriculture. I think it might be difficult to have a buy local policy. I buy locally, but it might be difficult to have a buy local policy in national policies, because of regional differences, even regional within a province, but I'm talking regional within Canada. Western Canada produces very few whole foods in terms of the total bulk of agriculture. Wheat, canola, and soybeans are ingredients. You don't buy them locally unless you're going to a bakery or something like that.

In southwestern Ontario with some of the greenhouses and with some of the farms in Quebec, you can buy fruits and vegetables locally, and I can buy them down in the ByWard Market, but because of those regional differences, I think it would be difficult to do a lot of justice to buying locally within a national food policy. That's just my opinion, not that of Soy Canada. There are huge regional differences.

Mr. Scott Ross: I would echo those comments, I think, around concerns we have with one common definition across Canada of what local is. Where I do think a national food policy has a role to play in this, though, is to focus on looking at what growth opportunities exist in agriculture, generally speaking, both in terms of exports abroad and also looking at the domestic market.

Issues like food literacy and building understanding and awareness of Canadian food and what is produced here, I think, are really critical roles a food policy can play that can help build some of the domestic markets we're talking about. We certainly think buying locally is one of those, amongst a number of other opportunities that exist in the Canadian marketplace.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Karine Trudel: I have a more specific question for Mr. Le Vallée.

Did you look at the issue of labelling in your many studies? My colleague Mr. Dusseault introduced a bill on mandatory labelling for GMOs, but the government rejected it. Of course, it is not a matter of banning GMOs, but of making sure that consumers know where their food is coming from and whether it contains GMOs or not.

Did you study that? What is your opinion about labelling and nutritional values? Would it be appropriate to have a measure like that in a food policy?

The Chair: Unfortunately, your time is up.

Mr. Drouin now has the floor. If he wants, he can pick up on your question, Ms. Trudel.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Thanks to the panel for being here.

Mr. Ross, you mentioned the tax reform. I just want to assure you that the Minister of Finance has assured me that the last thing he wants to do is put a barrier to farm transitions. He's heard you loud

and clear. We are in a consultation period. I'm sure CFA will be commenting up to October 2 and has already provided some comments, but thanks for raising that. It is an important issue. The last thing we want to do is create an extra barrier for farm transition.

[Translation]

Mr. Le Vallée, you said that the policy should include nutritional security. If highway 401 or highway 40 were closed for 48 hours, we would soon have a food supply problem in our markets. That makes me realize how fragile our system is.

Should that be included in the food policy?

Mr. Jean-Charles Le Vallée: Absolutely.

Mr. Francis Drouin: How should we address the issue?

Mr. Jean-Charles Le Vallée: We should approach it in terms of what I call resilience. On the economic, social and environmental fronts, this would provide the food system and the players in the food chain with mechanisms that would be triggered in the event of an emergency.

As you said, we are talking about a few days. The same is true for the city of Ottawa; we are talking about four or five days. If food were no longer delivered to the cities, we would have to make do with the food we had at home. But most people would not have enough.

This year, I prepared a status report about food. I looked at whether people were ready for this possibility. More than half of Canadians would have food for only one day in the event of an emergency.

Food security is important in the short term and in critical moments. You talked about nutritional security, but the term "food security" is more exact. Food security is the availability of food, the physical, economic and cultural access to food, and its use. Resilience supports those three pillars, if I can put it that way. Those tools are there in the long term as well.

Of course the army and the Red Cross could be a solution, but in the case of a city of several million people, only certain areas would be served. The entire population must be able to build community food security, which would also be supported by a national policy.

•(1620)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you very much, Mr. Le Vallée.

[English]

Scott, it's great to see you again. I have a quick question.

I've been reading your national food strategy, and you've talked about some of the environment perspective. In it, you're talking about international agreements with trading partners having been signed on environmental standards for food production, processing, and inspections. I know that's one of the goals we are trying to achieve through NAFTA, and I know it's created some barriers for farmers on our side in terms of exports, because our environmental standards are not the same. When we talk about food policy, how important is it to align our markets wherever Canada chooses to go?

Mr. Scott Ross: Regulatory harmonization is always a key focal point of the industry, and a national food policy, by virtue of the scope and breadth that it must take, really needs to focus on that issue. It's a critical issue for us in terms of the NAFTA discussions, but more broadly around creating further opportunities for trade for this sector moving forward. When we look at opportunities for growth in this sector, regulatory harmonization is going to be critical to taking advantage of a lot of those. We continue to see a series of non-tariff trade barriers arising on a whole myriad of different technical issues. This leads to a lot of missed opportunities and lost sales for Canadian producers.

Ultimately what we need to see is a focus on working with industry and giving industry a very clear leadership role in this process to help identify and address a lot of the issues that are arising. Regulatory harmonization isn't just one issue; it's a never-ending series of technical matters that can arise. Certainly it's a critical piece of this puzzle from our perspective.

Mr. Francis Drouin: One of the issues Canadians have expressed is making sure that food is affordable. Part of that affordability has to be the transportation system, ensuring we get foods to markets quicker and somehow in a cheap fashion. Has an analysis been done by your organization to find out what the status is in Canada in terms of the transportation system for farmers?

Mr. Scott Ross: I wouldn't say we've done a cross-cutting study on every aspect of it. Certainly we've seen issues over the past few years with some of the railway performance, and there has been a lot of work done on that front. I can certainly share any of the work we've done on that front, if there's an interest.

I would say on the issue of food affordability that your question speaks very much to our perspective, in that Canada is one of the most affordable countries in the world in which to procure food. When we look at the stats, we find ourselves third in the world in cost per capita and the ratio of your disposable income that goes to food. Canada's producers are doing a lot of great work in terms of efficiently producing food on an affordable basis.

There are issues with transportation, particularly when you look at northern communities, and there's a lot of work to be done. I can't say we've done a comprehensive study of all the different aspects of trade and transportation barriers within Canada, but we certainly see it as a key element of a food policy, recognizing that primary producers in Canada and our food production value chain are doing a great job already of providing affordable food. Certainly transportation is an area in which more attention is needed, in some respects.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ross.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

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

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

I would like to welcome all our colleagues joining us as new members to the committee. I am pleased to be working with you on this study of a food policy.

My question is for each of you.

I'm really interested in the whole issue of education about the food policy. In terms of the environment, just think how much time and energy have been invested over the past 20 years to ensure that consumers and the entire population recycle. Today, we feel guilty if we throw a small plastic jar in the garbage instead of the recycling bin. The fact remains that it has taken that many years. My fondest hope is that the educational aspect plays a significant role in the new food policy. I would like to hear your comments on that.

Clearly, when consumers choose a product, they need to know what they are buying, what the nutritional value of the product is, and so on. You must have an opinion on the matter.

Let me start with you, Mr. Le Vallée.

● (1625)

Mr. Jean-Charles Le Vallée: In some vulnerable groups, so-called food literacy is low. That's partly because they do not acquire that knowledge at home or at school, where programs no longer include home economics courses. They rely primarily on the agri-food industry, advertisements, chefs and, to a lesser extent, Canada's Food Guide. In fact, as a university professor, I can tell you that only about one-tenth of my students have read Canada's Food Guide. And we are talking about university students. So an effort needs to be made to get food back into school curricula. In the labour market, this is also an area that may attract people, encouraging them to increase their knowledge. The sector provides a lot of opportunities.

I also want to talk about costs. There are vulnerable groups, such as single mothers and fathers, who are most at risk among Canadian families. There are also more disadvantaged people. Inuit in the north are the most affected in Canada. They are a small group with only about 45,000 or 60,000 people. Those communities have traditionally obtained their food from hunting and fishing, and they are not used to our diet. They learn about it, but young people leave their communities. It is sort of like farming where young people leave the family farm. So we have to find a way to retain people, to educate them and to give them the opportunity to discover this sector.

Mr. Pierre Breton: Thank you very much.

Mr. Masciotra, Mr. Adolphe, would you like to comment on that?

[English]

Mr. Dale Adolphe: I certainly agree that education has to be a big component, and in three aspects. We heard today that consumers are the most wasteful: 40%, or something like that, of the food waste is from the consumer. Food poisoning happens in the home more than it happens any place else. That's consumer education. The last part is a basic lack of understanding of modern-day agriculture.

I'll use myself as an example. My parents farmed in southeastern Saskatchewan. I grew up and worked on that farm. My kids visited grandpa and grandma on that farm, and their kids might never be on a farm. In four generations you have a total disconnect with primary agriculture.

That disconnect can result in regulating urban myths, and that is not where we want to go. We want to remain science-based. To remain science-based, it has to channel or parallel that education activity.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Breton: Thank you.

Mr. Ross, would you like to add anything?

[English]

Mr. Scott Ross: I would very much echo many of the comments I've already heard. I think education has to be a big focal point of a national food policy. Speaking to the issues that Mr. Adolphe just raised as well as those by Jean-Charles earlier, one area in which we see a significant opportunity is education, in addition to the issues around food waste and food literacy, and all the benefits it could afford in terms of nutrition and food safety.

More than anything, however, I think there really is an opportunity to raise awareness around the agricultural sector. This has a number of benefits, one of which is closing the gap that was just referred to between many Canadians and their experience with hands-on elements of agricultural production and the entire food value chain. Furthermore, I think the issues around agricultural labour remain major concerns for our members.

One of the benefits of increasing awareness of the sector is in pointing to the many opportunities that exist for careers in this sector. Career promotion and skills development is a huge piece and an area in which a national food policy can play a critical role by identifying the opportunities that exist in the sector, making Canadians more aware of what actually takes place in food production and looking to ways in which we can match the labour demands that exist in this sector with supply from within Canada to meet those needs. That is certainly another critical element to education and a national food policy.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ross.

On that note, unfortunately this is all the time we have for this first hour.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Ross, Mr. Adolphe, Mr. Masciotra and Mr. Le Vallée. This meeting was very interesting.

We'll take two minutes to change, and then we're back for the second hour.

• (1630)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1635)

[English]

The Chair: Welcome to the second hour of our study on food policy in Canada.

With us in the second hour we have the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, with—not a stranger—Mr. Dan Darling, and also Mr. Brady Stadnicki.

Welcome to both of you.

As well, from the Canadian Organic Growers we have Ashley St Hilaire, director of programs and government relations, and also Mr. Jim Robbins, president, Organic Federation of Canada.

Welcome to both of you.

We will start with a seven-minute opening statement. I'll leave it to you, Mr. Darling.

Mr. Dan Darling (President, Canadian Cattlemen's Association): Thank you very much for the invitation to speak to you today. As stated, my name is Dan Darling, and my family and I farm and raise cattle near Castleton, Ontario. I am currently president of the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, and on behalf of Canada's 60,000 beef cattle producers, we are pleased to share our views on Canada's food policy. With me today is Brady Stadnicki, CCA staff here in Ottawa.

Earlier this year, the Government of Canada outlined its objectives for Canada's food policy, stating that it will set a long-term vision for health, environmental, social, and economic goals related to food, while defining actions that can be taken in the short term. CCA has been actively engaging in the food policy consultations and will continue to collaborate in this policy-making process.

Before getting into the proposed themes the food policy will focus on, I'd like to make a few overarching recommendations regarding the policy's development.

First, the governance structure or council that provides guidance to FPT governments developing the policy must have strong representation from agricultural producers. CCA believes it is important for this process to be collaborative and inclusive of civil society, but farmers and ranchers are the foundation of Canada's food system and it is critical that we play a meaningful role in developing this policy.

If designed and implemented properly, Canada's food policy has an opportunity to bridge the gap between the Canadian public and modern Canadian agriculture. As an industry, we understand that building public trust is very important, and that we need to reconnect with consumers and the public. This initiative has the potential to bring the public and farmers and ranchers together to find shared values in Canada's food and agricultural systems.

It is also imperative that Canada's food policy be science-based and utilize the best available data and research. Clear goals, priorities, and baselines need to be established to build the food policy into a road map that is truly useful to guide actions. It has to be flexible and updated regularly to account for changing market and environmental conditions, and should leverage and complement current federal initiatives rather than duplicate them.

The proposed themes of the food policy are increasing access to affordable food; improving health and food safety; conserving soil, water, and air; and growing more high-quality food. While we can definitely support all of these principles, it is important to provide context. For example, we all want access to affordable food. However, the food policy must recognize that innovation and technology help our industry and other commodities to remain efficient in using resources as best as we can while keeping costs of production down. This in turn allows food to be affordable to the consumer.

It is important that Canada's food policy recognize productivity-enhancing technologies like growth implants, feed additives, and even bio crops. This will help us towards the goal of keeping food affordable, as well as meeting other goals like soil conservation. Recognizing that raising cattle and supplying beef to consumers can play an important role in achieving the goals outlined will be essential in a food policy that we can support.

We already know beef is a nutrient rich and healthy food that can improve people's health when eaten with a variety of complementary vegetables, whole grains, and dairy.

Canada already has one of the best food safety systems and records in the world, but we know that the continued efforts to improve health and food safety are critical for public confidence, maintaining the Canadian beef advantage, and enhancing the health of all consumers. The Canadian beef industry has placed a strong emphasis on health and food safety in its research priorities and through the development of on-farm food safety programming for cattle producers. This focuses on training producers and verifying on-farm practices through an audit.

We know cattle can be used very well to conserve soil, improve grassland health, and ensure the preservation of important rangelands. Keeping grasslands that are utilized by cattle intact also provides public goods such as carbon sequestration, wildlife habitat, increased biodiversity, and improved water quality.

• (1640)

In regard to growing more high-quality food, the Canadian beef industry and all of Canadian agriculture is a strategic growth asset and is well positioned to play a vital role in feeding the world with its safe, high-quality products.

It will be imperative that Canada's food policy places a strong emphasis on creating the most competitive business environment possible in order to grow more high-quality food and meaningfully increase agriculture's contribution to the Canadian economy. This also includes an emphasis on market access, research, labour, and a competitive regulatory system.

In closing, I would like to say that Canada is already in a position of strength to achieve the food policy's themes and objectives. Canadian agriculture has made great strides over the past half century in terms of conserving soil, air, water, and biodiversity. Thanks to productivity improvements and research, Canadian beef's GHG footprint is one of the smallest in the world.

Consumers in Canada also have access to some of the most affordable, high-quality, and safe food in comparison to the majority of other countries in the world. Given our abundance of fresh water, feed grains, and grazing lands, along with committed and innovative producers, Canada is well positioned to grow more high-quality food to feed both local and international consumers.

There is always room for continuous improvement. That is something our industry is committed to, but it must be recognized that we are starting from a strong position.

Thank you for this opportunity, and we look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Darling.

Now, with the Canadian Organic Growers, we have Madam St Hilaire.

Ms. Ashley St Hilaire (Director, Programs and Government Relations, Canadian Organic Growers): Hello. Thank you to the members of the committee for having us here today.

My name is Ashley St Hilaire, and I'm the director of programs and government relations with Canadian Organic Growers. I am joined here today by my colleague, Jim Robbins, on behalf of the Organic Federation of Canada.

Canadian Organic Growers is a national charity and organic farming membership organization. We are very pleased to be here today to talk about the importance of this government's initiative to develop a national food policy for Canada. We'd also like to announce and remind the committee that it is Canada's National Organic Week, which is an annual countrywide celebration of organic food, fibre, and farming. We're in our seventh year.

It's a very fitting time of year to discuss a national food policy for Canada. As Canadian crops are in their final weeks of harvest and abundance appears all around us, we are reminded by our work today that too many Canadians live with food insecurity. At the national food policy summit, we were shocked to learn that food bank usage continues to rise across the country despite Canada being ranked eighth in the world for food affordability. We support the work of this government and of Food Secure Canada to lead the development of a national food policy that will address these issues head-on. Every Canadian deserves the right to access culturally appropriate and nutritious food so they may live with dignity.

We feel the priority areas within this policy are appropriate and should be equally weighted. Organic food and farming span all of these priority areas and enhance food security in Canada, because the core principle of organic agriculture is healthy soil.

Through organic management practices organic producers are enhancing the health of our agricultural soils all across the country, ensuring that these lands can produce food for future generations of Canadians. Healthy soils enhance yields and the quality of what is produced. When we don't look after our soils, we turn to inputs, which increase the cost of production for farmers and cut into their profitability, making it harder and harder to make a living growing food for Canadians and the world. Farm profitability and food security in Canada are inherently linked.

We also urge policy-makers to recognize that a balance must be struck between the productivity of our crops and environmental degradation. Achieving ambitious agricultural export goals of \$75 billion by 2025 should not come at a cost to the environmental health of our agricultural lands, as this would only further exacerbate food insecurity in Canada.

Organics is an industry that has always championed this balance and continues to be an agricultural leader in sustainability. Consumers from all walks of life support our industry every day when they purchase organic products at the grocery store and at farmers' markets. Their desire to access sustainably and locally produced organic food should be backed by this policy and by a commitment from the government to permanently fund the Canadian organic standards.

I'd like to turn it over to Jim to speak to that point.

• (1645)

Mr. Jim Robbins (President, Organic Federation of Canada, Canadian Organic Growers): Thank you, Ashley.

I'm an organic farmer from Saskatchewan. Together with my family, I raise cattle and grow cereals, pulses, and forages—all organic—on 2,500 acres in Saskatchewan. We farmed conventionally for 21 years, and we are now almost finished our 19th organic harvest.

I'm proud to be representing today the Organic Federation of Canada, which oversees the maintenance of our national Canadian organic standards. The organic standards connect agriculture with the environment. It defines good agricultural practices that target productivity, profitability, and preservation of our environment.

Decades ago, producers from across the country came together because they wanted to change the way they farmed. They wanted to reduce their environmental footprint and become more sustainable. The Canadian organic standards provide a framework for their agricultural practices and allow them to define what they do as organic agriculture. The standards are not only a measure to ensure public trust in organic, but are also an industry benchmark for achieving and standardizing environmental sustainability on a farm. The standards are a public good, and all Canadians benefit from the practices organic farmers use on their land.

Our Canadian organic standards were established in law by the Government of Canada in 2009, and are referenced by Canadian federal regulations. However, the Canadian organic sector has been operating under the constant risk of losing the backbone of our industry, which is our standard, our assurance system, our standards, our brand, and our public trust. This is because, unlike our competitors, such as the U.S. and the European Union, whose governments fully and permanently fund the maintenance of their organic standards, the Government of Canada has yet to do the same for its own organic industry.

The Canadian organic standards, owned by the Canadian General Standards Board, require our industry to review and update organic standards on a five-year cycle. The price tag of this work is about \$1 million, the majority of which goes to paying fees to the Canadian General Standards Board for overseeing the review and publishing of the revised standards. It also includes the cost of paying for national consultations to ensure that the standards reflect the needs of organic stakeholders.

Reviewing the standards is absolutely critical for maintaining not only the Canadian organic brand, but also all of our government-negotiated international organic trade arrangements, which we have with 90% of our major trading partners: the EU, Japan, and the United States.

The Canadian organic brand and the Canadian organic standards are all owned and backed by the government, so when the Government of Canada prepares budget 2018, with a national food policy and its 2025 agricultural export goal in mind, we strongly urge you to eliminate this competitive disadvantage that we suffer in Canada: get rid of the risk to our industry and include permanent funding for the Canadian organic standards. They will need to be fully revised and updated by the year 2020, and that work needs to begin in 2018.

To conclude, we remind the committee that organic agriculture is an example of a successful, clean-growth industry that offers a model for promoting climate-friendly food production. As the Government of Canada develops this national food policy, we hope it builds a policy that both incentivizes and rewards sustainable agricultural production, which we know contributes to food security in Canada. We also urge it to look for opportunities to eliminate competitive disadvantages for our organic producers. Permanently funding the Canadian organic standards would be the way to start.

Thank you for providing us the opportunity to speak on this topic today.

● (1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Robbins and Madam St Hilaire.

We will start our question round with Mr. John Barlow for six minutes.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Thank you to our witnesses for being here this afternoon for this important discussion.

I want to pick up on a couple of themes from our first questions, and I know some of you were here but I think it's prudent for these witnesses.

I appreciate the sentiments of my colleagues on the other side, Mr. Drouin and Mr. Longfield, in talking about how important our family farms are to our economy and how they've heard from farmers about their concerns on these potential tax changes, but I find their comments to be a little disingenuous, because we've heard over the last couple of weeks that there's been no movement from our current Liberal government in terms of extending that consultation. I think if you were really genuine about wanting to ensure that these are not going to impact our Canadian farmers, then you would extend that consultation period. I think to end that consultation period right in the middle of harvest shows just how much of a priority the feedback and input from our Canadian farmers truly is.

I again ask the Liberal government to consider extending that consultation period, and if it was a priority you would have agreed to our motion today, which would have asked us to study the financial implications of these tax changes on agriculture. You did not want to do that, so I think your concern about protecting our small farms is maybe a little misled.

One of the things we've talked about in this study is about ensuring that we have affordable food, but everything our colleagues across are talking about, in my mind, would do the opposite. I took note of a few things today. On transportation, they're not extending the Fair Rail for Grain Farmers Act. There's the carbon tax, and eliminating the deferral on cash grain tickets. Those types of things, in my mind, would make agriculture more expensive and our access to food less affordable.

I'd like your opinion on what you see as some of the implications of the tax changes that the current government is making and the impact it is going to have on our access and our ability to access affordable food.

Mr. Dan Darling: First, I'd like to say from the Canadian Cattlemen's point of view, we'd like a little more time on the proposed tax changes for some studies that we're having done to be

finished so that we know whether or not there are going to be some huge changes for our producers. I think one misconception as far as family farms go is that if it's a limited company, it's no longer a small family farm, and that couldn't be any further from the truth.

My operation is a limited company as well, which consists of my brother, me, my three daughters, and my wife. You can't get too much smaller than that, but we are a limited company. We would like the time period extended so we could get some studies done just so we know where we stand on it.

As far as some other changes that you mentioned are concerned, for example, I'll use the transportation regulation changes, and some of the changes in the length of time that cattle can be on a truck are not science-based. I guess it's trying to align us with a European model that we can't be aligned with because of the different sizes in the country, and it will make a huge cost for producers in layovers on cattle. You were discussing earlier about getting food to people in a timely manner. This does everything against that.

That's right off the top of my head.

Ashley.

● (1655)

Ms. Ashley St Hilaire: Perhaps I could jump in here before I run out of time. On the topic of carbon pricing that you brought up, carbon pricing is a tool to motivate producers to reduce their greenhouse gas footprint. One of the most energy-intensive inputs in agriculture is nitrogen-based fertilizers. They contribute 70% of Canada's nitrous oxide emissions, which is the worst of all greenhouse gases.

Being a very energy-intensive input to produce, the implications are that carbon pricing should increase the cost of these nitrogen fertilizers, which makes it more difficult for farmers and their profitability and increases their cost of production. However, there needs to be sufficient time for industries to adjust to these pricing changes. We know in organic agriculture we don't use these nitrogen-based fertilizers. We use green manures. We use crop rotations. We use a number of organic management practices to build fertility in our soils, so we have practices and techniques that are available for these farmers that they can adopt. However, you need time and support for farmers to adjust to these changes, so that comes down to research and extension.

On the topic of extending consultations, I think we always need more time to review and do the research that's necessary so that industry's voice is accurately reflected in the policies that are developed.

I'll just leave it at that.

Mr. John Barlow: I appreciate your comments on carbon pricing, but that doesn't impact cattle liners and fuel and those types of things that are still going to increase the costs of the operation.

I have a last question for both of you.

One of the concerns I see in this study and the initial first draft of Canada's food guide—I think this is going to form the basis for that—is that it clearly picks winners and losers and is pitting sectors against one another in terms of encouraging Canadians not to eat red meat and, in dairy, taking it away from being its own section. To me, it's trying to tell Canadians what they should and shouldn't be eating, which are all healthy choices, and is pitting one agricultural sector against another. I'd like your input on that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barlow. I'm sorry.

Mr. John Barlow: That's okay, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Peschisolido, for six minutes.

Mr. Joe Peschisolido (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): I'd like to thank all the witnesses for coming here to discuss our national food policy.

I try to eat organic. I think it's healthier, and I think it's healthy for the environment, but it costs a lot. I'm blessed that I have a certain income and assets whereby I can actually eat organic. I don't think your average family could do that. Can you talk a bit about the help you would need in order to actually have...? Organic is sustainable when it comes to the environment. How can we, as a government and as a society, help you make organic sustainable by having it affordable for all Canadians?

Mr. Jim Robbins: Organic is usually more expensive at the store, but not always. That price difference varies. Primarily, it's more expensive because it's scarcer. It's as simple as that.

I'm an organic farmer. I'm anxious to have the industry grow. Being anxious to have the industry grow means that I want more organic farmers in the marketplace. If there are more organic farmers in the marketplace, those prices will moderate. It's simply a supply and demand situation.

What do we need to expand the industry and to have that marketplace lower costs to consumers over time? We don't get our fair share of research. We don't get our fair share of extension. We've made the centre of our brief today the Canadian organic standard. It's a standard that is owned by the Government of Canada, but the Government of Canada does not pay for its maintenance. All of our competitors, the important ones—the EU and the United States—do pay for the maintenance of that standard. That standard is absolutely key. It defines those sustainable practices, and is an absolutely necessary part of the industry.

• (1700)

Ms. Ashley St Hilaire: I'd like to add that recent consumer polls conducted by Ipsos and carried out by our partners at the Canada Organic Trade Association have shown that there aren't any visible trends in the types of consumers who purchase organics. They looked at income and at ethnicity, and what we're seeing is that Canadians from all walks of life truly do purchase organics.

That said, we recognize that marginalized Canadians who are already having a hard enough time affording anything at the grocery store would be precluded from purchasing organics. As Jim mentioned, it has a lot to do with scarcity.

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: Dan and Jim, both of you may know Bill Zylmans. He's a cattle farmer in my neck of the woods. He has a

small operation in Richmond and a larger operation in Delta, in the valley.

I'm intrigued because I'm assuming, Dan, that most of your folks do not do organic cattle farming, and Jim, you mentioned that you have an organic operation. Bill is trying to get away from the traditional farming industry for cattle, which is kind of unique in B. C., because we operate with Alberta. We have our baby cows until about six or seven months, and then they're shipped off to Alberta to feedlots.

I'd like to get your comments. I don't have a specific question, but I'd like your thoughts on how we can have a more organic-driven cattle industry. Also, to tie into your comment on public trust, Dan, you commented about bridging the gap between the public and the industry on cattle. I don't eat much beef, but others do, and I think Canada should have a robust cattle industry. I'd love to have your thoughts on all those points I've made.

Mr. Jim Robbins: I'll start.

Yes, I'm an organic cattle producer. I used to be a cow-calf producer, but now I finish all of our calves to market weight, which is possible to do organically in the prairie region. It's not difficult to do finishing. I was told when I started that it was an art form, but it's an art form that's not difficult to master.

Yes, it's certainly possible. It's an important part of our farming operation. It's doable. I receive a pretty modest premium for my organic beef. When I direct market it, there's about a 20% premium. When I market cattle to a buyer, to a plant that kills, my premium is in the 35% range.

It's a doable thing, and a lot of what I do probably you do too, Dan. You grass your cow herd in the summertime. I do too. I grass my yearlings as well, and I don't finish until after that yearling grass period is done. I imagine we do many of the same things. I doubt very much whether you spray your grasslands either.

Mr. Dan Darling: We do similar things; however, when it comes to grassing yearlings, as Jim mentioned, we tend not to. We think it's more cost effective—and this gets shown right down to the consumer, or should—if we produce those animals as quickly as possible from birth to slaughter, thus lowering not only the cost but our carbon footprint. One of the reasons Canada's carbon footprint keeps dropping is due to the fact that we produce cattle so fast. In Brazil, for example, it's much higher than ours even though they grass everything, but those cattle are around for so much longer.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Peschisolido.

Madam Boucher.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Good afternoon, everyone.

Thank you for being here.

I am new to this committee, as are my two colleagues. I am very pleased to be here today because I have a number of questions for you.

My colleague Mr. Barlow asked a question and I would like to know your opinion.

I too, when I heard about the new—

• (1705)

[English]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I'm sorry to interrupt you, Madam Boucher.

Is it not the NDP's turn?

The Chair: We decided to continue the order this time around. She will have the fourth one.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I'm sorry, Ms. Boucher. I just wanted to make sure.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I'll get back to my question. Thank you.

I see the Liberals do not want to let me talk. I'm quite upset, sir.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: On a more serious note, I would like to say that I was surprised to see that a new food guide is in the process of being completed. As always, we were not informed. I would not want history to repeat itself by creating a divide between urban and rural areas, between productions. In the new guide, dairy products are separated from other products, which is unfortunate. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think the two kinds of agriculture go hand in hand. Some prefer organic products whereas others prefer dairy products. I think the preferences of all Canadians must be respected.

What do you think about that?

[English]

Mr. Dan Darling: Yes. I couldn't agree more. We represent our beef producers, but we're certainly not out to talk down dairy farmers, chicken farmers, or organic farmers, because we all fit into a niche that gives the consumers whatever they want. We have that luxury.

Yes, we are opposed to any kind of guide that will make winners or losers. We're not on for that. Also, like any other time something is brought in, we would certainly have liked to get in our opinion before, rather than afterwards.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Brady Stadnicki (Policy Analyst, Canadian Cattlemen's Association): Could I add something?

Getting back to Canada's food guide, we presented some research from the University of Alberta around the updated guide's focus on eating less red meat. We framed it to have a bit more of a science background, but we were also framing it more positively.

I have here just a sample from the University of Alberta's study. It looked at 557 multi-ethnic youth in Edmonton. Many of them showed deficiencies in vitamin B12, zinc, and selenium, and in vitamin B6, iron, and magnesium, which are all nutrients that are found in red meat and beef. We are just wanting to be able to say that beef, our product, is a great way to have people utilize and gain these

nutrients that some research is saying are short in youth and people who are growing.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I would like to ask another question about the organic products.

There are more and more products on the market called organic, and their prices are much higher than those of non-organic foods. In July, a TV program on organic food was broadcast on Canal Vie. According to that program, we have to be careful about the word "organic", because some foods are described as organic when they are not.

How can we ensure that the products on the shelves are truly organic?

[English]

Ms. Ashley St Hilaire: We have a federal Canadian organic standard, as we were describing in our testimony. It is backed by the government. We have a government-owned brand for organic products in Canada. The seal reads "Canada Organic", and consumers everywhere can look for those labelled products at grocery stores, farmers' markets, and wherever they buy organics.

Now, one of the deficiencies in our regulatory system right now is that many provinces do not have their own provincial organic regulation. What this means is that any products sold only within the province, not crossing any provincial or international borders, are subject to the regulations of that province. Right now, only five provinces in Canada, including B.C., starting this fall, and Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Manitoba, have a provincial regulation. We're working on one very proactively in Ontario right now. However, internationally and across provincial borders, we have a very robust regulatory system that enforces the Canadian organic standards, and the CFIA is part of that enforcement.

Yes, consumers who are buying within the province, at farmers' markets especially, need to ask their farmers if the product is organic and if the farmers have gone through certification, because in our minds "organic" means certification. Right now, every province is working towards a provincial organic regulation.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. St Hilaire.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mrs. Boucher. I gave you a few extra seconds.

Ms. Quach, you have the floor for three minutes.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to all the witnesses for being here. I am very pleased to be here, partly because I am working on a bill that includes a federal strategy to promote the purchase of local food.

As we know, about 10,000 family farms have had to close in the last decade. Despite that, one in eight jobs in Canada is still connected to the agri-food industry.

Buying local creates local jobs, in addition to helping us reduce our carbon footprint and ensure that food is grown in compliance with set health and environmental standards.

Do you think buying local should be part of the government's food strategy? How can buying local be integrated into this strategy?

[English]

Mr. Brady Stadnicki: When it comes to marketing and being local, I definitely think there's some room to work there.

From the cattle industry's perspective, when you're talking to, say, the Ottawa area and the local consumer base, they're going to want the types of products that Canadians enjoy—steaks, roasts, and hamburger—but there are a lot of pieces of the animal that Canadians don't particularly enjoy either. That's why having that balance between having that local market but also having a strong emphasis on export markets and being able to sell each piece, such as cow tongue, for instance, to the buyer willing to pay the most. There definitely needs to be a balance and still a strong export aspect in the food policy.

Mr. Jim Robbins: Well, organic has a very heavy emphasis on local food production. The cattle that I market I do sell to kill plants, but we also direct market our beef. We do that by word of mouth, basically, in our friend group and in family. If you buy a quarter of beef, you have the right to decide how that animal is butchered and which parts of it you want in which particular ways. That's how we market a certain proportion of our beef.

In western Canada, a lot of organic agriculture is export-oriented agriculture, but we have a strong, strong interest in local markets and farmers' markets. Even in the case of my own farm, the farmers' market is a way that I can market a significant part of my production, so we want that component.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Robbins.

We have about 14 minutes left. If it's okay with everyone, we'll give you each one question of four minutes.

Mr. Berthold, you will split your time.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Chair, I had a question, but I would rather give my four minutes to my colleague Mr. Barlow, who would like to ask a few questions as the critic on beef. In fact, Mr. Scheer is so committed to agriculture that he appointed two critics in the House of Commons to deal with the issue.

• (1715)

[English]

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you very much, Mr. Berthold.

Jim, I'm curious. With your ability and your organic beef, would it also benefit you if we addressed some interprovincial trade issues so that you were able to sell your beef outside of Saskatchewan without having to go through a federally inspected kill plant?

Mr. Jim Robbins: Interprovincial trade is of interest to us, and of course, through the Canadian organic standards, I have that right. You're right that at a kill-plant level, there's a potential problem.

At the moment, if I want to direct market to even family in Alberta, I have to do that through a federally inspected plant. I can

do that. That's physically possible. There's a plant close enough to me for that to happen, but that plant also either has to be certified organic or has to have a memorandum of understanding on that. It's not impossible, but I think that provincially regulated plants held to a high standard offer consumers a very good assurance of the product that they are receiving. In my case, the plant that I usually go through for direct marketing of animals is a plant that's provincially regulated. I've never had a problem. There is no difficulty with the product that comes out of that plant. The standards are high, and the province maintains those high standards.

But, yes, it would be nice if there were more flexibility.

Mr. John Barlow: Staying with CFIA, I think you're right that we need to make sure that if you go through a provincial or federal plant, you can market your product outside of Saskatchewan or Alberta.

Mr. Jim Robbins: Obviously, the standards have to be comparable in that case.

Mr. John Barlow: That's exactly right.

We were talking about animal safety as part of this as well.

Dan, you touched on it. We talked about the new transportation guidelines that CFIA is putting through. In my opinion, the more you unload and load cattle, the more opportunity you have to harm the animals. I think that's an issue as well, is it not? It's not just the financing and the time but also the actual transportation issues.

Mr. Dan Darling: Actually, that is exactly one of the biggest issues, and in fact, we've testified here on that. I know the vet association has as well.

When cattle are loaded on a liner, they jostle for position, and they get into position, and they're loaded tight enough to allow them to rest on each other so the movement of the truck doesn't bother them. That's fine. When they're off-loaded—for rest, for feed, for water—the problem is, they have to develop that pecking order all over again. They'll circle the pen, and they'll decide who's boss. In a four- or eight-hour layover, they might not rest for that length of time.

The vet association testified here as to what is adequate feed, what is adequate water, and what is adequate rest. There is no science base to the new transportation regulations that would tell them that. All of it is a cost to our producers and to the consumer at the end of the day. The longer they are there, the greater the cost, and so on.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Poissant, you have four minutes.

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon. Thank you for being here today.

Today, the quality of our witnesses is extraordinary.

That being said, I would like to clarify something about the motion that was introduced earlier. It was not rejected; we just postponed the discussion on whether we should study it or not.

A number of topics were discussed, including education. We also talked about inspection methods, the importance of not working in a vacuum, the labelling of GMOs, the increase in production and quality in light of climate change, among other things.

How can research contribute to the policy we want to implement, but also to climate change?

[English]

Mr. Brady Stadnicki: As was brought up in the earlier testimony, there's been a focus on food waste. Data from the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef shows that downstream, or from the packer on, of 1.24 kilograms of boneless beef, only one kilogram actually gets consumed, so there's a loss there. From that, it's figured out that Canada's beef industry's GHG footprint could be lowered by 5% if food waste were cut in half.

I think looking at some innovative ways at the downstream level could be something that the food policy could tackle.

• (1720)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: What about research on organics?

[English]

Mr. Jim Robbins: Well, the organic sector is not currently well supplied with either research or extension of that research. There is an organic round table. There is an organic science cluster. That's all excellent. But in proportion to the size of our industry, I don't think we get the same resources. Enhancing our sustainability is of keen importance to us. That's why we are organic farmers to begin with. We have a science-based method of agriculture too, and we need science and an extension of that science.

That's the chief way I think we could be helped.

Ms. Ashley St Hilaire: To build on that point, research in organic agriculture benefits all producers. Organics are based on technique, and all farmers use technique and can benefit from each other's technique. It's not proprietary research. This is research that benefits a public good.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: I have another question about organic products.

Earlier, you talked about standards that vary from country to country and that hurt our products here. Are there international standards for organic products?

[English]

Mr. Jim Robbins: There are national standards. In the case of the European Union, there is an international standard that is particular to that jurisdiction. Governments negotiate equivalency agreements. We have an equivalency agreement with the European Union. We have one with the United States. We also have one with Japan.

That's how an international standard is enforced. Negotiators get together and decide on the essential elements of each of the national standards, and they don't allow trade unless those standards are deemed to be equivalent.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Quach, you have the floor for four minutes.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to come back to an issue you have previously addressed: food waste.

My colleague Ruth Ellen Brosseau introduced Bill C-231, Fight Against Food Waste Act, which is probably familiar to you. Unfortunately, the Liberals did not believe in the bill and voted against it. Actually, it was not that they did not believe in it, but instead they wanted to integrate it into the food policy. However, I see nothing in this policy about it.

How can organic food contribute to food security? Many people turn to food banks and may not be able to afford food. How can organic food enhance food security while contributing to good human health?

The impact of sustainable development on lands and soils has been discussed at length. You gave the example of nitrogen fertilizer, which accounts for 70% of the emissions of nitrous oxide, a greenhouse gas. On your end, how can you promote good human health in a sustainable way?

[English]

Ms. Ashley St Hilaire: You covered a lot of topics there, so I'll do what I can to jump in and say something.

Organic agriculture contributes to food security by ensuring that the land the food is grown on can grow food for generations to come. The practices that are used in organic agriculture are about building soil fertility and resilience, especially in the face of climatic extremes. There is research to show that organic systems are more resilient in the face of extreme weather events. There are a number of very unique stories of how organic producers have found ways to make their products more available to the everyday consumer.

Direct marketing is one way to do that. It's one of the ways to bring down the cost and it's also a way to bring together consumers and farmers. There's an amazing book called *The New Farm*, which is about an organic farm just outside of Toronto that has partnered with The Stop, which is a community food centre. It's a model for all food banks across Canada. They have been regularly supplying them with organic produce.

Part of the movement of organic agriculture in Canada is about bringing the consumer closer to the farmer and building relationships. There are a number of models out there. We can send you some more information on some of the examples from the organic industry about the ways to strengthen food security and to make sure that organic products are available to all Canadians.

Again, as we said, it comes to scarcity. If a product is scarce, it will inevitably be more expensive.

•(1725)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: How do you ensure that the information circulates? You said you have an issue with reviewing the standards because the government does not pay for it. You are asking for permanent funding for this, but for how many years? Is it one year, two years?

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Robbins: It takes two years to review the standard. Every five years, the standard has to be revised and updated. That's partly the government's own regulation or demand but it's also in these trade agreements. Those standards have to be reviewed and viewed to be equivalent every five years. It's a process that takes about two years.

I would just like to indicate that it's not a process of two years because the organic industry demands it; it's a process that takes two years because it's a government process, and that's what it takes.

The creation of the Canadian organic standards and the first review of them were funded by the government through programs, but once the last review of the standards was completed, in 2015, the government said it wouldn't be doing that anymore. The industry

relies on these standards and has to have these standards, and it is very expensive for the industry to self-finance them.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Robbins.

I will close using the chair's privilege to make a statement.

As a lot of my colleagues know, I am a producer. I've been a conventional grower for 20-some years. In the last six years, I've been certified organic in my production. I did it because it kind of forced me to adopt better practices and also because there was a demand for it from my customer base. I've been able to keep the prices the same in my place, because they were used to my prices. Everybody said, "Oh, you're going to increase your price", which I didn't.

Just to follow up on your question, have you been told when the next review of the Canadian standards will be?

Mr. Jim Robbins: The next completion of the review is 2020, so it has to be initiated in 2018.

The Chair: Okay. We have made note of that.

Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

See you on Thursday.

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