



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri- Food

AGRI • NUMBER 069 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, September 26, 2017

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Chair

Mr. Pat Finnigan

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

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• (1530)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.)): I want to welcome everyone to this meeting of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are continuing our study on a food policy for Canada.

Today's guests will certainly help us in our study.

We welcome Mr. Shawn Pegg, Director of policy and research at Food Banks Canada.

Welcome, Mr. Pegg.

We also have with us Ms. Diana Bronson, who is the Executive Director of Food Secure Canada, as well as Ms. Amanda Wilson, Policy Analyst and Coordinator of Community Engagement with the same organization.

Welcome, ladies.

We also have with us the Chair of the Union des producteurs agricoles, Mr. Marcel Groleau.

Welcome, Mr. Groleau.

Finally, we welcome Ms. Annie Tessier, who is the Coordinator of the Food Sovereignty Coalition.

You will all have seven minutes to make your presentations. We will then have a question and answer period.

We will begin with Mr. Pegg, from Food Banks Canada.

[English]

You have seven minutes.

Mr. Shawn Pegg (Director, Policy and Research, Food Banks Canada): Thank you very much for inviting me to speak before you today.

I'd like to begin by saying that food banks across the country are very pleased to see the federal government develop a new national food policy for Canada. Food banks have changed with the times. They have changed their approach to food, including the types and diversity of food they're able to provide, and they want to see the federal government changing with the times as well.

We commend the federal government on the inclusive structure of the new national food policy framework, and we also commend the inclusion of household food security as a prime focus of the new policy. In a country where food is relatively inexpensive but where farmers have trouble making ends meet, where farm workers constitute some of our most vulnerable residents, where four million people are food insecure, and where more than 860,000 people access food banks each month, clearly new ideas are needed.

I'd like to address two major points this afternoon. First is the idea of the affordability of food, and second is northern and indigenous food insecurity.

First is affordability. Groceries account for about 10% of southern Canadian spending, 14% if you count restaurant food. This is one of the lowest proportions spent on food in the world. When we see the federal food policy consultation document talk about increasing affordability, we get a little nervous, because it would be difficult to make food any more affordable for the average consumer. If you try to make food cheaper, you're very likely going to be taking money out of the hands of farmers and food workers in Canada and across the globe.

In many ways, food insecurity is not about food at all. The main way to increase access to nutritious and safe food among low-income Canadians, in particular, is to increase incomes, which is a responsibility that clearly falls under the forthcoming poverty reduction strategy.

We were very happy to see that there are close linkages between the development of the national food policy and the poverty reduction strategy. That's very good news.

Food Banks Canada has released a new report about poverty reduction. We released it today. It's called "Nowhere to Turn". This report takes a close look at the 1.3 million working-age single adults who live in poverty and struggle to afford food in Canada, and it puts forward recommendations to bring this group into the economic mainstream. This is one of the things Food Banks Canada looks at in its advocacy and government relations efforts.

Because it can't be stressed enough, I'll repeat that only increasing incomes will improve access to nutritious and safe food on a broad scale. When a single adult on social assistance is living on \$8,000 a year—as hundreds of thousands of people in Canada do—we are very far, indeed, from affordability.

Of course the situation in the north is quite different. The cost of food in the north is more than double what it is in the south, and levels of food insecurity are much higher. One in five people in the territories are food insecure, with much higher figures among indigenous populations. Nunavut has the highest level of indigenous food insecurity of any high-income country in the world.

Conversations about northern food insecurity tend to focus on nutrition north Canada, and we're pleased to see that the federal government is planning changes to this program. We're looking forward to seeing what that looks like. However, nutrition north Canada is a small and limited initiative of about \$120 million, an amount that is really dwarfed by the size of the problem. If we are to truly address food insecurity in the north, we need to look beyond nutrition north Canada.

Increasing incomes is obviously an essential part of this, but only a part. I would encourage the committee to look closely at the ways many northern communities are addressing their problems with food through traditional practices including hunting, trapping, and fishing, as well as the ways the federal government could support these initiatives.

• (1535)

In research that Food Banks Canada has done, we have found that grassroots, community-level programs struggle mightily in the north just to stay afloat from season to season. There is a pressing need for new sources of funding for something that has demonstrable and outsized benefits for communities.

Thanks very much. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Pegg.

[*Translation*]

I now give the floor to Ms. Bronson, from Food Secure Canada.

Ms. Diana Bronson (Executive Director, Food Secure Canada): Thank you. I thank you very much for having invited us to appear before your committee today.

I am representing Food Secure Canada, a national alliance of organizations and individuals who are committed to achieving three goals: zero hunger, healthy and safe food, and a sustainable food system for all Canadians. We see these objectives as being interrelated.

Over the past decade, we have spoken directly with thousands of Canadians in all regions of the country about their vision for food policy. An overwhelming conclusion from our work is that we need a whole-of-government approach to food policy.

We need to work with all partners to build a common vision, common goals and common priorities. We congratulate the Department of Agriculture for having brought together 16 government agencies and departments for the development of a food policy.

Why is this whole-of-government approach so important?

We are a leading global food exporter. However, as Mr. Pegg just pointed out, four million Canadians are food insecure. Chronic-diet related diseases cost an estimated \$26 billion annually in direct and indirect costs. Canada ranks 37th out of 41 countries when it comes to children's access to healthy food. I could continue to quote

statistics but I would prefer to move on to our recommendations. By the end of this week, we will table a complete brief containing many detailed recommendations for the federal government. I think that it is more relevant today to give you a broad overview of the main thrusts.

• (1540)

[*English*]

The first thing we would like to see in the national food policy is a formal recognition of the right to food. It was back in 1976 that Canada signed the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and yet we have still not attained its objectives or implemented the recommendations that the UN special rapporteur on the right to food made when he came to Canada in 2012.

That's number one: let's have a formal recognition of that.

Two, it's not just a question of belief, it's a historical fact that food has been used as a weapon against indigenous peoples throughout Canada's colonial past. You just need to take a look at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report and read the testimonies to find that denial of food, suppression of indigenous cultures, and forced labour were all part of that story.

Food also brings people together and has a great potential to repair that relationship by making sure that indigenous peoples in this country have more sovereignty over the decisions that affect their food security.

Three, we also think that a food policy for Canada needs to prioritize youth and young people. I mentioned the UNICEF report, which placed us 37th out of 41 high-income countries. We still do not have healthy school food for kids in this country, even on reserve, where the federal government has clear jurisdiction. Along with the Coalition for Healthy School Food, we are calling for a cost-shared federal program that would support all children's right to learn well by eating well in school.

Four, we think that Canada needs to support more strongly the next generation of farmers and support more clearly a diversity of farming practices. We have more farmers over the age of 70 than we have under the age of 35, and 92% of them have no succession plan. There are huge challenges for young people or new immigrants who want to enter farming or our fishing industry to access the land, the capital, and the training they need. This should be a fundamental orientation of our new food policy.

Five, we are calling for a new institution, a new national food policy council.

There is a lot to be said about this, and you'll be hearing a lot more about it over the coming months, because a lot of us have been talking with some senior officials in government but also across industry and civil society networks. We're not going to solve everything that needs to be solved in this new national food policy. It's expected to be wrapped up by about next May. There are going to be a host of issues we're not going to have time to deal with, but for various reasons, some of us feel that all stakeholders need to be sitting around the same table, not simply with the Department of Agriculture, but also with Health, and Social Development, Indigenous Affairs, and Fisheries and Oceans. All of these players on the government side need to be around the table, as do industry, civil society, the best academics, and funders.

We've been working with our partners, Maple Leaf Foods, Canadian Federation of Agriculture, Canadian agricultural policy institute, the Arrell Food Institute at the University of Guelph, and a number of others to try to formulate clear recommendations in that regard, and I'd be happy to answer your questions about them.

Six, I know that innovation is a really important theme for this government, and the government has, on our behalf, given considerable resources to innovation in the agrifood industry. We applaud that. Innovation is not only about technology; it's also about social innovation. We believe that just as the \$65 million investment was made in the agrifood industry, we should make an equal investment in the social innovation that goes on in our food system. My membership is composed of people who are transforming food banks, who are experimenting with new agricultural techniques, who are finding new ways to get people the food that they need, and who are doing innovative programs in schools and campuses and hospitals. I think that's the kind of work that needs your support.

Thank you very much.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bronson.

[*Translation*]

I now give the floor to Mr. Groleau or Ms. Tessier, from the Union des producteurs agricoles.

Mr. Marcel Groleau (Chair, Union des producteurs agricoles): Good afternoon.

I am chair of the Union des producteurs agricoles, but I am also co-chair of the Food Sovereignty Coalition.

This coalition has existed in Quebec for nine years, and also has members elsewhere in Canada. Currently the coalition has 62 member-organizations. Several of our members also represent sectors that have just spoken here. Our coalition is very interested in all of the aspects of a future food policy for Canada.

We believe that this food policy for Canada should be prepared in co-operation and jointly with the provincial governments, because agriculture and food are matters of shared jurisdiction. Interprovincial agricultural trade is under federal jurisdiction, but everything that concerns agriculture falls under provincial jurisdiction.

In discussing a national food policy, one question comes to mind immediately. I would like someone to explain to us how Canada, with the provinces, will be able to fulfil its commitments and execute

this food policy in the context of the Canadian federation; this is an important question.

There is also the regulation of markets to be considered. We are a coalition for the exemption of agriculture and food. There are two ways governments can intervene, either through regulation, since they are legislators, or financially. The government can offer support, investment and guidance. Those are the two ways in which a government may intervene.

We think that when it comes to regulation, government must better regulate agricultural markets to see to it, as was mentioned earlier, that prices are fair and equitable for all citizens, regardless of their incomes or location. Access to food as such is not sufficient; it must be affordable for all Canadian citizens.

The right to food has been discussed and I won't belabour that. Rather, I will talk about the multisectoral aspect of that policy.

This does fall under the Department of Agriculture, but it should really become a government policy, that is to say that each department and state organization should take it into account when any decision is made that could have a impact on food and agriculture in Canada.

I am going to use the words "agriculture and food" often, because we consider that they necessarily belong together in our thinking about a food policy.

I will now talk about the producers. Citizens are also consumers. Surveys of citizens reveal that they are very demanding: they want to live in a healthy environment; they want agricultural practices to be as clean as possible; they want water, the water table and rivers to be protected, they want a diverse agriculture, and so on and so forth.

However, when we analyze the behaviours of consumers, we see that they are not always aligned with what citizens are asking for. Prices are often what determine citizens' behaviour. Governments intervene with producers according to the will of the citizens, but sometimes we, as producers, have trouble meeting the consumer's primary objective: paying as little as possible for food.

• (1550)

You must take this dilemma into account. Stringent agricultural practices are imposed in Canada, but we allow imported products from places where these practices or requirements are not respected. This puts Canadian agriculture at a disadvantage with regard to its competitors.

I will now talk about the strategic framework. This is the year the actual agricultural strategic framework comes to an end. In 2018 we will have a new agricultural policy. A federal-provincial agreement was concluded in July. However, the Canadian government has already determined that the amounts allocated to the future agricultural framework will be the same as they are now for the 2013 framework. In addition, with regard to the strategic framework adopted in 2008, there was a \$260-million yearly cut in 2013. People are patting themselves on the back about the implementation of a new food policy, whereas our main agricultural policy, the strategic framework, will be receiving less support than it did in 2008. Consequently, I am worried about the capacity of agricultural producers to meet consumers' demands in the context of that new agricultural policy.

The labelling of food is another important element in that policy. I think that labelling needs to be national so that consumers can make sense of it. Currently there is a lot of pressure concerning GMO labelling in Quebec. The Union des producteurs agricoles and the Food Sovereignty Coalition are in agreement with the labelling of GMOs, if it is national. We can't have very different labelling from one province to the other.

The Chair: Mr. Groleau, could you wrap up your presentation? Your seven minutes are almost over.

Mr. Marcel Groleau: I will conclude by saying that the expectations of citizens are very high, the concerns of producers are real, and the needs are very specific. The previous speakers outlined them.

The government has an interesting project here, but it will have to take a multitude of factors into account if it wants it to be successful.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Groleau, for raising all of these interesting points.

We will now proceed to our question and answer period.

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

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Thank you Mr. Chair.

I could easily spend half an hour with you, particularly with Mr. Groleau, who is the chair of the Union des producteurs agricoles, of course, but also a resident in my riding. This is also the case for the provincial Minister of Agriculture. Mégantic-L'Érable is the centre of agriculture in Canada.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Luc Berthold: I simply wanted to point that out to my colleagues.

I was struck by a good number of your comments. It is indeed unacceptable that Canadians not have access to quality food, whatever their social rank or location. I have worked a great deal with the food banks in my riding, and I find the extent to which these banks are meeting a primary need of the population quite horrible. This is a real issue.

You often referred to the problem of access to food. I appreciated that you pointed out that price is not the only aspect to be considered, and that revenues must also be taken into account. In the context of

this future food policy, we hear a lot about the requirements and the many standards we want to impose on farmers. The fact is that all of that has a cost. The more standards we add, the more we have to increase the cost of that food. That is a perverse effect. I think this requires a lot of thought.

I know that currently the department is carrying out an exhaustive study on the food policy. We are doing the same study, at the same time, and I hope that one day we'll meet. I would like to obtain a copy of your report and recommendations.

I would also like you to send us your documentation, Ms. Bronson.

Personally, I think we are putting the cart before the horse, here at the committee. We should have waited to receive the results of the department's analysis, and then studied all of their recommendations. Then we could have benefited from all of the department's consultations.

I would now like to speak to Mr. Groleau about a timely subject.

We spoke about access to food. There is another issue of concern to farmers at this time, which is the survival of family farms. This issue is related to the tax change proposals made by Minister of Finance. The time allocated to consultations was very short, and we ran out of time. Producers have not yet been made fully aware of the situation. I know, because I attended UPA meetings, that most people are not really informed about what is going on.

Mr. Groleau, for food to be affordable, costs do indeed have to be a part of the equation. Taxes are an important cost for producers.

● (1555)

Mr. Marcel Groleau: No one can be against the principle of fair taxation. I won't speak for other economic sectors in Canada, but as regards the agricultural sector, the difference is that you need very high-value agricultural assets to produce one dollar of income. Eight dollars of investment are needed to produce one dollar of revenue. And so there is no doubt that tax measures that affect agriculture are an important consideration for family income, which is by and large relatively low compared to the average family income in Canada.

Recently the Canadian Federation of Agriculture made representations to Minister Morneau and the UPA. We submitted certain questions during this consultation. This is particularly important because of the value of assets. A lot of small farms are incorporated. The tax measures are used to pay family members. This is very important to us.

Mr. Luc Berthold: During my own consultations over the past weeks, I heard a lot of small farm owners express grave concerns as to the next generation of farmers. You raised that issue. There is indeed a problem. I was told that these measures could in fact hinder the transfer of a farm to a family member.

Does the UPA feel that it is important that Quebec farmers be able to pass on their farm to a member of that same family? Those who live in the regions know what goes on. They know the families in the area, and which young people actually want to take over the farm. This is important, and access to the products produced by regional farms is what ensures, in part, the survival of our public markets in various regions.

Mr. Marcel Groleau: I spoke about the regional agricultural framework, in fact. I think that the cuts made to the agricultural strategic framework, to risk management and the support for various programs such as AgriInvest, have had more impact these past few years on small farms than any of the measurable tax changes, for instance.

As I explained, there were cuts of \$260 million. In 2018 we'll have a budget smaller than the one we had in 2008 to offset agricultural risk in Canada, whereas risks are increasing due to climate change and the greater volatility of prices in the markets.

Small farms that have to deal with these greater risks and less state support will certainly see their situation deteriorate. It's obvious.

Mr. Luc Berthold: In any case, as I mentioned, I'm hearing a lot of comments on this. I think that what is happening right now is causing grave concern, not only in Quebec but throughout Canada. I will be following this carefully over the next weeks, Mr. Groleau.

Thank you very much for your presentations. As I said, if you have other information for us that you may have provided for the department's analysis, we would be happy to receive it.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Breton, you have six minutes.

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

I thank all of the witnesses for being here today.

Your comments and concerns are extremely important to our current study.

I will begin with you, Mr. Groleau and Ms. Tessier.

You spoke about the next strategic framework. It's certainly an important element, for 2018 and the subsequent five years. You referred to an agreement with the provinces made in July 2016, correct?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: It was in July 2017.

Mr. Pierre Breton: July 2017, I'm sorry.

What funding do the provinces provide under this? You say that it is a bipartite file.

Mr. Marcel Groleau: These are federal-provincial shared-cost programs. The federal level contributes 60% and the provinces provide 40% with regard to federally funded programs.

However, provinces remain free to institute their own programs. In July, we worked out the framework for the next agreement, which will begin in 2018. Now, a bilateral agreement still has to be signed by each of the provinces with the federal government by 2018.

Mr. Pierre Breton: Have the provinces already put money on the table?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: The money from the provinces will follow when the federal-provincial agreement has been concluded.

Mr. Pierre Breton: Very well.

There is much talk about buying local, and the expression is very trendy.

Ms. Bronson, perhaps you can answer my question.

The simple fact that buying local is being discussed in our communities, and that efforts are being made to make people aware of this, does not mean that people will suddenly start to buy local products.

What could the government do to encourage this? What could it include in its food policy that would really incite people to purchase local agricultural products?

Ms. Diana Bronson: The most important thing the government could do is encourage public institutions to source locally. Local sourcing is being done by countless hospitals and university campuses. This could be tried in government buildings, and why not by Parliament?

We have to encourage local purchasing. Perhaps Mr. Groleau would have more to say about it, but one of the challenges local producers face is to find a regular market for their products.

I don't mean just any local product either, but organically produced product and healthy foods. We do not produce enough fruit and vegetables in Canada. When the American dollar goes up and the price of fruit and vegetables shoots up as a consequence in Canada, that makes us very vulnerable. This is a big concern for consumers, citizens.

The most important thing you could do would be for the Minister of Health to put incentives in place, either through setting prices or making regulations, to have the health sector source locally. This is in fact what the Montreal Heart Institute does.

Various initiatives are afoot in this regard. There is Nourish, for instance, a collaborative venture between the McConnell Foundation, Food Secure Canada, and other organizations. There are 25 such initiatives underway.

Meal Exchange is another; it is a group made up of university students who are putting pressure on their respective universities to have them provide better food. This is being done at the University of Toronto, Concordia University, Ryerson University, and on many other campuses from one end of Canada to the other.

Mr. Pierre Breton: That is an interesting example.

I have a few minutes left and I'd like to hear Mr. Groleau's comments, as he represents thousands of Quebec producers in this dossier.

Mr. Marcel Groleau: The agricultural policy created by Mr. Gendron, the former Quebec Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, had a component related to local supply in public institutions. Public institutions certainly constitute an important market. A number of European countries introduced the requirement, in their tenders, whereby a portion of the food purchased must be produced locally or within a certain distance of institutions. That creates markets. It is in line with what I was saying about governments being able to regulate and provide some indications. That is a concrete example.

•(1605)

Mr. Pierre Breton: It is often a matter of price. On a small scale, we want to buy locally. We want to at least be able to pay the same price we would pay for a non-local product. That is somewhat related to what you were saying earlier. Ultimately, the price often determines the consumer's behaviour.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Breton.

Ms. Brosseau, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to continue talking about buying local.

In the 41st Parliament, my colleague from Salaberry—Suroît introduced a bill that would require government institutions to source their food locally. I think that she will soon introduce a similar bill. I cannot talk about all the details because the legislation has still not been introduced in the House, but it would be worthwhile to study such a bill.

[*English*]

I would like to come back to the report of the special rapporteur, who came in 2012. I started on the ag committee in 2012; that was when we had the Conservative government. When the special rapporteur came to Canada and put forward his 19-page report with recommendations, there wasn't much action. Now we have a new government, and this government has made a promise to move forward with a food strategy, which is very good, and we're doing this study at committee.

Can we go back to what was said in 2012? Has there been any progress made? In the four priorities that were announced by the Minister of Agriculture, we don't talk about right to food specifically. I think it should be mentioned, and it's not too late to highlight it more.

Can I get some comments around that, please, Madame Bronson?

Ms. Diana Bronson: I think that was a pretty exciting time for Canada, 2012, when Olivier De Schutter came here. He went across the country and met with many people. He finished with a report with a series of recommendations, which I say, with all due respect, has been repeatedly submitted to the senior civil servants who are working on Canada's food policy.

It has been raised at the Food Summit, and it will be raised again and again over the coming months. We put out five big ideas at the beginning of this process, and our first idea is that we should

recognize the human right to food. Why? It's because it makes food a matter not of charity but of human dignity. If we don't recognize food as a human right, we will forever be going to the food bank solution of donating charitable food for those who cannot afford it.

When we signed on to the covenant, we did not say that overnight no one would be hungry. We said that we were committing, Canada as a country was committing, to progressively realizing the right to food. That would mean that there are fewer and fewer hungry people each year. Unfortunately, that's not what happened.

Olivier De Schutter's first recommendation was to have a right to food strategy. Well, this government announced a food policy, so we think that what we need to do is build the right to food inside that policy. Let us enunciate it clearly, as we have done for health care. We have stated in this country that health care is universal, it is free, accessible, transferable—and I'm not a Canada Health Act expert.

If we clearly state that food is a basic human right and that it is the intention of this government and further governments to realize that right for all Canadians without discrimination, I think we would be really making quite a break with the past, and it would allow all of us to buy into that vision and to work towards realizing it.

He also recommended the review of nutrition north, a universal school food program, and more government support for a diversity of agricultural practices. It's certainly worthwhile going back. It's not a long report; it's maybe 15 pages, with a page and a half of recommendations, and I think they're all still valid today.

•(1610)

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Thank you, Ms. Bronson.

Mr. Pegg, can I get some comments around the importance of the right to food?

Maybe you could also talk about a poverty reduction strategy. The people going to food banks are workers, students, sometimes seniors. Often, when I visit community groups and food banks, they say the number are not going down; more and more people are coming every year.

Can you talk about how the government is doing by way of a poverty reduction strategy and about the importance of moving forward with concrete action on it, please?

Mr. Shawn Pegg: We're very happy to see the federal government moving forward in a variety of areas on a food policy, on a poverty reduction strategy, on a national housing strategy. These things are all promising, but it's hard to say what's going to happen with the strategy when you're not sure what the content is going to be. The content is going to be very important.

One area in which the right to food in Canada is in my opinion most clearly lacking is among indigenous populations. Since this is a federal table, I think it makes most sense to talk about on-reserve indigenous people, since the federal government has responsibility for many of those communities.

You said that many people using food banks are workers, seniors, and children, which is absolutely true. To add to that, many people using food banks are on welfare, social assistance, or employment assistance—you guys call it something different in every province, depending on where you are—and it's the federal government's practice to match provincial and territorial social assistance rates on reserve.

If you're a single person in Canada and you fall on hard times—you lose your job because of an injury, and maybe you've been working in part-time jobs or temporary work for a couple of years—you may get EI for five or six months, and then what do you have to go to, if you're not well enough to go back to work? You have to go on social assistance, which is not a great place to be, because if you're a single person on social assistance you have to find a way to live on \$8,000 a year.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Pegg. Unfortunately, the time is up.

Now we have Mr. Longfield, for six minutes.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses who are here.

I am going to continue on some of the line of questioning that's happening today. I want to start on the innovation piece. Innovation always gets my attention.

I'm going to go back to the campaign. I think we had 11 candidate debates. The first one was hosted by Food Secure Canada at Innovation Guelph. It's a centre that I am a co-founder of. It was a hot afternoon. We had six candidates, and Food Secure Canada wanted to make sure candidates were talking about food. Here we are—different table, not quite as hot inside, probably the same outside.

The sixth point you made, Madam Bronson, was about innovation.

The Children's Foundation in Guelph runs a program called food and friends. They collect Christmas trees, about 4,000 trees a year. They raised about \$50,000 last year. They serve 16,000 students, 1.9 million meals a year. It's social innovation. This was started because the city said they weren't going to collect Christmas trees anymore, so the Children's Foundation stepped in and said, let's get some volunteers to pick up the trees. Pay five or 10 dollars apiece, and we'll collect some money and help the kids.

This is an example of social innovation that wasn't driven by government or big programs. There are probably other grassroots programs. Co-operation agri-food New Brunswick is another example.

Does your organization track examples of grassroots efforts to help children get good meals in their schools? Is that something we can include in our food study? If the government could help from the sidelines, because the programs are being driven by the grassroots, is there a role that social innovation funding or shared ideas could play?

It's a long question.

Ms. Diana Bronson: Yes. I just love the fact that you came back to the Eat Think Vote campaign. Just a citizen and a non-profit organization.... That campaign happened during the election.

• (1615)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: It was a good campaign.

Ms. Diana Bronson: I also met Mr. Poissant during those events, and to have you here now.... I'd like to think that it had something to do with getting food policy into the mandate letter. It makes me feel very good about engaging during election time. Thank you for that reference.

We don't have a comprehensive assessment, for example, of school food programs in this country. There is no map. What we have now is a patchwork of programs. Some kids are getting Coke and doughnuts, and some kids are getting fresh vegetables and hummus. There are all kinds of programs across this country.

The vast majority of them are very innovative, very grassroots, and they are doing the best they can with what they have at their disposal. I think it's exactly the model you're suggesting that the Coalition for Healthy School Food is after. It's a bottom-up model. It's not a new, big, one-size federal program, with all its complex rules that everybody has to follow.

It says, for example, we believe that all children should have the right to a healthy diet. We are creating a social innovation fund to which school boards, non-profits, and municipalities can apply in order to take the best of what exists in their community and build it up. We have fantastic programs in this regard. Some of them are doing just amazing farm-to-fork stuff.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Great. It's good to get your testimony as we are writing our report. We'll grab things as we go. Hopefully, we can include that.

There is also a social innovation start-up in Guelph, 10C, an incubator space for social innovation, which will include a kitchen to help refugees learn how to cook meals using local products, change of diet, or maybe accommodate their diet by working with local grocers. We are looking at a centre in downtown Guelph to help with food innovation.

When we talk about superclusters, and possibly the food supercluster, you made a comment during your presentation about matching existing innovation funds with social innovation funds. Is there something for our testimony on that?

Ms. Diana Bronson: I think that sometimes a shortcut is made when we talk about innovation. Everybody thinks technology. Of course, technology is important. I sit here with my iPhone, and I'm not denying that. But the innovation that exists in the people I work with amongst the food banks, school food programs, farmers, and fishers is all over this country. Every one of them is starving for funds. I'll tell you this. They're doing it on almost nothing.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: They're doing amazing work.

Ms. Diana Bronson: They're doing amazing work, and they have huge potential to grow the economy.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I want to pivot quickly over to Mr. Pegg. I was at the Guelph food bank last Friday, as part of the awareness campaign for hunger across Canada. The food bank is serving 22 organizations in Guelph. They're focusing some of their efforts around food waste, working with local grocers. They haven't started to work with restaurants yet. Is there a connection between food waste and food banks?

We're looking at food waste as part of our food policy. Is there some way that the food banks in Canada could help us with that part of our study?

Mr. Shawn Pegg: I think food banks have been quite involved in that aspect of things. Food banks have been acquiring safe, healthy, surplus food for many years. I think they would prefer they didn't have to, unfortunately. It's kind of a stereotypical thinking to say it, but I think it's important to say it.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: They have to. Great, thank you.

Those were wonderful presentations. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Longfield.

Now, Mr. Peschisolido, you have six minutes.

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

Mr. Pegg, like Guelph, in Steveston—East Richmond we have a phenomenal food bank, in Richmond. The executive director, Alex Nixon, is phenomenal. He gets involved in the community. We were chatting about the same kind of thing, not exactly what you said—that food insecurity is not about food—but that we need economic growth to have a progressive society.

One thing Mr. Nixon discusses with me is the whole notion of buying local. For our food policy, we export food, but we want food security, so we want to buy local. Do you have any suggestions or thoughts on how we can take a buy local approach, maybe make it regional, and make it part of our economic system for food production? Are they incompatible?

• (1620)

Mr. Shawn Pegg: I would say that's outside my area. I would pass that one over to Ms. Bronson, if it's okay with you. She's kind of the expert on that one.

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: Surely, or anyone else who wants to—

Ms. Diana Bronson: Maybe Amanda wants to intervene here as well, but I would refer you to an excellent report called “Dollars and Sense”, which talks about how the money and investment that goes into local food gets circulated through the economy many times and therefore has great potential to create good jobs.

Did you want to add something to that?

Ms. Amanda Wilson (Policy Analyst, Coordinator of Community Engagement, Food Secure Canada): Certainly, it's not a question of either-or, and I think most farmers and folks in the agrifood system would see the local food sector, the regional food sector, and export-oriented agriculture not as diametrically opposed,

on two opposite ends. Often farmers grow things for export and for a regional economy.

I think for us the direction is really about how we can leverage and increase local and regional production, knowing that export, of course, is going to continue to be an important aspect of Canadian agriculture. We're hoping we can bring one up while recognizing that the other is going to continue.

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: Madam Bronson, you talked in your remarks about the importance of education, going to elementary schools. I'd like to talk more about post-secondary education. In East Richmond, in my riding, there's a lovely institution called Kwantlen Polytechnic University, or they've rebranded it KPU. Kent Mullinex runs the agricultural department there, and he's dealt with what you talk about, creating the next generation of farmers. He has a program of 25 students per year who go into the community. In B.C., as you may know, we have something called the agricultural reserve system

Ms. Diana Bronson: It's the agricultural land reserve, yes.

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: There's a lot of land there, which is available, so they're going out and basically being farmers. That's not their co-op; that's the whole program. It's a two-year program.

Do you have any other thoughts on ideas like that, which we could implement in our food policy?

Ms. Diana Bronson: I want to come back to the “supporting innovation” on this. I'll give the example of a wonderful organization that is now closed due to lack of funding, called FarmStart. It was in Guelph, and they were training the next generation of farmers and they were doing business training and seeing who had it in them and who could really hold it and learning a lot and partnering with evergreen farms. Probably Mr. Longfield knows as much about it as I do. But they closed because they don't have adequate funding.

We have some very good programs in Quebec, probably the strongest programs to support the next generation of farmers, but it's not yet done.

Amanda, again, may have something to add here. She works with a group of young farmers.

Ms. Amanda Wilson: Yes, there's research coming out now that, on a national level, the majority of new farmers are coming from non-farming backgrounds, so they're folks who don't have a family farm to take over. They do have a specific set of challenges that need to be addressed in terms of accessing training and capital and land, which are not totally separate from those of existing farmers. Because they're predominately coming from a non-farming background, we do need additional supports in terms of training and linking them into that farming community, whereas before it was sort of easier to have succession.

[Translation]

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: Mr. Groleau, you talked about the federal government's role. If I remember correctly, you mentioned two things the government can do: regulate markets and provide funding.

I'm not familiar with the situation in Quebec, since I am from British Columbia. Can we make suggestions to the federal government in our food plan to come up with a pan-Canadian approach while taking differences into account?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: When it comes to agriculture, the federal government's tool of choice is the agricultural policy framework. The federal government can use program funding to influence decisions provinces will make. That is one of the elements. For example, if you want to make better investments in the environment, prepare for climate change and ensure better food security for Canadians—because that is important—the federal government can very well include those elements in the policy framework, fund some of them and encourage the provinces to also invest in those aspects.

The next generation of farmers is a good example. Quebec's programs for young farmers are more generous than those in other provinces, but that is a decision the province made. The federal government could do the same and encourage the other provinces, through funding, to also provide more generous programs for the next generation of farmers. Another consideration for young farmers is access to land, which is a real challenge. On the one hand, the price of land has increased significantly. On the other hand, it is often said that there is a shortage of young farmers, but that is not the case. The fact of the matter is that young farmers do not have the means to access land.

•(1625)

[English]

Ms. Diana Bronson: Well said.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Groleau: Schools are full of students who want to work in agriculture, but young farmers currently don't have sufficient means to purchase land or access farmland and start a business.

The protection of farmland is one of the important elements of a future agricultural policy because of the threat of global warming. Clearly, pressure on producing countries will increase, as will the value of land and everything else.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Groleau.

We have only a few minutes left. If the committee agrees, we could let a member from each side of the table ask a quick question. Do you agree? I know that Mr. Poissant wanted to ask a question. I will still start by briefly giving the floor to Ms. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for joining us today.

For a while now, we have been talking about what we have to do to establish a good food policy, but I would like to put the opposite question to you. What shouldn't we do, when it comes to a future food policy, in order to have affordable food? Let's not forget that

Canadians are overtaxed, in Quebec and elsewhere. Everyone knows that, and everyone is talking about it.

[English]

Ms. Diana Bronson: I think we all want to admit it to make our list.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Any of the witnesses can answer the question.

We have talked a lot about what we must do, but I want to know what we shouldn't do. What shouldn't we see in this policy?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: I would say that you shouldn't not listen to our recommendations.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: That's a good one. See, that is a good answer.

Beyond that, what shouldn't we do?

[English]

Ms. Diana Bronson: I would say that if we were to have an empty policy that would sit on a shelf with no institution to take it forward, that will not do it. I would also say if we were to just carry on as though the status quo is okay and climate change is not at our doorstep, that would be a big mistake. If we thought the market was going to resolve everything without any government intervention, that would also be a big mistake. And if we continue to operate in the siloed fashions in which we are operating now, with health not talking to agriculture and environment not talking to trade, and different departments and levels of government doing things at cross-purposes, that's what has to stop. We really need to think in new ways.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bronson.

[Translation]

I now give the floor to Mr. Poissant for a quick question.

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

I will try to be brief. All these people participated in the roundtable I organized in my riding. I would have liked to ask three questions, all of which are just as important, but I will keep to a single question.

You made a suggestion I am very interested in. You said we should have a new institution that would bring together the 16 agencies and departments. I would like to know a bit more about that.

Ms. Diana Bronson: We are talking about a policy board, a government-wide institution. I think it should be created by an act of Parliament, in the same way Parliament created other institutions such as Rights and Democracy, the International Institute for Sustainable Development and many others.

We are talking about a place where industry, civil society, the research community, and levels and departments of government would meet. We are not talking about a hundred people in a room doing nothing. These would be working groups and committees that would operate in a transparent and accountable manner and would be representative of their members, just as Mr. Groleau is representing his members here today.

The institution should advise the government, commission research, build consensus and keep everyone on the same wavelength. We will not magically agree on everything overnight, but there are currently very few places where industry, civil society, the government and the research community meet.

● (1630)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bronson. We have to interrupt you.

Ms. Brosseau, you can ask a quick question.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Groleau, it was a pleasure to see you at the happy hour in Longueuil to announce the 15th open house on Quebec farms.

You also came to our area to visit the Ferme vallée verte 1912. I love the cheeses they make.

This has been mentioned several times, but I would like to highlight the fact that the strategic framework is an important tool for producers. Yet the funding is staying at the same level, once again. It is important to point this out again because the funding is the same as what was earmarked in 2008, unless I am mistaken.

Mr. Marcel Groleau: The funding is lower than it was in 2008.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: So it is lower than the funding in 2008.

We have talked a great deal about the next strategic framework, held consultations in committee and issued recommendations. Can you tell me about the importance of ensuring that producers will have the necessary tools? Risk management programs such as AgriInvest will have to provide good tools to help producers deal with a variety of contingencies.

I would also like to know what happens when disasters occur. We can use Montreal as an example. Let's assume that bridges are closed and that we cannot send food to the Island of Montreal. Is Canada prepared to manage such a serious crisis? How will we ensure food security? Is that an element that should be included in our discussions on food policy or is it rather the responsibility of the Minister of Public Safety?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: As I said, the less risk management programs intervene, the more difficult it is for small producers. We have two strong programs in Canada: AgriStability and AgriInvest.

AgriStability has ultimately become a disaster management program. It no longer intervenes enough to protect producers against changes in market prices. Canada currently supports its agriculture less, per dollar produced, than the United States, even though our farming is smaller-scale and more northern.

We have been lucky because, so far, prices have been relatively good. We have not had any major crises to manage other than those

caused by the climate or bad weather. So we have been lucky since 2013.

However, we are really at risk in Canada. If grain prices were to drop significantly, we would experience a serious farming crisis.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Groleau. We have to wrap things up because we are going to proceed with the second hour of our meeting.

I want to thank the witnesses. You were very insightful, and we could have spent the entire two hours with you.

We are now beginning the second part of our meeting.

● (1630)

_____ (Pause) _____

● (1635)

The Chair: We will begin the second hour of our meeting where we are studying our food policy.

Joining us is Annie Bérubé, director of government relations at Équiterre.

Welcome, Ms. Bérubé.

From Moisson Outaouais, we have Sonia Latulippe.

Welcome, Ms. Latulippe.

We are also hearing from Shannon Benner, chief executive officer of 4-H Canada.

Welcome, Ms. Benner.

You will each have up to seven minutes for opening remarks.

Ms. Bérubé, you can start.

Ms. Annie Bérubé (Director, Government Relations, Équiterre): Good afternoon and thank you for inviting Équiterre to testify in your study on a food policy for Canada.

This is the first time in Canada we have had a national discussion on the quality and the source of our food. Today, we want to talk to you about a threat to the sustainability of agriculture in Canada, a threat to the abundance and quality of the food we produce.

That threat is all too often overlooked in our conversations, but it can and must be considered in the context of food policy in Canada. That threat is the dependence on synthetic pesticides in farming.

● (1640)

[English]

The importance of the national food policy cannot be understated. We finally recognize that food security for Canadians is linked to the viability of Canadian agriculture, including the conservation of the ecological foundations that underpin our food production, like healthy soils, clean water, biodiversity, and healthy pollinator populations.

Unfortunately, our mounting dependence on pesticides in agriculture threatens all of the above. While pesticide sales continue to increase in Canada, the most recent census on agriculture shows that farm profits are not increasing. Our food supply depends on the viability of Canadian farms, and we should all be concerned about the rising costs of agricultural input, including the cost of overreliance on synthetic pesticides.

Our recommendation to you today is that the committee recommend a comprehensive national pesticide use reduction strategy as part of the national food policy. I'll explain briefly why this is necessary, and how it can be done.

First of all, the myth that pesticides are essential to feed the growing population is no longer supported by evidence. It's quite the contrary. The seminal report from the international assessment of agricultural knowledge, science, and technology for development at the FAO and the World Bank back in 2008 concluded, based on the experience of 80 countries, that industrial agriculture with its heavy dependence on pesticides was not going to feed our growing population. It was rather agricultural practices that are locally adopted and work closely within ecosystems that will improve human health and ensure food security for our growing global population. Since then there have been several other large-scale studies worldwide showing that agricultural yields will drop and sometimes even crash on farms, as soil health and ecosystem functions reach a tipping point after years and years of overuse of synthetic pesticides.

The UN's special rapporteur on the right to food, Dr. Elver, co-published a report earlier this year denouncing the myth that pesticides are necessary to feed the world. She lays the blame on the pesticide industry for "systematic denial" of harms, "aggressive, unethical marketing tactics" and heavy lobbying of governments that has prevented national and global restrictions on pesticide use, creating a threat to national food security. Those are her words, not mine.

She proposes several recommendations that should be considered by your committee, including the urgent need for national pesticide use reduction strategies in agriculture.

Globally we know that synthetic pesticides threaten food security, but at home pesticide overuse poses threats to the viability of Canadian agriculture. First of all, pesticides degrade soil quality, which is essential for plant growth and carbon sequestration. Pesticides kill important soil bacteria and fungi, which are essential for plant growth and production yields. We know, based on the latest Agriculture Canada data, that small organic matter is declining in several regions of Canada.

Canadian water quality is also deteriorating because pesticides are increasingly leaching into our watersheds across Canada. As one example, atrazine is now found in the vast majority of Canadian waterways and is now even measured in Canadian drinking water. It is water contamination that led to a complete ban on atrazine in the European Union 13 years ago, yet corn producers in the European Union remain competitive. Many studies now show that atrazine in Canada only contributes to at best 3% increase in agricultural yields and in most cases to no increase in agricultural yields at all.

Pesticides also threaten the ecosystem services upon which agriculture depends, including the health of pollinators, which are vital to agriculture. Declines in pollinator populations such as bees and monarchs are in part the result of exposure to insecticides. Neonicotinoids, best known as "neonics", are the most commonly used insecticides in Canada. They have been found to be 5,000 to 10,000 times more toxic to bees than DDT was. DDT was banned 45 years ago.

The Task Force on Systemic Pesticides just last week released its worldwide assessment on the ecological effects of neonics, and they were in Ottawa, Montreal, and Toronto presenting the results of their research. The results are truly alarming.

You should also know that France will be the first country to completely ban neonics, not only because it makes sense to preserve biodiversity, but because farmers recognize the need for pollination for successful agricultural production. France's ban on neonics goes hand in hand with a strategy to reduce pesticide use nationally, with financing and support for farmers.

As the committee has seen in the case of the proposed ban on imidacloprid in Canada, agricultural producers are often vulnerable when we must restrict or ban a pesticide. They are left with no alternative. Had we had the funding, the financing, and the programs to globally reduce pesticide use in agriculture, it would make it much easier for agricultural producers to adapt and respond to a restriction on specific pesticides when it is necessary to do so to protect the environment and human health.

Agriculture Canada and provincial agriculture departments must share the responsibility for reducing pesticide use, and this is where a national food policy can make a significant contribution.

In conclusion, I would point out our detailed recommendations to reduce the dependence on synthetic pesticides in Canada, which I hope you've all received. I would just briefly like to point out that Quebec has a pesticide use reduction strategy with targets and would now propose a piece of legislation to achieve those targets. Denmark committed to reducing its national pesticide use in agriculture by 50%, and they achieved that target in 1989. France also has very generous financing and crop insurance programs to reduce pesticide use in agriculture. There are plenty of international examples to draw from.

•(1645)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bérubé. We have to move on.

[English]

Ms. Annie Bérubé: That's it for me. Thank you very much.

[Translation]

The Chair: We give the floor to Ms. Latulippe from Moisson Outaouais for seven minutes.

Ms. Sonia Latulippe (Chief Executive Officer, Moisson Outaouais): Thank you for your invitation.

I am happy to participate in these consultations and to have an opportunity to present our views, especially on the accessibility of quality food at affordable prices for people experiencing food insecurity.

I am here as a representative of my organization. My comments do not necessarily reflect the views of organizations from my region.

As a regional food bank, Moisson Outaouais is the primary provider of food assistance in the Outaouais region. We supply a network of 32 organizations that respond to thousands of requests a month.

We work with agri-food businesses, tackle food waste by salvaging unsold products in supermarkets and establish partnerships with the corporate world. In addition, we educate Canadians about hunger and are constantly developing new projects in a collective effort to alleviate hunger, while encouraging food self-sufficiency as much as possible.

The fact that we are part of a large structured network, Les banques alimentaires du Québec—which in turn is affiliated with Food Banks Canada—gives us access to significant quantities of food acquired through donation agreements with industry and enables us to benefit from national fundraising drives.

Here are some figures on the situation in the Outaouais. Every month, from 7,000 to 10,000 individuals use food assistance; one-third of those served are children; half of the people served are individuals living alone; finally, nearly 80% of users return every month, and in 28% of cases, they return more than once a month.

The number of immigrants, seniors and persons with disabilities who use the service is growing every year.

Right now, we redistribute over 600,000 kilograms of food every year. Despite all our efforts to improve our supply and meet the needs, last year, 37% of organizations in our network lacked food. Since we essentially give away what we receive, there are shortcomings in our food supply in terms of quantity, but also in terms of quality. Among the products we lack regularly are milk, eggs, and fresh fruits and vegetables.

Poverty forces people to turn to food assistance. Food is abundant in stores, but low-income people don't have access to that food, since they cannot afford it. The vast majority of people who use food assistance are living on public support, be it old age pension, disability pension, social assistance or employment insurance. This

shows that those programs are inadequate because they are largely insufficient to meet basic needs.

However, I do want to mention that recent measures taken by the Canadian government in relation to the guaranteed income supplement for seniors and the Canada child benefit have led to a slight drop in those clientele in food banks.

Food banks were mainly created in the 1980s to deal with a difficult economic situation that was supposed to be temporary. Thirty years later, they are more active than ever and meet real vital needs to address food insecurity. This has been especially true since the 2008 recession, when the demand skyrocketed and has remained high.

The food balance sheet for Canadians is not very gleaming. The U.N. Special Rapporteur on Right to Food made sure to remind us of that during his 2012 mission.

The rate of Canadian households affected by moderate and severe food insecurity is estimated at 7%. In the Outaouais region, that represents about 30,000 people. Of that number, one-third of the individuals resort to food assistance. Those are the people who are the most seriously affected. They have used up all their resources before they get to that point. They have moved into cheaper housing, obtained wage advances, gotten into debt and defaulted on payments. They have skipped meals and received help from friends and family. By the time they come to a food bank, they are extremely disadvantaged.

Food is the most elastic part of the budget. That is where people cut back when they have to tighten their belts. They can't risk losing their home or having their car seized, especially when they live in the regions, where public transit is not widely available.

Using food banks is neither a rewarding nor a normal way for people to feed themselves. Yet 863,492 individuals in Canada, with 171,800 of them in Quebec, use it every month because they have no other choice.

•(1650)

So the food baskets and meals provided by assistance agencies are part of their food supply. Without that assistance, their health and even their lives would be compromised, as would the country's cohesiveness and social and political stability.

While certain consumer products may be less expensive than they were 30 years ago, the opposite is true for food products. Our purchasing power has been reduced. Moreover, the gap between the richest and the poorest has widened.

The price of food forces the most disadvantaged to make choices that can compromise the quality of their food. The cheapest food is also the least healthy. Soft drinks are cheaper than milk. A bag of cookies is cheaper than a bag of apples. Since junk food is more widely available and accessible than healthy food, it is the daily diet of many young children in Canada. As a result, our children are increasingly overweight and the incidence of chronic diseases is rising steadily in our population.

Food is the chief determinant of health. Right now, three out of four deaths are attributable to chronic diseases that could have been delayed or prevented. Moreover, the incidence of chronic diseases varies with socio-economic status, and poor people have the highest incidence. Canada's food policy can reverse this trend by taking preventative measures before problems arise.

Canada's proposed food policy seeks to bring about social change. In order to be successful, this policy must be horizontal and interdepartmental, and involve the federal, provincial, and municipal orders of government. Moreover, it must address food insecurity and, more broadly speaking, poverty.

The Chair: Your time is nearly up, Ms. Latulippe.

Ms. Sonia Latulippe: This is an ambitious project, but it is feasible. It addresses the aspirations of Canadians for a food system that is sustainable, fair, and respectful of the earth's resources. This Canadian policy is the stuff of dreams, but will it live up to its promises? We sincerely hope so.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Latulippe.

[English]

Now, with 4-H, Ms. Shannon Benner for seven minutes.

Ms. Shannon Benner (Chief Executive Officer, 4-H Canada): Good afternoon. Thank you very much for the invitation to appear today before committee.

My name is Shannon Benner. I'm the CEO of 4-H Canada. I know some of you have relationships in your home riding with 4-H clubs and communities and work with them at a local level. For those of you not so familiar, I'll tell you very briefly who we are and what we do.

We're a national youth organization. We work with young people in four areas. We have 25,000 youth members in 2,000 clubs across Canada, and we have 7,500 volunteer leaders who work with youth. We work with youth in four key areas, our pillars: sustainable agriculture and food security, science and technology, communications and community engagement, and the environment and healthy living. These are all things that are very relevant to today's conversation, so thank you for having us.

4-H started 100 years ago as an organization that wanted to help kids succeed both on and off the farm. That meant it started with the principle of giving them not only skills, farming skills—literally giving them a bag of potato seeds 104 years ago—but also teaching them to be leaders in their communities and developing the character traits. Fast forward to today and that's still who we are at the fundamental level.

Globally, 4-H works with seven million young people around the world in the core pillar areas of sustainable agriculture and food security, and science and technology, so this is very relevant to us both at a global level and also at the community level.

The success of our program is evident not only by the number of highly engaged youth that we see across Canada and the topics they want to be part of and have conversations on, but also with the millions of alumni we have in this country. Whether they're Olympians or whether they're parliamentarians, we see that these

are very important topics and that 4-H members really want to be engaged and part of this discussion.

What makes 4-H unique is that we have a public-private partnership. No matter where you are, whether you're in B.C., where the Minister of Agriculture partnered with 4-H B.C., or the United States—the USDA partnered with 4-H in the United States—it's always this public-private partnership that delivers agriculture and food security programming to young people.

We believe this helps us be very nimble and adapt to some of the emerging issues that youth can respond to and where we can work with young people. For example, in 2014, we surveyed our youth members across Canada. More than 80% of them indicated they were aware of careers in agriculture, and more than 50% indicated they wanted to pursue careers in agriculture.

When you look at some of the skills and labour gap statistics in the agriculture sector, we believe 4-H can help respond to some of the challenges and see them as opportunities.

One of the key things we believe, though, is that we don't consider them leaders tomorrow; they're leaders today, so we commend this government on its response in addressing youth and including youth at this table and in this conversation.

What we also see is that youth are very interested in pursuing many of these other crosscutting themes. I'll speak to generation Z—that's really who we work with. Generation Z right now means young people under the age of 18. They're a unique generation. They're the most connected generation in history. They're very socially conscious. They have a global mindset. They think of themselves as a we, not an I. They definitely embody the ability to think globally and act locally. We see that everywhere.

I'll use the example of Carp Fair just this past weekend. The Agricultural Society dedicated a plot of land. Kids grew crops that were donated to the food bank. They built entrepreneurial skills, they sold some of those crops in market, they learned to run a business, they banked the funds, and they donated them to a charity. We see an immense amount of opportunity to engage youth in these conversations. These are young people between the ages of nine and 15 who want to be part of this conversation.

I have a couple of recommendations I would like to put forward and leave with the committee on behalf of 4-H, which we think would lead to success in adopting a national youth policy.

The first is that we would suggest meaningfully engaging youth and ensuring that there's buy-in in a national youth policy. If we want this policy to have longevity—they're the generation that this impacts, not only with young people being able to access food today but in delivering this policy and ensuring its success for many generations to come—then young people should be engaged in the process to ensure that there's coast-to-coast buy-in for youth adopting the policy.

The second is that we would suggest there be an alignment with sustainable development goals. Whether it's taking 4-H members to speak at the FAO General Assembly, or whether it's convening them at a global level and hearing them talk about soil, food security, water, and air, as well as growing more high-quality food, young people want to be engaged in the high-level conversation. We see that sustainable development goals are of great interest and relevance to generation Z.

• (1655)

The last one is that we would suggest that a national food policy be—like 4-H—made crosscutting, in many departments, a very collaborative piece; and also that, like 4-H, it have public-private partnerships and be a shared accountability across multiple departments and portfolios.

Thank you very much for your time today.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Benner.

Now we'll start our question round.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Barlow, you have the floor.

[*English*]

You have six minutes.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I have a couple of questions for our witnesses, but I want to start with the motion I put forward last week. I would like to table that motion for a vote now. If it's okay with the chair, I will read the motion into the record.

It is:

That the committee immediately undertake a study on the government's consultations titled "Tax Planning Using Private Corporations" as publicly released on July 18, 2017;

That the committee hear from witnesses on this topic for 15 meetings;

That the hearings focus on the potential impact of the consultations, including making it easier to sell a family farm to a stranger than to a family member and how this will impact the Canadian agriculture and agri-food economy;

That the findings be reported to the House; and

That the government provide a response to the recommendations made by the committee.

The reason I think this is critical, Mr. Chair, is that we've heard from just about every witness we have had on this study that the importance of affordable food is going to be a key platform and part of our foundation of this study and, I think, of food policy moving forward.

In my opinion and certainly the opinion of every single farmer and rancher I have spoken with over the last several weeks, there is grave concern about how they can remain financially sustainable with some of these tax changes being brought forward by the Finance Minister, not only when it comes to passive income, but also in their ability to estate plan and pass on their family farm to the next generation. They have been working on these legacies sometimes for four or five generations. They are looking forward to passing that farm on to the next generation.

I think it's very disconcerting that we've had this much concern raised from farm and ranch families across Canada. I know my colleagues across the floor have been getting the same phone calls we have. Again, I think it is the job of this committee to be the voice of those farmers and ranchers who are raising those concerns.

It seems to me that as every day passes, it's quite clear that the Finance Minister is not going to extend the consultation period on these tax changes. I think this is an opportunity for the agriculture committee to step up, study these changes, and come back to farmers and ranchers with some answers on exactly what the economic impact of these changes will be. That's why I think it's so critical that we move forward with this study, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barlow.

Are there any comments or questions?

Mr. Longfield.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I think it's unfortunate that we have witnesses here. I'd like to continue with the witnesses.

The study on taxes is being handled by the finance committee right now. We had agricultural representatives there yesterday. We would be looking at duplicating an existing study that's going on with finance.

As well, we are in the middle of a consultation process. We don't have policy for us to look at while we are in the consultation process. It's premature, in any case, for us to be looking at this when we are in the middle of a consultation.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Longfield.

[*Translation*]

Are there any other comments or questions?

Mr. Barlow, please go ahead.

[English]

Mr. John Barlow: I appreciate my colleague's comment on this, but the finance committee will have two or three witnesses from the agriculture industry on these changes; we have an opportunity to talk to every sector in the industry—farmers, ranchers, and agribusiness owners from across Canada, and not two or three, but dozens. I think that's what's important here. It's not just a chance to say we took a peek at it and let's shoo along. As the agriculture committee, I think it's our job to take a look at this, not just have the finance committee listen to two or three witnesses. This deserves digging into at a much greater depth than that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barlow.

[Translation]

Are there any other questions or comments?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Can we have a recorded division, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Okay.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Marc-Olivier Girard): We will have a recorded division.

(Motion negated: nays 5; yeas 4)

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Barlow, you have two minutes.

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that, and I appreciate our witnesses coming here today.

I know that my colleague apologized, but I think this is a very important issue for us to be discussing, and I appreciate your indulgence on this.

I want to ask some questions of Ms. Benner.

I know you had some great points on engaging youth, but before I get to you, I just want to make sure that it is clear to Ms. Bérubé of Équiterre that France is not moving ahead with banning neonics. It is reversing that decision. Even the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has said that bee populations have bounced back to a record high. Germany, Britain, and some other countries are also looking at reviewing those decisions with the collapse of the canola industry in those countries. I just want to be clear that to say that all these other countries are banning neonics is.... I think, they've seen that they need to bring some of those things back to ensure that they have a strong agriculture industry.

Ms. Benner, I think one of the things that we need to talk about really quickly is that you have a thing about getting youth engaged.

The Chair: Mr. Barlow, I apologize. It was one minute, but I'll let whomever you want to answer. I thought it was two.

Mr. John Barlow: No, no, it's okay.

Ms. Benner, what are some of the things? How do we engage urban youth to get involved in the agriculture sector and learn more about that?

Ms. Shannon Benner: I'll give you a great example. I think that public-private partnerships play a great role. When you look at Vancouver, for example, you'll see that UBC did the exact same thing. They donated a plot of land. Leaders came in, and they have intercity kids working in community gardens.

That serves a number of purposes. It's about making healthy choices, food education, and some of that sort of farm-to-plate education. It's also about growing food efficiently and effectively. Then there's also the marketability and the entrepreneurial skills. They're learning to either put it into a school system or a healthy eating program, or to market and sell the goods. I think there's an immense opportunity. From a 4-H perspective, we are working to bring those programs into urban areas. For a year now, we've piloted a program within Ottawa, and have programs in most urban centres.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Benner.

Now, we have Mr. Peschisolido, for six minutes.

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: Mr. Chair, thank you so much.

I would like to follow up with Madame Bérubé.

I was intrigued by your use of the language "*une menace*". Those are fighting words. Those are words you usually don't hear in the agriculture committee. My riding is 80% urban and suburban, and 20% rural. Eastern Richmond and southern Steveston are farms.

Can you follow up a little bit on what you mean when you say that pesticides are a threat to the sustainability of the farming system? I just want to preface that by saying that I hear that debate in my riding. The west end is like that. The east end says, "No, there's nothing wrong with pesticides."

Ms. Annie Bérubé: I wouldn't say that pesticides are a threat to Canadian agriculture. I said that overuse, extensive use, and over-dependence on synthetic pesticides, as the first tool to combat pests, are the problem when we know that we have beneficial management practices, integrated pest management, and organic practices that should be our first weapons in managing pests.

They are a threat, because when we register new synthetic pesticides in Canada, the industry is required to demonstrate the efficacy of the product. The requirement under the act is that the new product need only increase yield by an incremental fraction. Years later—10, 20, 30 years down the road—when those pesticides are used in the real world, what we see is that in fact the promise of increased yield is not delivered; it is marginal, as I've said, in the case of atrazine in corn, for example, or non-existent.

There are also many non-essential uses of pesticides in Canadian agriculture. I would cite, for example, the use of glyphosate pre-harvest in wheat and grains, which is meant only as a desiccant to the crop, and is most responsible for glyphosate in food contamination.

Basically what we are saying is that if we look at the long-term sustainability of agriculture, if we want to maintain healthy soils, healthy ecosystems, healthy pollinator populations, and healthy watersheds that are really the foundation of long-term agriculture, we need to rethink using synthetic pesticides as the tool of choice, every single time we need to prevent or manage a pest problem.

● (1710)

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: Madame Bérubé, if we're transitioning out of synthetic use of pesticides into something else, an organic system, what would be the role of a national food policy, the role of the federal government, in being helpful in that process?

Ms. Annie Bérubé: We make lots of specific recommendations to that effect in our document. We need to rethink many of the agricultural support programs that are currently in place that incentivize synthetic pesticide use in agriculture. I'll give you one example: crop insurance programs. You can only qualify for crop insurance if you demonstrate a certain level of agricultural inputs and if you grow a large-scale monoculture. If you want to switch to more diversified agriculture, crop rotations, for example, you would not qualify for certain crop insurance programs. We know, and the importance of France has demonstrated, that insurance-wise it costs less in the long term if you have diverse crops, and crop rotation as well, to ensure that production. Crop insurance is a very easy tool.

The other thing that we hear routinely, and I'm sure you've heard it in your committee, is that a lot of the innovation and the tools that are developed to reduce pesticide use are developed by agricultural producers. There is an innovation market failure in that agricultural producers often cannot reap the benefits of that innovation because they can't patent their practices, they can't apply for intellectual property rights. We need the financing, the research and development funding, to go to the producers to innovate and to share peer-to-peer best practices for reducing pesticide use.

[Translation]

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: Ms. Latulippe, you talked about the various orders of government, the role of the municipalities, the provinces and the federal government.

Could you now tell us how we, the federal government, can help eliminate hunger?

You talked about the burden of cost for certain people.

Ms. Sonia Latulippe: I said primarily that this policy should include a poverty reduction strategy. It goes without saying that addressing poverty will reduce food insecurity. All three orders of government must be involved because they act in different areas of jurisdiction. The municipalities, for example, are very close to members of the public. Quality of life is particularly important where people live, that is, in the municipalities.

As to the federal government, there are certainly economic benefits. A collaborative approach is needed. Funding is important, of course, but in this case a collaborative approach is needed. The food policy must be adopted by all orders of government, they must

all embrace it, and they must pursue common goals and work together.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Latulippe.

[English]

Unfortunately, Mr. Peschisolido, that's all the time we have.

[Translation]

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

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In my riding of Mauricie, Moisson Mauricie has been dealing with food banks for some time. This agency collects unsold food. In Maskinongé, it works with various local groups and agencies. More recently, Moisson Lanaudière announced that it is working with local IGA, Metro, and Sobeys stores. Recovering unsold food to help people in need is a wonderful initiative.

Ms. Latulippe, can you tell us about the needs of food banks and how a poverty reduction policy and strategy could help them?

● (1715)

Ms. Sonia Latulippe: Even reducing poverty will not mean the end of food banks. There are always poor, very vulnerable, and sick people dealing with mental health problems or addictions who will need food banks.

I mentioned the program to collect unsold products, which we also belong to. It is an outstanding program because we have agreements right across the province with the major food chains such as Loblaw's, Metro, and Sobeys, which provide a tremendous supply by recovering unsold products.

As to reducing food waste, there is the whole issue of best before dates. Best before dates are under federal jurisdiction, so it is a question of labelling. In a way, they contribute to food waste because we throw out a lot of products that are still good. Right now, this helps food banks because we recover a lot of products as a result of that waste. Nevertheless, as I said earlier, there are gaps in the food we offer. That is very important to remember.

A study by the Banques alimentaires du Québec showed that 12% to 15% of food users' food was from those food banks. That is a significant contribution; it is a lot. So we have to provide a food basket that is healthy and nutritious. It is hard for us to offer high-quality baskets because, as I said, we are constantly running out of milk, we have no eggs—we have to buy them—and we never have fresh fruit, especially in the Outaouais region, which is not agricultural.

No doubt there are tax incentives that could be established to encourage farmers to donate food. With regard to food waste, in France, Belgium, and Italy, there are measures requiring supermarkets to donate their unsold food products to food banks. I think similar measures are starting to be introduced here, but we have to keep pushing.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: May I ask a question, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes, go ahead.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: That's great, I'm afraid I will not have enough time. I have a lot of questions.

Ms. Bérubé, please explain the situation in Quebec. A strategy to reduce the use of pesticides has been in place since 2015 and will continue until 2018. Can you explain the situation in Quebec and what we can learn from it?

Ms. Annie Bérubé: Quebec has had agricultural pesticide use reduction targets for decades. That is part of Quebec's phytosanitary strategy for agriculture for 2011-2021.

The lesson learned in Quebec is that, without a bill, without funding and support programs, it is not possible to miraculously achieve the pesticide use reduction targets.

The good news is that Quebec's Ministry of Sustainable Development, the Environment and Action Against Climate Change finally introduced a bill to establish support measures to help farmers meet the agricultural pesticide use reduction targets. The Quebec government is focusing on 10 pesticides that it considers highly toxic in Quebec, including atrazine and the three neonicotinoids registered in Canada.

Among other things, the bill includes financial support for farmers to consult and implement integrated pest control practices. It would also prohibit the use of these 10 dangerous pesticides unless prescribed by an agronomist. These are the main measures the Quebec government wants to establish.

We are concerned about this recommendation, primarily as regards the professional independence of many agronomists. We would rather rely on independent consultants to help farmers reduce pesticide use.

That is where the debate is at in Quebec, and the bill was just introduced.

• (1720)

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Ms. Benner—

The Chair: Thank you. Your time is up. We have extended it as much as possible.

Mr. Drouin now has the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here today.

Ms. Latulippe, I am curious. Statistics show that about 50% of food is wasted in homes. Regardless of the programs we might implement, food will still be wasted in homes, for whatever reason.

Ms. Sonia Latulippe: There are best before dates!

Mr. Francis Drouin: For example, I might expect to be at home on a Tuesday evening, but end up not being there for some reason. Also, households are short on time. According to some studies I have consulted, people hardly prepare food any more simply because they do not have the time.

How can we promote healthy eating when families do not have the time? Have you established any programs to address this issue? I am curious to know if you have found solutions that I am not aware of.

Ms. Sonia Latulippe: Not at Moisson Outaouais specifically, but a number of agencies in our network are looking at alternatives. They are focusing in particular on low-income families. For this segment of the population, that primarily means cooking together in community kitchens or taking workshops on cooking inexpensively. This is effective, but there is not a lot of funding to create those programs. Those groups also need facilitators. It does require a time investment, to be sure, but the large quantities produced there can be enough to prepare meals for a week.

It is a win-win situation. Families save time and it costs them much less. In addition, it is a way for people to help each other and learn to cook again. Cooking is a skill that has been lost to a large extent, unfortunately. People do not cook any more, they do not know how to cook any more, and that is a problem. People opt for prepared meals, unfortunately, because the more highly processed the food, the less nutritious it is.

Mr. Francis Drouin: From what you have seen, do any young people take part in those community kitchens?

Ms. Sonia Latulippe: Yes, there are groups that do at youth centres and community centres, for example. There are also intergenerational groups.

All the agencies I know of in the Outaouais have difficulty because those programs are not subsidized. The fact is, however, that individual food independence is the future, since that independence is primarily an individual thing. That power must not be taken away from the individual. There are many success stories.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you very much.

[English]

Ms. Benner, my colleague and I were in Woodstock two weeks ago at the farm show. One thing we were looking at was precision farming. We were talking with a few folks about the barriers for farmers to adopt new tools.

There are technologies that would reduce spraying when deciding whether you'd spray a whole field. One guy was telling us that he had put fertilizer on for three years in a row, even though he didn't need to, until his partner finally convinced him not to.

It was his partner who convinced him, but he would never admit it. One thing that became apparent is that youth are ready to adopt those technologies much more quickly than perhaps the other generation. I'm wondering how you're working with youth and whether you're bringing them on with precision farming as perhaps an attraction for providing farms with their next generations.

Ms. Shannon Benner: Science and technology is a new pillar of ours. We're in our third year, and to have relevant programming with young people and bring it back into agriculture was very intentional. We have a direct track to the Canada-wide science fair, and there is a strong partnership there now to bring young people coming from agriculture and traditional agricultural settings into the science and technology conversation.

For example, this afternoon we have a young person on the Hill who is a national recipient in the Prime Minister's science fair. She's from P.E.I., and she was frustrated by seeing the amount of lobster shell wasted. She has developed a more advanced way of extracting polymers from lobster shells. We see every single day through a lot of our programming, and specifically through our science and technology programming, that young people are strongly coming out and wanting to be engaged in these areas, in particular precision farming.

For our part, my response would be that we need to make sure young people are engaging and participating and having the influence to be at the table in those conversations in order to challenge some of the mindsets.

• (1725)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Are youth telling you that agriculture is being taught at the secondary level in high schools? Is it still being taught? I have a few pilot projects in the riding, but I don't know if it's widespread across Canada.

Ms. Shannon Benner: I think it varies by region. We are a very outside-of-the-classroom model, so we don't specialize in the educational system, but I think it really varies in that presence from province to province.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you so much.

The Chair: We are almost out of time, but I know we have cut this group short. If everybody agrees, we could go with one quick question each, if we could maybe go a couple of minutes beyond.

[Translation]

Does everyone agree?

We will begin with Ms. Nassif and then move on to Ms. Boucher.

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

As a newcomer to this committee—

The Chair: Just one question, Ms. Nassif.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Okay.

I would like to thank the witnesses for their presentation.

Ms. Bérubé, in recommendation 13, you raised the issue of the supply and demand for organic products. A previous witness stated that this can be attributed to the high price of organic products.

What are your thoughts on that observation?

Ms. Annie Bérubé: In Canada, organic agricultural products account for about 4% of the food market. The organic agriculture sector in Canada receives less than 0.2% of federal funding for production, research and innovation. Investment is needed in order to stimulate this expanding market, to stimulate consumer demand. Right now, this sector's market share is much larger than the financial support provided by governments. That is a major problem.

One of the common obstacles in organic farming is the high cost of organic certification.

Many principles of organic farming can be applied on a broad scale and do not necessarily require a rigorous certification process. We would like to see research and funding to enable organic farmers to apply their practices and innovations to all farming sectors in Canada.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: May I ask another question?

The Chair: You are entitled to one question only.

Ms. Boucher, please go ahead.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a number of questions, but my question is for you, Ms. Bérubé.

I worked for Health Canada at one time. The department's website says the following: "Pesticides are strictly regulated in Canada. Health Canada only registers products that will not harm human health or the environment."

You have talked a lot about synthetic pesticides and the threat they represent. If there is a threat, do you have a plan B? What are you suggesting and how much would it cost?

In terms of addressing a threat or correcting a problem, in many cases there is a solution and we know what it will cost.

Ms. Annie Bérubé: That is a broad question, but I will try to be brief.

Consider for example neonicotinoid pesticides, which were introduced into the market to replace the use of organophosphorus in farming in Canada. The hope was that neonicotinoid pesticides would be less toxic than organophosphorus. Now we are seeing that is not necessarily the case.

We are on a kind of toxic treadmill. We are still waiting for the synthetic alternative to a product that must be restricted, as was the case with imidacloprid, whose risks to the environment the Minister of Health deemed unacceptable.

We recommend pest management by way of crop rotation, crop diversity, integrated control, and prevention, and that chemical products should be used as a last resort, very briefly and minimally. That is what our national strategy recommends.

• (1730)

The Chair: Ms. Brosseau, you may ask one question only.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Okay.

[*English*]

The question I wanted to ask you before was about youth, because we are hearing that more and more often. It isn't in the four priorities announced by the government for the consultation of this elaboration of the food strategy. We have to include youth.

We recently had a private member's bill, which was sadly defeated in the House of Commons, that would have helped the transfer of family farms.

Can you make a recommendation to the agriculture committee that we could maybe include in the report to our Prime Minister, who is the Minister of Youth? I would like to get your comments on what we could do.

Ms. Shannon Benner: I haven't consulted with them very specifically on this matter, so I don't want to comment on behalf of youth in Canada on that issue.

What I will say is that on any issue, youth do want to be engaged and part of the conversation. I would encourage anyone to consult them on that issue.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Benner, and thank you to all of you for being here.

[*Translation*]

Your contribution will certainly enhance our report.

I would like to thank Ms. Bérubé and Ms. Latulippe for their testimony.

[*English*]

Ms. Benner, thank you so much for appearing with us today.

This concludes our meeting.

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