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Chair: Mr. Bob Bratina



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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.)): Having quorum, I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs to order.

We will start by acknowledging that we are meeting on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

The committee is holding its first meeting on its study of food security in northern communities.

To ensure an orderly meeting, participants may speak and listen in the official language of their choice. This is really important, because one of the stumbling blocks we have occasionally is the selection of the translation. On the bottom centre of your screen is a globe. You click on the globe and you see three boxes. One says “off”, one says “English” and one says “French”.

I am now clicking the “English” box, because I will be speaking in English, for the most part—I have a 500-word French vocabulary, which I am ashamed of, and every now and then I let loose.

Make sure that you have the language of your choice selected, so that you’ll hear the translation and so that when you speak, it will be properly translated.

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on “mute”.

With us today by video conference for the first hour are the following federal officials: John Fox and Matt Parry, directors general from the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food; Wayne Walsh, director general from Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, northern strategic policy branch; and Mary Trifonopoulos, senior manager at Indigenous Services for healthy living, in the population health and wellness division of the first nations and Inuit health branch.

We are going to begin with six-minute statements from, first of all, directors general John Fox and Matt Parry.

Whoever would like to start, please go ahead for six minutes.

Mr. Matt Parry (Director General, Policy Development and Analysis Directorate, Strategic Policy Branch, Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good morning, members.

I would like to acknowledge that I am joining you this morning from Ottawa, the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

Thank you for the invitation to speak with you today as you resume your study on this important subject. I am pleased to be joined by John Fox, who is the director general from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's programs branch.

I will speak briefly about Canada's new food policy and then describe Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's recent programs and activities that are helping to support food security, including in northern communities.

In June 2019, following extensive consultations, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food announced the first-ever food policy for Canada, our road map for a healthier and more sustainable food system. It included a vision for all people in Canada to have access to sufficient amounts of safe, nutritious and culturally diverse food and to support a food system that is resilient and innovative, sustains our environment and supports our economy.

Food security was indeed a critical issue that was identified during the food policy consultations, and it was highlighted when the food policy was launched.

I will now outline the activities that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada is undertaking to help address food security issues, including those in northern communities.

The first is the local food infrastructure fund, which was first announced in budget 2019 and formally launched the following summer. The fund is a five-year, \$50-million initiative. The objective of the fund is to strengthen food systems in Canada and to facilitate access to safe and nutritious food for at-risk populations. To date, the fund has supported some 13 projects in the territories, involving more than \$250,000. It has also approved 282 projects that identified indigenous peoples as one of the beneficiaries of the project.

In addition, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's science and technology branch is working with indigenous communities, stakeholders and partners in the north, including Arctic and sub-Arctic regions. For example, a partnership is under way with the Gjoa Haven community in Nunavut, along with the Arctic Research Foundation, the National Research Council and the Canadian Space Agency, on a green-energy-powered food production research unit.

In addition to these measures, the government has taken action to address the significant challenges relating to food security that have arisen during the pandemic. In April 2020, the government announced up to \$100 million in funding through the emergency food security fund for Canadian food banks and other national food rescue organizations to help improve access to food for people experiencing food security in Canada due to the pandemic.

To date, the emergency food security fund has provided up to \$3.2 million in funding to 90 recipients in the territories. It has also provided \$17.7 million in funding to 820 recipients supporting indigenous peoples. An additional \$100 million in funding for the emergency food security fund was announced by the Prime Minister in October.

In addition, there is the surplus food rescue program, a \$50-million initiative to help support Canada's food system—food processors, food producers and food distributors—to help ensure food availability for all Canadians. Funding was used to help manage and redirect existing food surpluses to organizations addressing food insecurity and to ensure that these surplus products were not wasted. The surplus food rescue program has provided support to 94 recipients in the territories.

In addition, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada officials have been meeting regularly with officials from other federal departments and agencies, provinces and territories, as well as with industry, civil society and indigenous partners throughout the pandemic to better understand regional and local challenges and to collectively address food security issues.

In closing, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada will continue to implement the programs and activities announced last year as part of the food policy as well as the emergency measures announced during the pandemic to strengthen food systems in Canada in keeping with the food policy vision and to address urgent needs across the country, including those in northern communities.

Thank you.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Parry. You're even below the six-minute mark, which is always appreciated.

Next, for six minutes, we have the director general from the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, Wayne Walsh.

Mr. Walsh, please go ahead.

Mr. Wayne Walsh (Director General, Northern Strategic Policy Branch, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning. I'm speaking to you today from the traditional territory of the Algonquin people here in lovely downtown Gatineau.

I want to thank you very much for the invitation to speak to you about the important work being done within the northern affairs department on food security in the north and to provide you with an update since our last appearance on this study in February of this year.

Since the onset of the pandemic, the department has been closely monitoring northern supply chains and the impacts of food access in the north. During the first weeks of the pandemic, the department, in collaboration with Transport Canada, worked with northern airlines, retailers and suppliers to monitor the impacts of pandemic closures and lockdown restrictions on the supply chain. Maintaining this supply chain is critical not only for the transport of food but also of other goods and of essential services. The department engaged with partners to avoid disruptions in the supply chain and continues to monitor closely to ensure that critical access is maintained.

To ensure that families have nutritious food and to help offset the financial burden caused by COVID-19, the government announced a one-time financial injection of \$25 million to the Nutrition North Canada retail subsidy in April. Subsidy rates have been increased on basic and essential goods across all 116 eligible communities effective May 1, 2020. In addition, Nutrition North Canada expanded the eligibility list to include such other items as hand sanitizers and soap.

These additional investments have had a positive impact on prices in the north, and the eligible communities are generally experiencing significant price reductions for many food items. For example, the price of a 10-kilogram bag of flour in Iqaluit dropped from \$21.49 to \$11.49, which represents a 47% price reduction, bringing it in line with the shelf price of flour in the south.

In April, Nutrition North Canada also launched the new harvesters support grant, an \$8-million-per-year initiative to support hunting, harvesting and food sharing in isolated northern communities. Grant agreements have been signed with recipient land claim, self-government and indigenous organizations. The grant program has been designed to be indigenous-led, with a recognition that harvesting needs and practices should be driven by communities themselves.

The launch of the harvesters support grant serves as an important milestone in response to recommendations from northerners and as an important step forward in addressing food security in the north beyond subsidizing market food. It is a critical step in recognizing the role of rites, traditions and cultural practices in sustaining isolated indigenous communities.

Relationships established with recipient organizations of the harvesters support grant have been instrumental in our understanding of the unique challenges communities are experiencing during this pandemic and for providing additional support. Partners have commented that the deployment of the harvester support grant has provided additional support to communities to increase access to traditional food during this challenging time.

For example, one of the recipient groups in northern Ontario purchased 23 community freezers for 18 isolated communities to store hunted and harvested traditional country food. During the pandemic, the grant has also provided critical support to the migration of community members out of the community to the land, where they are isolated while engaging in traditional harvesting activities.

Nutrition North Canada has also partnered harvesters support grant recipients with other federal funding opportunities to improve food access during the pandemic. For example, Nutrition North Canada worked closely with colleagues at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to help distribute surplus food through the surplus food rescue program. All three territories and regions across the provincial north receive deliveries of surplus food, including frozen fish and meat products.

Collaboration with federal partners has been essential in providing support to northern and indigenous partners throughout this pandemic, and the department thanks our colleagues at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada for these collaborative opportunities.

The pandemic measures have been effective for the most part; however, the outbreak has also highlighted the degree of need in northern isolated communities and the critical link between food security and poverty. The Nutrition North Canada program has recognized this and is working to address gaps highlighted by the pandemic to implement permanent improvements.

• (1115)

Important steps have been made during this difficult time to support isolated northern communities in accessing food and the unique, challenging circumstances of communities in the north. The department is committed to continuing to work together with northerners and indigenous partners on long-term solutions and opportunities to strengthen local food systems and improve food security in the north.

With that, thank you, and I welcome any questions you might have.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Walsh.

As I said, Ms. Trifonopoulos is here to answer questions. She won't make an opening statement, so that will enable us to hopefully get a full round of questioning in, beginning with Mr. Vidal for six minutes.

Gary, please go ahead.

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My beginning question is going to be about Nutrition North, specifically in northern Saskatchewan. I'm going to open it up to any of the witnesses who feel that they have the data or the ability to answer the question.

There have been some serious concerns raised around the Nutrition North program, but where I want to focus is that in a riding such as mine, in northern Saskatchewan, there are specifically three communities that are actually in northern Saskatchewan, but they're not north of 60. There's a different relationship there to some of the programs and whatnot. The most recent data on your website about

the contributions in both dollars and weight of food subsidized in those communities is from 2018.

My question is simply this: What has changed from 2018 in the context of northern Saskatchewan, specifically in those communities that are south of 60? What new investments and changes have been made, and are there some measurable outcomes that you could outline for me that would identify progress and improvements in those outcomes?

• (1120)

Mr. Wayne Walsh: Our 2019 data should be posted on the departmental website fairly soon.

The northern Saskatchewan communities that are eligible for Nutrition North would have benefited from the \$25 million that was injected into the program, dating back effective as of May 2021, so that's the one change. Also, we have recipient organizations in northern Saskatchewan that are taking advantage of the harvesters support grant.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Can you speak at all to any outcomes or any results of some of the investments that have been made?

Mr. Wayne Walsh: When it comes to the harvesters support grant, it's still fairly early days. The money just started to roll out in April, so we will be collecting data from our recipient organizations as they go along. It is a five-year project.

In terms of the retail subsidy, we track expenditures. As I mentioned, I don't have those figures in front of me right now, but we will be able to post those reports, as we frequently do, on the 2019 figures.

Mr. Gary Vidal: All right. We'll watch for those, and thank you.

Could you speak about the impact that the pandemic has had specifically on the Nutrition North program?

I use the Saskatchewan example of these fly-in communities that are south of 60, so to speak, across the country. What has the impact of the pandemic been on programs such as Nutrition North in its ability to serve those communities and make sure they have access to affordable food?

Mr. Wayne Walsh: What we've found, generally speaking, is an uptake of the program by community members. The data that we've been collecting so far seems to indicate an increase in the shipment of food throughout the Nutrition North Canada area, and that probably is a result of a number of factors, one being the increased subsidy on those essential items. I think bringing those prices down to make them even more affordable has had an impact.

There have also been other measures taken by provincial, territorial and federal governments. For example, with the introduction of the CERB, we noticed that it also had a correlation on people buying more food through the Nutrition North program.

Also, even NTI and the Government of Nunavut, for example, in their most recent response to the pandemic in Arviat and in Rankin Inlet have offered food baskets. That has also had an impact on the overall amount of food bought and therefore on the NNC program.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Could you very specifically maybe tell me how you measure the success of a program like this?

My understanding is that there have been significant dollars spent but that food insecurity is actually still rising in many of these communities. What is it that we're using to measure success and outcomes?

Mr. Wayne Walsh: There are two things. One is that we have the northern food basket. We track the overall price of that food basket as is a representative sample to make sure that the prices are maintained or lowered over time. That's one of the big metrics.

The second is that we follow quite closely on the actual amount of food that is shipped to the north. That also gives us an indication of the uptake of the program.

• (1125)

The Chair: Thanks very much.

That brings us to the time for our next set of questions, coming from Marcus Powlowski.

You have six minutes. Go ahead.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Good morning.

I want to ask about greenhouses.

I am a doctor. I've spent a couple of years working in northern indigenous communities. There are certainly a lot of non-communicable diseases—diabetes, hypertension, obesity—and as a result of that a lot of heart problems, strokes, blindness, amputations. I think, to some extent, it all starts out with diet.

I know, having lived a few years in those communities, that it's fairly cheap to buy chips and pop. It's a lot more difficult to buy green vegetables. Even as a doctor, who was probably the wealthiest person in the community, I found it very expensive.

I know shipping stuff up north is expensive, but how about growing it up north? I know there have been some initiatives here in northwestern Ontario to start greenhouses in indigenous communities. I recently visited a new facility that was growing medical marijuana here in Thunder Bay. It was all hydroponics. They use no natural light; it was all artificial light. I asked about the amount of energy it would take to run it. They said, "Not that much." It seems like it was something that could be done in more northern fly-in communities.

What have we done specifically to try to encourage the development of greenhouses? This would certainly seem to me to be a good way of improving the diet in a lot of northern communities and, as a result of that improved diet, improving people's health.

Maybe I'll address Mr. Parry. I don't know if others may want to respond as well.

Mr. Matt Parry: Thank you for the question.

I might turn to my colleague, Mr. Fox, on this point.

I would also note, Mr. Chair, that there is another program, one that's not run by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. It's called the northern isolated communities initiative fund. CanNor operates it, and it likely provides support in this area.

John, do you have anything to add?

Mr. John Fox (Director General, Innovation Programs Directorate, Programs Branch, Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food): I'll just add to what you referred to in your opening remarks, Matt.

There is a project that our science and technology branch is working on with NRCan and others. It's on controlled growth chambers that are scalable for northern communities. It's still at the experimental stage. I actually had an opportunity to visit it in Kemptville.

The only other thing I would add is that under the local infrastructure fund, we do provide up to \$250,000 for infrastructure projects that are intended to cover a range of activities that communities may want to explore. It could include greenhouses, but in a lot of cases those communities are interested in trying out community gardens with root crops that can be grown in the ground over the short growing season in the north. There is some work being done around expanding growth potential in northern isolated communities.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: It would certainly seem to me that that would be an option for us that would be worth exploring.

Is there no other source within the indigenous stream for funding these types of projects? If a community was specifically interested in pursuing this, what, if any, options would they have?

Mr. John Fox: Our programs don't have a particular indigenous stream, but we do partner with indigenous communities in the north, either through our mainstream innovation programming or, as I said, through the local infrastructure fund. You might want to ask either our Indigenous Services colleague or our CIRNAC colleague if there are specific indigenous programs that might address that need.

Mr. Wayne Walsh: If I may, I'll jump in here.

I think the program that Mr. Parry identified from CanNor is one that's probably the most front and centre.

One of the things we've had a lot of discussions on with indigenous communities is the utilization of the harvesters support grant and whether that can be expanded to include things such as food production and greenhouses. I think those discussions are ongoing.

We also have some climate change and green energy programs here within the department that communities have taken advantage of to help to power...and provide that supply to greenhouses. It's very much community by community. There's nothing systematic at this point, but it's certainly something that has garnered increasing attention and interest.

• (1130)

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: A number of months ago I was talking to Alvin Fiddler, who is the Grand Chief of NAN, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation. He was telling me that when he was a kid, his parents used to grow potatoes and turnips in the garden. They would have enough potatoes and turnips. His father dug a hole in the ground or something. I know the Ukrainian community did the same thing. They had potatoes and turnips year round.

What, if any, investments have we made in terms of supporting and educating populations in those isolated communities to grow their own food, their own vegetables that they could use in the winter?

The Chair: We're at six minutes right there, so could you provide just a quick answer? We might pick it up later.

Go ahead.

Mr. Wayne Walsh: I'll defer to Mary on the education side of things.

Ms. Mary Trifonopoulos (Senior Manager, Healthy Living, Population Health and Wellness Division, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Department of Indigenous Services): Good morning.

Certainly Indigenous Services Canada provides funding for community-based health programs in first nations and Inuit communities, including in the north. These programs and services promote healthy eating and food skills. Often communities want to do community gardens and household gardens and learn more about those things, as well as improve access to healthy food. That does definitely come up in the programming, which, as you know, has multiple objectives.

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt, but we're way over the time.

We'll go for six minutes now to Madame Bérubé.

[Translation]

Ms. Bérubé, go ahead.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Walsh.

You talked earlier about challenges related to the pandemic and complementary support.

My riding includes the community of Inukjuak, a town located on the Hudson Bay coast, where a gardening project is being carried out in northern Quebec—the Pirursiivik project. Those in charge of the project created a hydroponic farm in containers, which will enable them to harvest vegetables throughout the year. A major portion of the production will be given to that Nunavik community, and the surplus will be sold in local stores.

Do you think the government could support the development of those kinds of projects in other northern communities?

[English]

Mr. Wayne Walsh: Yes, at this point, there are pockets of funding and there are pockets of resources that would go towards projects such as the one you've indicated in Nunavik. A lot of them are ad hoc. They seem to be case by case. As I mentioned earlier, unfortunately right now there's nothing systematic in terms of a program set-aside. That's why we have these ongoing discussions through our engagements.

We try to steer people in the right directions, but it is certainly something that we've increasingly been looking at. As I mentioned earlier, the harvesters support grant people are asking if they could repurpose some of that money for things such as hydroponics or community gardens. There's a growing interest in communities for that type of investment.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: You also talked about food insecurity, which affects men and women in northern Canada.

Can you explain to us why food insecurity does or does not occur?

• (1135)

[English]

Mr. Wayne Walsh: If I understand your question correctly, I would argue that food insecurity in the north probably affects women more than men. They tend to be the matriarchs of the household, and when food insecurity has a huge impact on households, I would say, without having any tangible data in front of me for you today, that generally children and women bear the brunt of food insecurity in the north. I would say that's probably the case everywhere.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: I would like to talk to you about my region, which covers Baie-James, Nunavik and Eeyou. It is often difficult to send food by plane, rail or boat.

How do you plan to ship that food into regions like mine, given those types of problems?

[English]

Mr. Wayne Walsh: Yes, this is essentially the crux of the problem. The communities we are talking about, whether they are in the high north or in the provincial north, are isolated, and food and other supplies need to be flown in. That has a huge impact on the cost, but it can also have a huge impact on the quality of the product, in some cases.

Nutrition North Canada, the retail subsidy program, at its heart targets that nutrition and those perishable foods to reduce the price for the people who live in northern communities for the food that needs to be flown in. That's essentially the fundamental challenge. Whenever you need to transport food any distance, however, it's going to be more expensive. That's why communities are increasingly looking at local food production in order to offset some of the cost.

When we are looking at food systems and addressing food insecurity, we need to look at a whole host of opportunities and of different solutions in order to address the issue.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: You are talking about options, but have you compared Canada with other countries when it comes to food insecurity?

[English]

Mr. Wayne Walsh: We have not, but I'm pretty sure, if I recall correctly, that Food Secure Canada will have done some work in that domain. There are also some other academics in Canada who would have looked at food insecurity, Canadian versus international, and certainly a lot has been done to study the issue between southern and northern Canada.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: What factors could improve the nutrition-related process in the north?

[English]

The Chair: Answer very quickly; we are over six minutes.

Mr. Wayne Walsh: I would say that the number one cause of food insecurity is poverty. If poverty were addressed, then food security would be addressed and it wouldn't be a Nutrition North issue.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Mr. Walsh and Madame Bérubé.

Ms. Blaney, it's your turn now, for six minutes. Go ahead.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses so much for their testimony today.

Let me start with Mr. Parry.

Thank you for your presentation. You mentioned that right now your department has 182 projects that are directly partnered with indigenous communities. In your process of doing these projects, what is the analysis around best practices, and how is that sort of information shared with other communities that may have similar challenges?

Mr. Matt Parry: Thank you for the question. I might turn to my colleague John Fox, who is in the programs branch, to speak to those issues.

Mr. John Fox: I am wondering if the member is looking specifically at the local food infrastructure projects that we've been doing in indigenous communities or at the emergency food response as a

result of COVID. The approach is slightly different in each of those cases.

● (1140)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Both are very important. Either is important, but the first one I have more interest in.

Mr. John Fox: Those are the local food infrastructure programs.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: That's right.

Mr. John Fox: Those are purely application-based. We send out the word as broadly as we can, including to members of Parliament, to invite applications to come in. They're community-based, so there's a broad list or suite of potential eligible applicants. They include even municipal governments or governmental agencies, indigenous organizations, and economic development corporations, but they're aimed at the not-for-profit—

Ms. Rachel Blaney: There's no process whereby best practices...? I find this is a gap. I worked in the non-profit sector for many years and worked in indigenous communities, and one of the things I found very concerning was that when things worked well, there was nothing shared broadly so that people could look at those programs and those projects and how they were implemented.

Just to clarify, there's no system of sharing best practices or successful programs?

Mr. John Fox: The program has been open for only about 14 months, so it's a little early to be able to determine where those best practices might lie.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Okay. Thank you.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, I know that your departments allowed more flexibility to use funding based on the needs of the community. I heard from some communities in my riding about starting community gardens. I also heard about food security projects like providing hampers and getting people back out onto the land.

Has having to address these issues in a new way made any of the departments re-evaluate their process and programming? That's for both departments.

Mr. Wayne Walsh: I'll go first, I guess.

I would say, simply, yes, but it was something that we were starting to do already. Through our engagement with indigenous partners, we were increasingly being asked to look at lots of options, other than just the retail subsidy, to address food insecurity. I think the introduction of the harvesters support grant was a first step towards that, and discussions are ongoing on other possibilities moving forward.

Mr. John Fox: The only thing I could add is that in the emergency COVID responses around food, the focus of those responses has been specifically food, but we've been pretty flexible in how that food assistance could be distributed. In some cases in northern communities, it was found that distributing gift cards to individual families was the best way to get them to be able to meet their own food needs through the retail operations. In other cases, as you noticed, it was hampers.

The entire focus of the first \$100 million and the second \$100 million that the Prime Minister announced has been strictly emergency food assistance. That money hasn't been used to do more long-term work around capacity building and food systems.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Walsh, if I could come back to you, I find these on-the-land initiatives very interesting. I really appreciated the information you gave us about communities coming together and buying a lot of freezers to store food.

I know that when we look at health—and I appreciate what Mr. Powlowski was talking about earlier, about people having healthy food, the affordability of more healthy food and the challenges—but especially when we talk about indigenous communities, I'm wondering if there's been any reflection on the ability of people to harvest off the land to start to meet the gap in those healthy choices in food because of their traditional knowledge.

I'm wondering if that's come together and if there's any feedback on that, and if in the long term there's any reflection on measuring health outcomes based on that.

Mr. Wayne Walsh: Thank you for that.

The reality is that the traditions, approaches and cultural practices will vary from region to region and community to community, so we designed the harvesters support grant to be as flexible as possible so that the communities could target their funding accordingly. What we've been finding is that some communities have been looking at it as part of a cultural revitalization, mentoring or matching elders with youth to go out on the land to do that.

The program is still really young, with money having just started to flow in April. The communities are required to report back, and we anticipate that we will see different metrics and different data coming in because the different communities will take different approaches. It will be interesting to see what lessons are learned. I think what's really important is that at the end of the day, it's about what matters in the community. We didn't design it in Ottawa. It really was designed for northerners by northerners, so that's going to be a bit of a balance.

In terms of the health outcomes, I'll defer to Mary from the first nations and Inuit health branch. I will also say that one of the concerns going forward that we'll have to keep an eye on and certainly—

• (1145)

The Chair: I'm sorry, but we're way over time on the answer. I apologize for that. My microphone switch wouldn't come on to interrupt. Every now and then technical glitches happen. Perhaps you can complete that answer later on.

We go now to our next round of questioning, the five-minute round, and we have Mr. Melillo.

Eric, please go ahead.

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to go back to you, Mr. Walsh, and pick up on something that my colleague Mr. Vidal was asking about, which was how we measure the success of Nutrition North and these programs.

You mentioned tracking the cost of the food basket and tracking the amount of food in the north, which are obviously very important aspects, but I think that overall what we should be tracking is the goal of having food security for those in the north. I think if that is not our primary focus with these goals, then perhaps we're missing the mark a bit, and perhaps there is a bit of a lack of focus on building capacity in northern communities.

What sort of mechanisms are you using to monitor food insecurity across the north in order to respond to that issue more directly?

Mr. Wayne Walsh: The reality is that food security is a complex issue that requires lots of partners to collaborate and come together with solutions. Nutrition North Canada is a retail subsidy. It's one aspect in what we think requires a suite of actions. In and of itself, Nutrition North is never going to solve food insecurity, and that's why we've introduced things like the harvesters support grant. That's why we're working with our federal colleagues at CanNor on the community innovation stuff, with our colleagues over at AgCan on the national food policy, and obviously with our indigenous partners.

As I mentioned before, the number one cause of food insecurity in the north—and in Canada, frankly—is poverty, so we need to engage with other partners in order to address that core issue. On that issue as a whole, that is the approach we need to take.

In terms of providing data, we have our metrics for the program and we follow our Treasury Board reporting requirements for the program itself. As well, certainly we keep an eye on think tanks and other agencies nationally that track food insecurity rates in the north and in Canada.

Mr. Eric Melillo: Thank you.

I agree with a lot of what you just said, particularly in terms of poverty being a real issue that shows we need to do more to increase economic activity and create more opportunities for jobs and more opportunities for prosperity across the north. Unfortunately, I think that over the past few years this government has opposed many opportunities for development in the north. I'm wondering if you could speak more to a plan to develop the north and to create some more opportunities so that, as you said, we can have a more comprehensive approach to addressing this issue.

• (1150)

Mr. Wayne Walsh: Thank you. That's a great question.

In 2019, the government announced the Arctic and northern policy framework. It's a codeveloped policy approach between the Government of Canada and northerners to map out a road map for sustainable social and economic development in the north between now and 2030.

The Arctic and northern policy framework has eight goals and multiple objectives. We are now in the process of implementing that framework with our partners, which include territorial and provincial governments as well as indigenous governments, to make progress against that framework.

The framework looks at things such as some foundational infrastructure requirements, economic development, education attainment levels, health, reduction of poverty, etc. There is a comprehensive framework in place that has been developed with our partners, and that's what's really guiding our work right now to advance the north and those goals and objectives in the Arctic and northern policy framework.

The Chair: There are 10 seconds left, Eric.

Mr. Eric Melillo: I'll give that time back to you, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

We go next to Mr. Battiste. Jaime, you have five minutes. Go ahead.

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I was lucky enough 18 years ago to be able to go to Iqaluit as part of an Assembly of First Nations youth council. We were at a meeting with provincial and territorial agreement agencies. I got a chance to speak to some of the people around the importance of indigenous harvesting. As a Mi'kmaq person myself, I know that harvesting isn't just about food; it's about a cultural practice and about transmission and transition of knowledge.

My question is around the harvesters support grant. I know that it's quite new in its launch. I'm wondering if you can provide any insight into how the program is being received by eligible communities and if you see any possibilities of expanding the program if it's successful.

Also, just generally, what is the health of the stocks of the traditionally hunted or fished animal life out there, just to get a sense of whether this program is working?

Mr. Wayne Walsh: Thank you for that question. I'm glad you asked it, because it will enable me to finish an earlier answer when I ran a little over.

It has been received very, very well in the communities. Some of our recipients have called it a game-changer for them. It's a game-changer not only because of the things that it accomplishes, as you mentioned, in terms of cultural reappropriation and mentorship between elders and youth; they are also telling us that it has some real impacts on language revitalization and the passing on of traditional information. That's the first answer.

Second, are we looking at expansion? We were being asked to expand it as soon as we announced it. They said, "This is great, and we could use more." We're having conversations with our partners on this and a whole suite of other food security solutions.

On the final one, on access to traditional food or traditional animals, the wildlife itself, this is something that I was alluding to earlier that we're going to have to keep an eye on. The effects of climate change are having a tremendous impact on caribou herds, fish stocks and migration patterns. It's great to have a program like this, but we'll need to work very closely with our colleagues on the environmental side and with the territorial and provincial governments, because climate change does have the potential to have a significant impact on the whole program and the whole exercise of cultural harvesting.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: I've heard about some of the difficulties around caribou and the challenges to the stocks. Can you talk to me about some of the other traditional harvesting practices, whether they be fishing or some of the things that the Inuit are taking part in that we could expand on?

The biggest thing is that we want the stocks to be healthy and we want the survival of the species, regardless of what it is. I'm wondering if there are any healthy stocks out there—traditionally harvested foods—that we might be able to focus on and expand on.

• (1155)

Mr. Wayne Walsh: I believe that you will have officials from the Government of Nunavut in the next hour. They might actually be better placed to be more specific on that question. Certainly fishing has been seen as a huge opportunity in the north. It's probably been underdeveloped compared to in other areas of Canada.

I think another area of concern is invasive species—species of animals that are coming north that didn't exist there before—and what kind of impact those might have.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Okay.

My last question, if I have any time, is about the indigenous community support fund. Can you provide some clarity as to how individual communities across the north are utilizing this funding to ensure they meet the food security needs of their members?

That's for any of the witnesses, really.

The Chair: You have half a minute.

Mr. Wayne Walsh: I think, Mary, that's your program, right?

Ms. Mary Trifonopoulos: It is, but not specifically, because the indigenous community support fund is supporting a broad range of needs to help communities adapt to the COVID crisis. Food security is definitely one of the needs that communities are addressing, and we're hearing from our partners that they are addressing it by providing additional food relief or delivering food hampers. Because of a lot of activities that normally happen in the communities, they've had to pivot to other modes of getting food to folks, so it's definitely being used in that way as part of a broad range of measures.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

We're going to conclude with two-and-a-half-minute segments for Madame Bérubé and Ms. Blaney, which will take us to time.

Madam Bérubé, for two and a half minutes, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you.

My question is for Ms. Trifonopoulos.

We are talking about the importance of traditional or local food for the physical and mental health and the cultural well-being of indigenous peoples.

According to you, what is the government doing to increase access to traditional foods in the north?

[*English*]

Ms. Mary Trifonopoulos: I don't know to which of my colleagues that question might be best directed.

Through Indigenous Services Canada, we do mostly support communities in designing their activities and services towards improving healthy eating. Often this does include increasing access to healthy store-bought food and traditional food. It could be improving knowledge around the use and the preparation. Inviting elders is often a very critical part of the activities that communities want to have. There are some on-the-land activities that are supported, whereby multiple objectives are often met. Mental wellness is often paired with learning how to hunt and fish, so the access has improved in that way.

I don't know if any of my other colleagues may have contributions.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Walsh: I think that was pretty comprehensive. The only other thing is that in terms of programs themselves, obviously the harvesters support grant is there.

The Chair: You have one more minute.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: In 2011, the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs made recommendations. What measures has the government taken, if any, to implement those recommendations?

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Walsh: Oh, boy. I think, if the chair will allow it, I'd be happy to provide a written response to that question, because there is a fairly comprehensive response to those recommendations.

The Chair: That would be absolutely fine, and that brings us to time. Thanks very much.

To all witnesses, for anything that's missing, please submit written material.

Ms. Blaney, you have two and a half minutes. Go ahead.

• (1200)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

I'd like to go back and finish off my question with Ms. Trifonopoulos.

Could you just talk about the health outcomes? I was asking earlier about health and well-being and harvesting off the land, and I'm wondering how health outcomes are measured and how you work with the communities to make sure that this is carefully monitored and shared with the community.

Ms. Mary Trifonopoulos: That's a very important question.

What impact do the various services and programs have? I think one of the promising things is in supporting more indigenous-led data collection through things like the first nations regional health survey. Inuit are working on the comprehensive Inuit health survey, which I think is just in the beginning stages. Included in these surveys are measures on a variety of social and health outcomes.

In terms of some of the other impacts, we measure in the short term things that look promising toward improved health, such as increased knowledge and skills gained. It depends on the service being provided to communities and to what extent. At the same time, we are trying to minimize reporting and we encourage a lot of flexibility in the funds.

Really, those broader indigenous-led data initiatives are where the most promise is in collecting data on those medium-term to longer-term health outcomes.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

My next question is this: How do we compare on-the-land initiatives to Nutrition North? Do we need to correlate these more closely? When people are out on the land gathering healthy food and bringing it home, how does it work with Nutrition North? Is one or the other more effective?

Mr. Wayne Walsh: That's a great question.

One of the things we'll be looking at in the long term is the impact that harvesting has on the need to buy food in a store. The assumption is that if we are successful through the harvesters support grant, there will be less reliance on store-bought food for similar items, and we should actually see a decrease in sales in those items in retail because they're being supplemented by harvesting—

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sorry—

Mr. Wayne Walsh: So that's it.

The Chair: —but we're pretty much out of time.

I want to thank our witnesses so much. Once again, there is so much detail. Anything that needs to be supplemented can certainly be done by written testimony, which you can send in to us if you wish or if members of the committee need more information on any of those subjects.

We have three other witnesses in the next panel. To keep us on time, we're going to suspend now.

Once again, thanks again so much to our witnesses.

We are suspended for about three minutes to set up our next panel.

• (1200) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1205)

The Chair: We will call this meeting back to order as we continue our study of food security in northern communities.

For our panellists, I have a reminder. You should look to the bottom centre of your screen. There's a globe there. By clicking on that globe, you will be able to select either “English” or “French”. If you don't, you may not get the translation, so if it's the language of your choice that you are going to speak in and listen to, select that in the globe. That is usually the one little stumbling block we encounter as we organize our meetings.

That said, with us today by video conference for the second hour are the following witnesses: Lindsay Turner, director of poverty reduction, department of family services, Government of Nunavut; Tracy St. Denis, assistant deputy minister for economic development in the department of industry, tourism and investment, Government of the Northwest Territories; and Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources Ranj Pillai, Government of Yukon.

Welcome to all three. I invite the witnesses to make their opening statements of up to six minutes.

Lindsay Turner, could you begin now? You have six minutes.

Mrs. Lindsay Turner (Director, Poverty Reduction Division, Government of Nunavut): *Ulaakut. Qujannamiik*, Mr. Chair, for today's invitation to speak to the House of Commons Standing

Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs about food security in Nunavut.

As mentioned, my name is Lindsay. I am the mother of three young boys. I have lived in Iqaluit, Nunavut, since 2011. I have been filling the role of the director of poverty reduction since 2015, as well as, in partnership with Nunavut Tunngavik, the role of co-chair of the Nunavut Food Security Coalition.

According to the 2017 Canadian community health survey, 79% of Nunavut's children live in food-insecure households, and 57% of households in the territory are food insecure.

The Nunavut food security action plan speaks about how “Nunavummiut have a long-standing intricate knowledge of how to obtain, store, prepare, and consume country food.” “The Makimaniq Plan 2”, Nunavut's shared approach to poverty reduction, speaks about how, in traditional Inuit society, “there was a...well established...system of parents and grandparents passing knowledge along to children.” However, today, much of this has been broken as the result of federal colonial policies from the 1950s and 1960s, including relocation into communities, relocation to the High Arctic, residential schools, tuberculosis interventions and sled dog killings.

As a result, today there is a lot of concern that country food skills are not being passed to younger generations and that similar skills related to store-bought food are not being acquired.

Food insecurity in Nunavut is complex, and the required solutions and supports are wide-ranging, from hunting and harvesting supports and infrastructure, to fisheries and marine infrastructure, to airport and cargo infrastructure, to mental health and addictions, to housing, to local workforce development, to a strengthened not-for-profit sector, to community food infrastructure, to nutrition, and to financial, life and food skills.

However, today I will focus my remarks on just a few of these: the importance of country food, the importance of sharing food, community food infrastructure gaps that exist in Nunavut, and current goals to build the capacity of community food organizations.

In 2019, the Qikiqtani Inuit Association published “Food Sovereignty and Harvesting” and called for a shift from thinking about food security to thinking about food sovereignty and empowering Inuit to feed their own communities and control their food systems and supply. Country food is not only nutritious; it also plays a critical cultural and healing role in Nunavut communities. The support of young hunter mentorship programs; increased resources for hunter and trapper organizations and community freezers; supports to cover the high prices of gas and hunting and cold weather necessities and supplies; and skill-building opportunities and tools to be able to repair ski-dooes and build komatiks are all ways that access to country food can be improved.

The Nunavut food security action plan highlights the critical role that community-based programs play in supporting food sharing and in strengthening connections within communities, as well as in contributing to the nutritional needs of vulnerable populations such as children, single parents and elders. Indeed, a rich diversity of community-based programming and resources has been developed within Nunavut. However, many of our conversations with community food organizations and community members have emphasized the fragile nature of these operations. Many struggle to access the various applications for funding and to even find space in which to run their programs, and their initiatives are ad hoc and come and go without consistent staff and community member availability to provide on-the-ground coordination.

The vision of the Nunavut Food Security Coalition is to foster the development and growth of community food organizations that are able to sustain more comprehensive, innovative, culturally appropriate and sustainable food system projects and life skills projects. To realize this, there is a need for more start-up supports, capacity-strengthening opportunities, multi-year and core funding, and access to reliable community social infrastructure.

I would also like to share how the design of many federal programs intended to address food insecurity in the north have made it difficult, if not impossible, for Nunavut communities to access funding for their priority needs.

Recent changes to the Nutrition North Canada program, new initiatives announced by Agriculture Canada under the national food policy, and recent COVID-19 emergency food security investments have all been welcomed in Nunavut. However, all of these programs could have been designed and delivered in ways that could have had a greater and more sustainable impact in Nunavut and that could better meet Nunavut's priorities.

● (1210)

Cost-matching criteria, language and Internet barriers, eligible and ineligible costs, and contributions and maximum funding levels that do not take into account either the high costs of the north or the capacity and infrastructure deficits of the north are but some examples of the challenges faced. Programs designed within the Nunavut context could go a long way to supporting food sovereignty in Nunavut's communities.

There has also been, more recently, concern that the funding that has been made available this past year to meet the urgency of COVID-19 will not be sustained to meet what has been long-standing urgency of unacceptable food insecurity levels in Nunavut.

In closing, I would like to share with you an excerpt from Maki-maniq Plan 2's definition of poverty in Nunavut:

Many Inuit today have successfully bridged two worlds—life on the land, and life in the settlements—but many others have not. Those who have not require more support to meet their basic needs, to acquire the knowledge and skills to live either a traditional or a modern way of life or a mix of both, and to participate fully and take leadership in the decisions that affect their lives.

Qujannamiik, Mr. Chair. Taima.

The Chair: Thank you very much. You are right on six minutes.

I'll just repeat that we need you to speak slowly and clearly, but please hurry up, because you have only six minutes. That's our dilemma. I apologize for that.

Next we have the assistant deputy minister of economic development, industry, tourism and investment for the Government of the Northwest Territories, Tracy St. Denis.

Ms. Tracy St. Denis (Assistant Deputy Minister, Economic Development Industry, Tourism and Investment, Government of the Northwest Territories): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will try to be quick but clear.

Thank you and good morning. I appreciate the opportunity to present the Northwest Territories' position on this important matter.

I am pleased to be speaking to you from the traditional lands of the Yellowknives Dene, Chief Drygeese territory.

The Government of the Northwest Territories is keenly aware of the importance of food security, especially with the pandemic making it more of a serious issue around the world.

In the Northwest Territories, we have numerous small communities with issues of geography, transportation and access. During these challenging times, these vulnerable populations critically need our assistance with health, safety and security.

Our government's mandate is to increase food security through locally produced, harvested and affordable food. Increased local food production can support the GNWT's goal to improve food security across the territory.

Our government is focused on practical solutions to increasing food security through several priority projects. These include a plan to review and amend a regulatory framework to remove barriers that impede NWT residents from developing food production businesses; implementing a meat inspection regulatory framework for locally produced and sold products, specifically meat products; working to strengthen the territorial support for indigenous governments to develop and deliver culturally appropriate harvester support programs, including a harvester mentorship program; reviewing our northern food development program to ensure territorial food security supports are provided for greenhouses and community gardens; committing to working with indigenous and community governments to recommend improvements to the Nutrition North program; and finally, planning the construction of a Canadian Food Inspection Agency-approved fish plant in Hay River that will give our local fishers, who are largely indigenous, more autonomy over their sector. This will shift the commercial fishers from being price-takers to being price-setters with the Northwest Territories trout, whitefish and pickerel, which are our premium cold-water subarctic products.

The GNWT recognizes that a great deal of interjurisdictional cooperation is necessary to achieve food security throughout the territory. Food insecurity, when experienced, touches every aspect of people's lives, particularly affecting health and education outcomes. To mitigate these issues, we have continued partnerships with indigenous governments and the federal government to identify potential pathways to move forward collaboratively.

One of the ways we are doing this is working closely with Second Harvest and Food Banks Canada to connect them directly with indigenous governments and organizations delivering food charity in the NWT.

We have also worked with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. When meat shortages were first identified as a concern by grocers early in the lockdown, we were extremely appreciative of the fast action undertaken by the federal government to negotiate and sign an MOU for the temporary ministerial exemption process to allow for interprovincial trade of meat and poultry products from establishments that are not federally licensed.

The NWT understands the pressure and responsibility placed on the federal government over the past several months. The vulnerabilities exposed by lockdowns have resulted in devastation for cities across Canada, but have also stimulated opportunities for innovative approaches. The north has always had innovative solutions to issues by necessity. Supporting and sustaining communities separated by distance and culture has created unique partnerships and a dependence on one another to help the territory thrive as a whole.

As we review the potential options for developing solutions to gaps in food security, we know this can only be accomplished with partnerships at the community, territorial and federal levels. Federal government support for vulnerable populations and food security throughout the pandemic has been crucial for the well-being and security of northerners. We have been able to assist residents of our communities more quickly and effectively with that support, but we know there's more to be done. We are hopeful the federal government will remain one of our committed partners as we focus efforts

on the development of strategic approaches to strengthen certainty in the territory to fulfill our mandate to both grow and process food locally.

● (1215)

Food sovereignty is of particular importance to the territory's indigenous population. It would be beneficial to talk to those indigenous governments directly; I'm not sure if there are plans in the works to do so, but please let us know if we can be of assistance in making those connections.

We are already running and further developing programs to build capacity in territorial food production sectors. Programs training youth in traditional harvesting, agriculture and fishing will ensure that traditional practices are preserved and sustained. These actions will increase local purchasing options at a lower cost for people throughout the NWT, which will in turn reduce the territory's reliance on national and international supply chains. We're not quite there. However, we do continue to work with our partners to monitor the resiliency of supply chains.

The strengthening of local food sectors and increased access to traditionally harvested foods will be the keys to making real and meaningful progress. This will also create jobs and strengthen the economy, which will contribute to a positive feedback loop, which will be important to achieving territorial food security.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

● (1220)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

As much as I complain about the technology, it's really amazing to think that we've gone from Nunavut to the Northwest Territories, and now we're going to Yukon with our next witness, Mr. Pillai.

Please go ahead for six minutes.

Hon. Ranj Pillai (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, Government of Yukon): Thank you to the members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs for inviting me to speak today. I am joining you from the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council.

As I am the minister responsible for agriculture in Yukon, matters of food security are of significant importance to me and to Yukoners. I'd like to set the stage by recalling a moment from several years ago. In June of 2012, heavy rains caused a series of mudslides and washouts along the Alaska Highway, severing Yukon's only road link to southern Canada. While the highway was down for only a few days, produce sections in Whitehorse supermarkets were diminished to just radishes and coconuts. Shelves quickly became bare across many of our communities. It was at this moment that many Yukoners became truly familiarized with the term "food security".

Yukon is not unique when it comes to our fragile connection to food supply in the north. I'm sure you've heard many similar stories and descriptions of this tenuous link from my northern counterparts and friends.

With that, the important message I hope to convey to you today is twofold. First, I am very encouraged that this topic is being heard by the committee today. It tells me that this is an important national concern. Second, I will focus the remainder of my remarks on how Yukon is making incredible strides to address food security in a way that not only helps keep our shelves stocked but also grows an important part of our local economy.

This past summer, the Government of Yukon launched "Cultivating Our Future", our 2020 Yukon agricultural policy. This new policy will guide Yukon's agricultural industry over the next decade and increase the territory's ability to be more self-sufficient in food production.

The vision of our new policy is to increase food self-sufficiency for Yukon, support production of high-quality products, contribute to our local economy and leave positive cultural and environmental legacies for future generations. With easily disrupted southern supply chains and limited food production, our new policy seeks to decrease reliance on southern imports. This can be done by increasing local food production and consumption by supporting infrastructure development and Yukon-grown marketing initiatives.

Yukon's agriculture and agri-food industry is a key part of our Yukon life and has been a growing part of our economy since the Klondike gold rush. While improvements in transportation have resulted in importing much of our food from the south, Yukon farms continue to fulfill the important role of providing fresh, healthy products to feed our communities while keeping transportation greenhouse gas emissions low relative to imported food.

Over the last decade, the total amount of land under cultivation and the number of farms in Yukon have grown, along with livestock and vegetable production. According to the 2016 census on agriculture released by the Government of Canada, between 2011 and 2016 the number of farms increased by just over 9%, with over 142 farms in the territory. In 2016 total farm investments, including land, buildings, equipment and livestock, were reported at just over \$100 million.

In addition, Yukon first nations and communities are taking the lead in food security through various community garden projects. Community gardens are allowing people to participate in gardening and are feeding their community members with fresh produce. First

nations are also leading food security through farming education and community development. The Ta'an Kwäch'an first nation, with their working and teaching farm, won the Arctic Inspiration Prize for their work towards food security in 2019. Other Yukon first nations, such as Carcross/Tagish First Nation and the first nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, have working farms that support their communities as well.

Yukon farm operators specialize in a variety of products, including vegetables, livestock, fruit, dairy, eggs, honey, sod and bedding plants. Yukon producers breed and raise a variety of livestock, including cattle, pig, sheep, goats, horses, ponies, llamas, alpacas, rabbits, bison and elk. Producers also breed and raise a variety of poultry for meat, chicks and eggs. The territory's reliance on imported livestock is slowly decreasing, as more Yukon producers are starting to breed their own animals and are committed to year-round operations.

Yukoners are exploring different ways of extending the shelf life of their products and are producing a great variety and amount of stored vegetables, cut meats and such value-added products as preserves and jams. These products are found in large retail stores, community markets, and gourmet meals prepared by restaurants and caterers in Yukon's food service industry. In recent years, this growth in new products has expanded into new markets. Yukon farmers are finding success in selling their products both within and outside our local region.

• (1225)

Much of this incredible growth of Yukon's agricultural industry is due to the support of the Canadian agricultural partnership. Under this agreement, the Government of Canada commits to allocating \$1.48 million to Yukon agriculture each year for five years until 2023. This funding amount includes the Government of Canada's in-kind contributions as well. Many agricultural projects are eligible for 60% funding, with the remainder coming from the individual farmer, meaning that the \$1.48 million per year can trigger a large investment in our farm community.

The Canadian agricultural partnership supports our commitment to building a productive and profitable local agriculture industry and our ability to be more self-sufficient in food production. In the first two years of the Canadian agricultural partnership, over 315 projects have been supported to help develop agriculture in Yukon.

We are proud of our growing agriculture industry in Yukon, but we know there is a long way to go in terms of increasing our food security. In order to increase food security for Yukon, we require collaboration and partnership with the Government of Canada, Yukon first nation governments, municipal governments, stakeholder organizations and individual producers.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

All of our presenters are right on time. Hopefully, that will continue, because we have a tremendous panel and a lot of questions to be asked, beginning with Mr. Viersen.

Arnold, you have six minutes. Go ahead.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here.

I am fascinated by Yukon and the farming that's going on up there. It's within spitting distance of where I'm from, so I'm a bit familiar with farming in the north.

Is the number of butcher shops in the Yukon a growing thing? That seems like something that our first nations communities would have expertise in as well, given the living off the land. I notice that in rural Alberta the number of butcher shops is decreasing. I'm just wondering where that's headed in Yukon.

Hon. Ranj Pillai: It's an absolutely exciting time. It's really a renaissance of the agricultural industry. It's what many of the folks online here today would have seen in their home provinces a hundred years ago.

We're actually seeing an increase in butcher shops and in folks making a decision to leave work in the public service, maybe, or in the private sector and other areas, and going back and becoming trained in order to be able to open these shops.

In smaller communities such as Dawson City and Mayo and other smaller communities, we're now seeing investment by the private sector to open these shops. We also have a mobile abattoir that we use in some of our rural areas. We've shared that information with other jurisdictions, such as Newfoundland. It seems to be a good solution for some of this work.

Simply, to answer your question, we're seeing a couple of them opening almost each year, and we're using CAP funding for either infrastructure offsets or training offsets.

This year, to be very open with you, we had a very difficult time in keeping up with the demand we had, and that doesn't even take into consideration traditional foods, as you alluded to. During hunting season, there's still a big demand on a lot of those services, due to the many things that you can hunt in Yukon and harvest. We're going to see more of a push for even more of these operations to open.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Has there been a specific policy change that you have brought in? I know that in northern Alberta there's a frustration on the part of many of the small butcher shops around the layers of red tape that are required to maintain their operations. Has Yukon pursued a unique policy arrangement around butcher shops?

• (1230)

Hon. Ranj Pillai: We're still in the early stages. We're working through dealing with our own departments through environmental health, which is key. I think it's really just been more of an interest; we're seeing people pivot towards this opportunity.

At a federal level, we're really looking to continue to have the support from the CFIA and others to make sure of this, because

now we're moving into this larger production. We've had good support out of northern British Columbia from their representatives, and to date it has worked, but I think that as we move on, we're going to need to have a presence in Yukon from some of the federal representatives who are going to be able to help us when we have to be watching our operations on a pretty consistent basis to make sure we're meeting the guidelines that are laid out.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Moving to the Northwest Territories, is the situation similar there?

Ms. Tracy St. Denis: We work very closely with the Yukon government. Their agriculture sector is a little more developed than ours. We do have commercial operators here. We've seen through COVID the movement of food into grocery stores, which has been a big step. Our health department has done some regulatory changes that have allowed for that, and I mentioned in my opening comments that our government needs to do some work and is committed to doing work around meat regulations. We have been working with Yukon to find out what's working for them so that when we embark on having locally processed meats, poultry and traditional foods done here, we'll have a made-in-the-north situation that works for us.

Yes, it's on our radar and is definitely a key answer to our food insecurity issues.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Around meat production, I noticed when I was up in Nunavut a few years back that the number of geese that fly through there is incredible. Is that being used, and are you seeing, similar to the Yukon, a growth in butcher shops in Nunavut?

Mrs. Lindsay Turner: Nunavut is probably a little different. Within Nunavut there are three facilities like meat or fish processing facilities, one in each region.

Within Nunavut, if I could describe the equivalent in terms of butchering, once an animal has been caught out on the land, it would pass on the skills around how to cut properly and knowing the whole process of taking care of an animal once it's been caught. The concerns in Nunavut are more the lack of community infrastructure for doing that; places in a community where, once a catch has been brought back to the community, it can be prepared in the community. I'm thinking of community freezers and the young hunter mentorship programs that would connect elders with youth in learning how to prepare animals.

One interesting project over the last few years has been the development of the country food guidelines. This project has looked at combining some of the health guidelines with country food and making it easier to serve country food within government-run facilities, such as a hospital, for example.

The Chair: We're out of time. I'm sorry to interrupt. Thank you.

We need to go now to Mr. van Koeverden for six minutes.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the opportunity to listen to everybody's perspectives today. It's wonderful of you to join us. Thank you.

It's also just great, as has been pointed out already, that we're able to come together virtually. You are all part of the northern region, but it's so vast, and the travel to come to Ottawa would be so challenging. *Qujannamiik, nakurmiik*, Ms. Turner, Mr. Pillai and Ms. St. Denis for joining us today.

I'm joining you today from the traditional territory of the Algonquin here in the West Block in Parliament.

I love the north. I love to visit. Whenever I have the occasion to express gratitude to Inuit for the gift of the kayak, I do. I was a professional kayaker for 20 years and I had the pleasure to visit the north and express that gratitude personally, but I never resist the temptation to express it again, so thank you.

I've also had the opportunity to try and eat country foods like nattiq and muktuk. For those on the call who are not familiar, that's seal, whale and narwhal. It was quite an experience, and delicious.

As I mentioned, the diversity of the challenges and issues that people are facing in the various northern regions is vast, but diversity is important to recognize, so it's important that we don't try to paint the north with one brush, as has been mentioned just now.

My question is primarily for Ms. Turner, but if there is time left over, I would extend the same question to the others—without coming back on, if that's possible, to save time.

I recently had the occasion to discuss the issue of northern food security with the founder of Community Food Centres of Canada, Nick Saul. He said something that has stuck with me for a couple of days now. It's been corroborated somewhat by our witnesses today, but I'd really like your take on it. He basically said that the solution to hunger isn't actually food, because the cause of hunger is poverty. Just giving people food or a discount on it doesn't solve the problem of poverty, and that doesn't get to the root problem of hunger and food insecurity.

I hear you that we've made some progress. I hear you that the investments being made now are making a difference, but I'd like to know from you and the others what this thesis of the solution to hunger not actually being food means to you in the context of the challenges that your communities face and where we might go from here.

Thank you again for being here.

• (1235)

Mrs. Lindsay Turner: It's a bit circular. It's difficult to take steps forward in your life if you are hungry, if you don't have the nutrients and energy to even get up and concentrate.

Absolutely, there are lots of struggles with poverty, trauma, mental health and addictions in Nunavut that make it difficult for people to access skills or training and to be successful in their community endeavours or employment. Absolutely, it contributes to it.

Similarly, there is a focus and concern on skill building. That break in skills has happened, and it has stopped the traditional knowledge of the elders from being passed down to younger gener-

ations in terms of how to get out and access their food. That also has been a big challenge. The cost of a skidoo and a komatik and bullets and guns is a limiting factor, so it's a bit circular in a sense, but you do need food to have the energy to take steps forward.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: I appreciate the comment. The thesis was a bit philosophical and not exactly the most pragmatic thing, but thank you for that.

Mr. Pillai, do you have any comments?

Hon. Ranj Pillai: What I want to illustrate to the panel is that when we think about our own food production and that bigger conversation about climate change and take into consideration what we could do at a Yukon domestic level as a government, we realize there are definitely some key values in the points you're making.

We have a holistic approach in how we're dealing with a number of items, whether it's support for some of our most at risk and youngest right through to the supports we've put in to work hand in hand with our first nation communities. Our first nation communities are exceptional leaders. Of our 14 first nations in Yukon, 11 have modern treaties. They probably make up half of the self-governing first nations in the country. There are many very independent strategies that they are putting in place to deal with this. From our perspective, when I have my agriculture hat on, I think about how to make sure we build infrastructure, and we have small communities where they are buying farms that were in place. The first nations are running those farms, and their elders are there. They're getting to choose the things they want to see growing next year.

We're seeing that happen in each one of our communities. It's such a holistic approach. It's a healthy way of living. The folks in those communities, indigenous or non-indigenous, have access to that great food, and it helps in all causes. As Ms. Turner said, you have to have the fuel, and if anybody knows that, you do.

Overall, there is definitely some substance there. When we think about food security at a social level, we have to make sure that the programs running in our urban areas, where most of our population is, are identifying those needs.

This year, at our food bank, we had local chefs using local produce with local recipes to feed populations at home that had some challenges. That's what we want to see happen, versus shipping it in. We want to support our programs that way.

• (1240)

The Chair: We go now to Madame Bérubé for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am addressing the witnesses who are here. Earlier, we were talking about poverty. Food insecurity and insufficient nutrition disproportionately affect indigenous individuals, households and communities in the north.

What factors do you think contribute to food insecurity in your respective territories?

[*English*]

The Chair: Do we have a response?

Mrs. Lindsay Turner: I think it was a question to everyone, so I can start.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for your question, Ms. Bérubé.

Indigenous peoples, Inuit, account for nearly 80% of Nunavut's population. About 40% of the population receive social assistance. Poverty affects a large proportion of Nunavut's population.

A number of factors contribute to food insecurity, including past policies that have caused trauma that lives on today, mental health issues and addiction problems. Another aspect has to do with the high cost of equipment and food. Added to this are difficulties in transferring knowledge from one generation to the next, especially when it comes to accessing food and hunting. Those are important factors in Nunavut.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: What is the situation in Northwest Territories?

[*English*]

Ms. Tracy St. Denis: The translation kicked out during the question, but my understanding from Nunavut's response.... In the Northwest Territories, our food insecurity factor is about 21%. For us, it's about having sustainable, self-reliant options moving forward. Obviously, poverty, health and education all have links there.

I don't know if there could be an opportunity just for a quick re-cap on the question once again. There was a bit of a technical glitch.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: I will repeat the question.

We were talking earlier about poverty and about how food insecurity and insufficient nutrition disproportionately affect indigenous individuals, households and communities in the north.

What factors contribute to food insecurity on your territory?

[*English*]

Ms. Tracy St. Denis: Thank you.

The challenges in the Northwest Territories, obviously, are the high percentage of food insecurity, as well as access to reasonably priced foods. The Nutrition North Canada program plays a role there, but our government is really focused on having programs and using programs like the CAP to make sure that there are training and skills built in order for people to get out of poverty.

The solution needs to be a northern-based one. I think it would be important to get direct indigenous government feedback, and

that might be something that we could help facilitate. Really, it's about how we can change the shift between doing some investment in social economic development and getting people out of poverty. Our anti-poverty coalition is meeting in the new year, and I'll commit to providing a meeting summary to the committee as well.

• (1245)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: What is the situation in Yukon?

[*English*]

Hon. Ranj Pillai: Thank you. I'll keep it brief.

As you can see from my colleagues, when we reflect on the status, situation or perspective with our first nations government partners, we're very respectful in the sense of just ensuring that those nations are speaking with their own voices. I would offer that the Council of Yukon First Nations is doing a lot of work right now to ensure that there are programs in place that are aligned with the Department of Education to ensure that young individuals are starting the day off right and to meet some of the gaps that might be in place.

I would just pivot to one spot. I would say that costs continue to grow. I see it. I think anyone living here in Yukon is experiencing it. What a bundle of goods looked like five years ago, 10 years ago.... We're seeing it across the country. I think people will make the right choices collectively, but cost is going to be a factor. We have one fly-in community, so we don't have the same challenges as my partners from Nunavut or the Northwest Territories, but in that community, when you think about it.... One that I always joke about with my colleague Minister Frost, who's the Minister of Health, is that a watermelon costs \$30, if you can get one. I know my partners across the other territories would have stories that would make that seem minimal.

Again, I believe it's cost. I think people will make the right decisions if those foods are available to them.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Blaney, go ahead for six minutes.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all of our witnesses today for their interesting testimony.

Ms. Turner, you talked about 79% of children facing food insecurity in your territory. You then talked about the difference, for you, between food security and food sovereignty. Could you explain what that means a little bit more?

Mrs. Lindsay Turner: Food sovereignty speaks to the ownership and control over food systems. In Nunavut, if we think back to the traditional source of food and the traditional way of life, Inuit had control over going out on the land and getting their own food. Today, because of the levels of poverty and because of the multiple factors that are limiting access to both getting out on the land and settlement into communities, there is a lot more store-bought food. Private companies are shipping up the food to communities.

Food security means having enough food to eat versus the shift to having control over what food is available to you and how you access it, and having that choice. Food sovereignty, in terms of the point about children, would be the capacity to pass that skill and control to the younger generations.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you. That's really helpful.

You also talked about the fragility of accessing country food, and how the challenges are multiple. Could you talk about what issues cause this fragility and what steps you think would be helpful in ending the fragility?

Mrs. Lindsay Turner: Among the factors that have contributed to the fragility is the broken transmission of on-the-land knowledge. That is huge. It can't be underestimated.

There are other examples. The sled dog killings completely took away the tools that Inuit had to go out on the land. Today, with the changing times, there's much more use of skidoos and ATVs. Obviously, this is expensive equipment. Some of the challenge is being able to afford that equipment. Some of the challenge is even having access to the replacement parts to fix your skidoo when it breaks down so that you can get out on the land.

As well, climate change is obviously huge. Hunters are having to go further and further away from communities to reach the animals they're hunting. Those are some of the factors.

There has been some good progress in the last few years with the creation of the harvester support program through the Nutrition North Canada program. The other big investment that is needed on a larger scale is for our young hunter mentorship programs. There are a couple of really beautiful programs. To see the joy in kids' faces when they catch their first catch.... It's such a valuable community celebration.

There are a number of strong programs across the territory. There is a need to support those programs and create them in the communities where they're not as strong so that we can get kids out on the land.

• (1250)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: That's a great segue into what I wanted to ask about next.

You talked about federal funding and some of the challenges you're seeing in your region around how those funding sources are designed, and some of the particular barriers. You even mentioned access to Internet as one of those barriers. Could you talk a little bit about what those barriers are and the design changes that would be helpful for communities in your region?

Mrs. Lindsay Turner: A lot of federal applications are shifting more and more to Internet-based applications, computer-based ap-

plications, so if you combine that with.... I don't have the statistics, but bandwidth is very limited, and the vast majority of the population don't have access to a phone or to the Internet.

You combine that with a culture that is.... Written communication is not really part of the traditional Inuit culture; it's more of a storytelling culture, a spoken culture, so taking the time to write down—in your second language—your project idea is a barrier. It's difficult. As well, some of the criteria of the federal application often make it impossible for communities; they don't end up being eligible. Those are some of the factors that make it very difficult for communities to apply.

Also, it's the short deadlines for turnarounds in applying for projects. As well, there's community exhaustion, because that they have to send out so many different applications to get bits and pieces of funding and be able to get enough funding to meet the high costs here in Nunavut.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm going to ask the committee something now. We have time issues, of course. My suggestion as chair is that we do as we did in the previous round: We would have each of the parties speak for their allotted second-round time, with five minutes for the Conservatives and Liberals, and two and a half minutes for the Bloc and the NDP. Then, if we approve of that, because we need to have your approval to go past one o'clock, are the witnesses available to stay with us for a few more minutes after that?

I see thumbs up from the witnesses. Okay, great.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Chair, I have a quick point of order.

Obviously, when we agree to go late, sometimes colleagues have to go to other meetings, so of course there would be no motions or other things entertained. I want to clarify that before we agree to continue past the deadline.

The Chair: Oh, you caught me.

No, we're not going to do that. Thanks; it's a very good point, and I appreciate that. We'll continue as stated.

Eric Melillo will be next for five minutes. Go ahead, Eric.

Mr. Eric Melillo: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to pose this question to each of our three witnesses, and I thank them for being here with us today.

A lot of what we've heard today, and of course what we know, is that food security is a very complex issue. Many aspects have to go into it, including transportation and infrastructure. Of course, in the north we have many infrastructure gaps and transportation difficulties, and I truly believe that the government can and should do much more to help fill some of those gaps.

Perhaps following the lead of my colleague Mr. Viersen, I'll start in the west with the Yukon, and we can work our way east from there. I'd like to have comments from each of our witnesses on how those transportation/infrastructure difficulties play a role in the prevalence of food insecurity and what the federal government can do to help address that.

• (1255)

Hon. Ranj Pillai: Thank you.

Speaking about our current situation, I think one of the concerns we have at this particular time is what will happen to regional airlines. We know the pressure that we're in across the country. We know that we have a couple of major airlines that support travel internationally and across this country, but probably most of us online here would have a regional airline that plays an important role.

For us, we know that the bigger airlines—a WestJet or an Air Canada—are not going to fly to Dawson City or Old Crow every two days to fill the need that our regional airlines address. I would just say that it's very important for us to continue to support these folks across the country, and I'm sure it would be the same in NWT, Quebec, Labrador and Nunavut—you name it.

When it comes to our road access, we have about 5,000 kilometres of all-season roads, and of course for those in line, you can imagine that if it's not being shipped to or flown into Alaska, it's coming through Whitehorse. For a long time, the Alaska Highway has been a major artery to connect our continent and our countries, and I think from that perspective there's good infrastructure in place.

It costs a lot to maintain those roads. We've had an agreement with the United States for a number of years, but that has come to an end, and that's what really maintains the Alaska Highway. There was a transfer that was put in place from the U.S. to Canada to do that work. Inevitably it landed in the financial framework of the Yukon government, and we would deploy that. I think getting that support back in place is going to be key, because that highway has always been our central artery.

I think the third thing would be that if we think about innovation and how we move forward, and if we look at the conversation we're having across the country, we are really going to need to figure out how we can expedite the process for long-haul trucking to pivot towards different fuel sources. Our number one form of emissions is heating, and our second is transportation. For us, that's really the sweet spot to look at if we want to reduce emissions. We just rolled out a new climate change plan for the next 10 years, and we're going to have to figure this out.

I would say that if there's any way we can help, it's going to be about how we can make sure that for all those trucks coming out of Alberta—basically, our product is coming out of Edmonton—those business owners can make the decision to use a different type of innovative machine to get something up the highway, and also about how they are going to be able to make those decisions, because there are extraordinary capital costs on the front end of making those decisions.

That's what we need to be able to do if we're going to change a bit of how we do this in a healthier way, because inevitably it's go-

ing to take us a while to be able to achieve the growth we want, and we are still going to be purchasing from across the country and the United States, as we do now.

The Chair: You have about a minute left, Mr. Melillo.

Mr. Eric Melillo: I'd like to take the opportunity for the other witnesses to comment on that within the limited time available.

Ms. Tracy St. Denis: I want to echo Minister Pillai's comments about supporting our regional airlines.

We are obviously very jealous of the Yukon road systems. The majority of our communities are fly-in, so regional airlines would actually be a critical continued support for us.

As well, on the impacts of climate change, we have a climate change strategy as well, and are keeping an eye on that, as there will obviously be continued impacts on our limited road systems.

I just wanted to flag this point. I mentioned the anti-poverty coalition meeting next month. Really, for us, it's about understanding what our indigenous governments are seeing as priorities for food security moving forward. I look forward to sharing that information with our federal colleagues so that we can work together.

Thank you.

Mrs. Lindsay Turner: Nunavut has 25 fly-in communities, so a lot of the discussion is around airport infrastructure—a lot of the runways are gravel runways or short runways—as well as building small craft harbours or deep sea ports.

• (1300)

The Chair: Thanks to all of you.

Yvonne Jones, it's your round now, for five minutes. Go ahead.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the panellists this morning. Ms. Turner, Ms. St. Denis, Minister Pillai, it's really good to see you all on the line and hear your presentations this morning.

There are so many questions I could ask, but I know we have limited time. Obviously, we've seen some transformational changes around Nutrition North Canada and food security over the last few years, in terms of increased federal supports, whether it's in agri-food investments, emergency food funds, increases to the Nutrition North subsidy and so on, as well as expanding the program and the number of communities.

One debate continues. I'd like to get your view on this. Right now, Nutrition North Canada really provides a subsidy to wholesale companies. There's always an argument around whether that should be going to the wholesalers or to the airlines. I'd like to get your feedback on that.

The other question I have is for Ms. Turner. I'll throw it out there, and hopefully there's enough time.

Nunavummiut are impacted much more than other populations when it comes to food insecurity in Canada. In the last survey, it showed 57%. Are there culturally respective programs that you see that could be launched in Nunavut to help us alleviate some of the difficulty that families are having, which are probably not being done right now?

I'll leave my questions right there. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Lindsay, do you want to start with that? Then we'll go to the subsidy question. Go ahead.

Mrs. Lindsay Turner: Investments in harvester support programs are key. Two other areas would be, more specifically, young hunter mentorship programs and the capacity building of the not-for-profit sector, such as funding for each community to have a space to run community food programs and to hire staff to run them consistently.

In terms of the Nutrition North program, there remains a lack of trust in Nunavut around the transparency of the program. It's difficult to say whether shifting the subsidy to the airlines would change that. There's definitely an interest in seeing... Some changes have been welcomed. The harvesters support program and some of these hyper-subsidies have made a difference, but other program changes are still being called for, such as more transparency, changing the focus to the food being consumed rather than the food being shipped, and looking at the program objectives. The program objectives should be food security rather than the shipping of food.

The Chair: Tracy, do you want to comment on the subsidy?

Ms. Tracy St. Denis: I wanted to mention that there's been a lot of investment in growing food. We've seen some success, even in our high Arctic communities, in growing root vegetables. I think the big challenge for us moving forward is storage and those storage options. Some of them were alluded to earlier. That's going to be a priority for us.

Around Nutrition North, we have great partnerships with AAFC, Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, to grow food. We have local producers who are growing. Unfortunately, at the same time they're competing with the subsidized food that's coming in through Nutrition North. That's something we're going to continue some dialogues on. Part of that is doing some of our own homework around the development of a food security plan.

It really is about creating opportunities, having less imported food coming into our territories and developing our commercial operators.

The Chair: Mr. Pillai, would you comment on the subsidy question?

Hon. Ranj Pillai: Thank you.

I think we're happy to see the focus on the improvements. For us, again, it becomes Old Crow, which is essentially Canada's most northwestern community. I think there's some room to move.

I would have to take a better look, MP Jones, to really see what would happen with that subsidy switch moving over to the private sector. I don't think I'm prepared to give you an analysis on that today. Overall, I think it's important to just keep working with the communities and to understand that this is a real impediment for

them to be able to access food, especially in these fly-in communities.

• (1305)

The Chair: Thanks very much. That brings us within eight seconds, so thanks for the responses.

Now, for two and a half minutes, we have Madame Bérubé. Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mrs. Turner.

Mrs. Turner, the nutrition north Canada program was evaluated last year, and food insecurity has gotten worse in Nunavut communities since the program was implemented. The study also raises serious concerns about the fact that the federal government continues to use food subsidies to improve access to food in the north.

How can the rising rates of food insecurity in Nunavut be explained after the nutrition north Canada program was implemented?

Mrs. Lindsay Turner: Thank you for your question.

The issue lies in the program's objective, which is to reduce the price of food. When that is combined with the high level of poverty, even though prices are reduced, food is still unaffordable and the majority of families cannot buy food. So it is a combination of those factors.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Food insecurity is related to poverty, but we are very aware that it is also related to mental health.

We are in the midst of a pandemic. Can you tell me what the current situation in Nunavut is?

Mrs. Lindsay Turner: Nunavut only recently had its first case. We really saw how important food security was. If someone is infected by the virus and has no food, it is difficult for them to get some. Isolation exacerbates that issue.

More has been invested this year in Nunavut to improve food security. There was also the possibility to provide all sorts of programs to give people food hampers. The concern for us is the fact that this funding will no longer be available over the next few years. The critical aspect is the communities' capacity to develop and implement programs.

Finally, isolation and cancellation of programs have really had an impact. People often get food by participating in school programs or community programs. So when those programs end, there is a very high risk of food security taking a hit.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Finally, we have Ms. Blaney for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Chair.

Mrs. Turner and Ms. St. Denis, both of you talked about mentorship programs for harvesting and for country food.

Could both of you talk about those programs, and if there are any particular barriers that limit the capacity of your region to have them?

Mrs. Lindsay Turner: The more obvious barriers would be the sustained funding to get out on the land consistently for long periods of time, and having the capacity within communities—that not-for-profit sector capacity, for example—to organize and manage the programs on a consistent basis so that they're not offered every now and then but all the time.

Ms. Tracy St. Denis: We actually have a few mentorship programs. We have a take a kid gardening program that is funded through the CAP program with Agriculture Canada. Recently we've announced an on-the-land program, which will include mentorship harvesting.

I would echo that it's not only funding capacity but the capacity of our own government. We're a small government and we punch above our weight. Our teams have done a good job coming up with this program. I'd love to report on it once we have everything rolling out, but we're always looking for additional resources.

• (1310)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mrs. Turner, my last question is for you. It deals with the country food guidelines. I thought that was interesting and compelling. We did a study in the last Parliament around the care facilities for elders on reserve, and access to traditional food was one of the biggest barriers.

Could you talk about how that works, and how you're able to get that food into these care facilities?

Mrs. Lindsay Turner: This project is run through our Department of Health, so I don't have 100% of the details, but part of what the guidelines did was go into some of the biological information

around the different food-borne illnesses and how to store the food. If you're preparing the food, at what temperature do you need to store it? It was that type of information. It goes through a number of different species and different animals and how to store them, as well as some of the preparation techniques.

It talks also about serving the food. Traditionally, Inuit preference would be to eat the food as fresh as possible, as soon as they cut the animal out on the land, so the guidelines look at both eating the food raw and cooking the food.

I'm aware of a pilot project that was run at the hospital here in Iqaluit, and I could find some information on the results from that project and send it to the committee.

The Chair: It would be great if you could do that, and thank you very much.

Thank you to another wonderful panel on a very serious and important subject. We're honoured to have the responsibility as the indigenous and northern affairs committee to listen, to reflect and to recommend, so we will do that.

In closing, I was eager to get this in as we were discussing the opportunities earlier of growing food in the north. The old guy with the hat driving the last spike was Lord Strathcona. As a young man, he managed the Hudson's Bay post in Hamilton Inlet, and it was his pride and pleasure to make a garden. Using fish fertilizer, he succeeded in Hamilton Inlet in growing almost every kind of vegetable, and even ripened melons and other fruit under glass. An American visitor said that the best cauliflower he ever tasted was in Lord Strathcona's garden. I don't know if there's any value in that for today's discussion, but I had to get it in.

Thank you so much, everyone.

This meeting is adjourned.

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