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Chair: Mr. Bob Bratina



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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.)): We now have quorum. Accordingly, I call this meeting of our committee to order.

We start with the acknowledgement that, in Ottawa, we meet on the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on April 29, 2021, the committee continues its study of food security in northern communities.

For our witnesses, please speak and listen in the official language of your choice. In the globe at the bottom of your screen, you can select English or French. Once you begin your testimony, you can actually switch from one language to another—as you speak—without changing that icon. When speaking, make sure that your video is turned on and that you please speak slowly and clearly. When you're not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

Pursuant to the motion adopted on March 9, 2021, I inform the committee that Silvano Cendou and Merlyn Recinos have not completed a technical pretest.

With us today by video conference are the following witnesses. We have Duane Wilson, vice-president, stakeholder relations, Arctic Co-operatives Limited. We have Daniel Lelievre, manager, store services, Fédération des coopératives du Nouveau-Québec. We have Alex Yeo, president, Canadian retail, and Michael Beaulieu, vice-president, Canadian sales and operations, North West Company. We also have Wade Thorhaug, executive director, Qajuqturvik Community Food Centre.

Thank you all for being with us today.

Mr. Wilson, would you please start your opening remarks? You have six minutes, go ahead.

Mr. Duane Wilson (Vice-President, Stakeholder Relations, Arctic Co-operatives Limited): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I offer a sincere good morning or good afternoon to you, honourable members of the committee, and to Canada C3 alumni, wherever you may find yourselves this morning. I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to participate and share a perspective on the challenges to food security in Canada's remote, fly-in communities.

I think Monsieur Lelievre would agree that when we look backwards or listen to and read the stories of early co-op leaders in Canada's Arctic, I for one have come to recognize that the co-oper-

ative movement was one of economic reconciliation, food security, social enterprise and collective entrepreneurship long before anyone had actually coined or defined these terms. Co-ops work together and have diversified over the decades to achieve scale in pursuit of their vision of people working together to improve their social and economic well-being.

Given the short time allotted, I'd like to confirm our organization's belief that a holistic food security discussion includes elements of country foods, which have historically sustained the people of Canada's Arctic and remain the most nutritious and culturally appropriate diet for many of the residents of Canada's remote fly-in communities.

Despite this, I'm going to focus my comments today more on store-bought food, an area with which our organization is most familiar and has the largest capacity to affect.

It's very simple to compare the shelf price of widgets in Winnipeg with that of widgets in Whale Cove. Many people would point to freight costs or other high operating costs as the reason to explain some of these differences.

Residents in the north move cargo around. They purchase airline tickets. They pay high costs for such basic utilities as electricity and the internet. Therefore, I think many have an appreciation of these cost differences. However, many will not fully appreciate the vital role that economies of scale—or more accurately, the lack thereof—play in the cost of goods in remote communities.

The NNC program commissioned a report on this exact matter, entitled “The Roles of Scale, Remoteness, Business Structure, Competition and Other Operational Factors in Nutrition North Canada's Relationship with Canada's Northern Retail Operations”, authored by A.J. Phillips & Associates, November 2017. For the benefit of the members of the committee, I will send a copy of this report to the clerk of the committee. I highly encourage committee members to review this report for an interesting and informative assessment of these topics.

From the executive summary, however, I'd like to highlight the following:

The Nunavut economy lacks the scale or “critical mass” to support a normal market structure, and

The long supply chains, with missing modes, exacerbate the impact of the lack of critical market mass....

While the citation specifies Nunavut, I would maintain that it applies equally well to other territories and much of the northern reaches of many provinces. An important realization for all might be that the unintended consequences of directing resources at marginal projects or at initiatives such as greenhouses, or nutrition north Canada's permission of personal orders, might have the unintended negative consequence of further eroding what economies of scale may exist to the detriment of all, for the benefit of the few. This manifests itself as economic leakage from many communities.

The report also highlights the distinct relationship between household income and food security or, inversely, food insecurity. Sample research and evidence point to a strong correlation between income and food security. In their report entitled "Household Food Insecurity in Canada", Tarasuk and Mitchell report that 60.5% of households citing social assistance as their main source of income experience food security issues, compared with fewer than 12% among those reporting their household income as being derived as wage earners.

The data from Statistics Canada's Canadian community health survey indicates that more than 93% of Nunavut households on social assistance were food insecure. Again, I'm happy to forward this report that I'm citing to the clerk of the committee for the benefit of the members.

While the nutrition north Canada program may affect part of the cost side of the equation, it does nothing to address the lack of scale, nor does it address the most reliable determinant of food security, that being income.

• (1110)

Those of us who have spent time in remote communities recognize that there is a high degree of income disparity and bimodal income distribution that are masked by statistics that cite averages or median levels of household income. In his testimony, I believe Mr. Natan Obed of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami pointed out some of these issues from their research.

I could go on at length, but out of respect for the allotted time I will stop my comments there. During this time we have, we're only going to begin to start to unpack all of the issues surrounding this important topic, but I'll be pleased to try to answer any questions and attempt to provide any clarifications. I will also provide my direct contact information to the clerk of the committee should any of the committee members wish to contact me at a later date.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. That concludes my comments.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wilson. It's very much appreciated.

Mr. Lelievre, you have six minutes, if you please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Lelievre (Manager, Store Services, Fédération des coopératives du Nouveau-Québec): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the opportunity to address the committee.

Mr. Wilson has already made a number of points about co-ops, so I will try not to repeat what he said.

Mr. Wilson and I represent two co-ops [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] and we have similar problems. I would like to focus on the infrastructure.

In Nunavik, the population is growing and the construction of new infrastructure is not currently keeping up.

Furthermore, our planes are not refrigerated, which causes a lot of difficulties in keeping the products fresh. This could create a big problem with food security.

Also, a lot of information is circulating on social media, which causes a lot of problems for our retailers. People are not aware of the real costs associated with living in the north or in remote areas. Many factors affect the cost of products and many, such as the weather, work against us. We need to educate and inform people so that they understand the reality of the north.

That's basically what I wanted to say. Mr. Wilson has already said it all and I don't want to repeat it. For us, the infrastructure needs are the greatest.

Thank you for your attention.

• (1115)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Lelievre, is that your testimony?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Lelievre: Yes, it is. I don't want to be repetitive.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go now to Mr. Yeo and Mr. Beaulieu, for up to six minutes, please.

Mr. Alex Yeo (President, Canadian Retail, North West Company): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good morning to everyone on the panel. Thank you again for extending an invitation to the North West Company to testify on this really important topic of food security in northern communities.

First, I will give you a quick overview of the North West Company. We operate 135 community stores across Canada and offer a broad range of products and services, depending on each community's needs. While our primary focus is on food, we also offer a broad selection of general merchandise, health services, optometry and pharmacy, as well as financial services. We are the largest employer of indigenous employees in the north. In addition, we operate an airline, North Star Air, that provides cargo service to 35 communities in Ontario, Manitoba and Nunavut.

I provide that overview because it gives you a sense of how deeply focused we are on the food value chain and supply chain across all of northern Canada, and it brings to light the fact that food security is something that we care deeply about as a long-standing community retailer.

The two previous speakers made a lot of points that I will make.

The first point that I really want to make is that food security, at its heart, is tied to the broader issue of income insecurity and the high cost of living and operating in the north, given the complex operating environment.

Here are a couple of facts to bring that home: Number one, the cost of energy is up to 10 times higher in Nunavut versus in the south. Making a repair to a building in the north can be 50% more expensive due to the cost of flying in supplies and skilled trades and the lack of infrastructure that previous speakers alluded to.

The cost impact of green policies can have outsized effects on the north due to the high-carbon footprint required to operate in northern Canada. As one example, the move to low-sulphur fuels for ships operating in the Arctic will increase sealift costs. It's the right thing to do, but it will have an outsized impact on food prices in Nunavut alone. Transport Canada estimated that this move to low-sulphur fuels could increase food prices by up to 2% and cost each Nunavut household between \$500 and \$700 a year. At the same time, no income support programs that many of the customers we serve depend on, whether it be child or old age benefits, are indexed to the higher cost of living, operating and working in the north.

Therefore, addressing food security will require a multi-pronged solution that's not just about food prices. As an example, nutrition north, which we will talk about, has done an excellent job of addressing the high freight cost of flying in product. Because of the subsidy for freight costs, a four-litre jug of milk in Shamattawa costs \$5.79 today, which is comparable to the price in many southern hubs.

At the same time, though, it only addresses one cost input that affects the overall issue of income insecurity. Other additional measures will be required to tackle the underlying root causes of food insecurity, whether they be infrastructure, indexing benefits in the north or making deliberate infrastructure investments to help mitigate the higher costs of operating in the north and to help northern communities mitigate the costs of greenhouse gas and climate change adaptation.

Once again, I thank the panel for inviting me and Mr. Michael Beaulieu to testify on this topic today. I would be happy to explore the topic in the rest of today's panel during the Q and A, or after this panel in individual one-on-one conversations as the committee sees fit.

Thank you again for your invitation. We look forward to continuing this conversation.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Beaulieu, were you going to add anything to Mr. Yeo's testimony?

Mr. Michael Beaulieu (Vice-President, Canadian Sales and Operations, North West Company): At this time, no, but certainly I am prepared to answer any questions the committee might have.

The Chair: That was just for my own information.

Now we'll go to the executive director of the Qajurvik Community Food Centre, Wade Thorhaug.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Wade Thorhaug (Executive Director, Qajurvik Community Food Centre): Thank you very much. Thank you to all the committee members for the invitation to speak today.

Qajurvik Community Food Centre is a charity based in Iqaluit that works to reduce barriers to healthy food in Nunavut, and we accomplish this through a variety of programs and advocacy work. I would also like to thank our national partners, Community Food Centres Canada, who worked with us on the brief submitted to this committee. Much of what I have to say has been mentioned by previous witnesses before this committee, but I will focus on a few important points.

First, you are no doubt all aware of the strong link between poverty and food insecurity, and it is no coincidence that the regions of Canada with the highest rates of food insecurity are also those with the highest rates of poverty. We cannot hope to address issues of food insecurity without first addressing lack of income. We feel strongly that boosting incomes for those living in poverty is the most impactful policy tool available. Research shows that increases in income lead to higher rates of reported food security, but recently we were able to see this first-hand. In the week that the Canada emergency response benefit, CERB, was first distributed in April 2020, demand for our emergency food services suddenly dropped by over two-thirds.

While lack of income is the principle driver of food insecurity, as you are also well aware the cost of living in the north is another major factor, particularly when it comes to food prices. The nutrition north Canada program was established to help rectify this problem, and while it undoubtedly benefits northern communities, it is worth taking stock of its shortcomings, particularly since 2021 marks the 10-year anniversary since its creation.

Natan Obed, the president of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, pointed out before this committee in December that NNC is blind to income and benefits everyone living in an eligible community. As was mentioned by Mr. Wilson, in Nunavut, income disparities are larger than in the rest of Canada. One-fifth of the population earns over \$80,000 a year, while over half of individuals earn less than \$30,000.

It was demonstrated that food insecurity in Nunavut has actually increased since the implementation of NNC, based on one report, despite an increase in the quantity of subsidized food purchased in communities. One reason for this may be that the list of eligible items that are subsidized are more commonly consumed in higher-income households. In effect, NNC may disproportionately benefit higher-income households more than lower-income ones. It is worth asking whether NNC can be reworked to primarily benefit low-income households, or whether it should be replaced by an entirely different form of intervention.

Finally, I would like to highlight the often undervalued importance of our local food system. We are grateful for the addition of the harvesters support grant as part of the NNC program, but we hope this is just the start of sustained investments in local harvesters. There is an abundance of food in the Arctic that has sustained continuous settlement of the region for millennia, yet too often it is not considered a viable food industry. Supporting harvesters has a myriad of benefits to communities, including increased economic development, skills training and nutrition, but most importantly, food from the land has enormous cultural importance for Inuit and other indigenous groups in Canada.

Too often agricultural commodities are favoured over local foods. In addition to the nutrition north program, another example of prioritization of southern or commodity-based food systems is the emphasis placed on greenhouses as a potential solution. While there are several successful growing initiatives in the north, the output is low compared with the inputs required, and there is often a lack of community support to sustain them over the long term. In the case of Inuit Nunangat, we feel agricultural solutions are a distraction from what could ultimately be accomplished by focusing on the food system that is already established. We should be wary of perpetuating colonial methods when addressing issues in indigenous communities.

In closing, I would like to reiterate our recommendations to the committee: boost incomes for those living in food insecurity through tax credits or social assistance programs, re-evaluate nutrition north Canada to ensure that it primarily benefits lower-income households, and increase support for local hunters and harvesters.

• (1125)

I would also like to thank the committee for investing so much time and attention to this issue. We should not be content to live in a country where so many of our citizens are unable to meet their dietary needs, where food banks dot the landscape and where regions that were once food sovereign are dependent on subsidized imports.

We look forward to continued engagement with the government to seek sustainable, culturally appropriate and impactful solutions to food insecurity in our communities.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We go to our committee now for the first round of questioning, which is six minutes.

I have Mr. Melillo, Mr. van Koeverden, Madam Bérubé and Ms. Ashton.

Eric, please go ahead, for six minutes.

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

I just want to thank all of the witnesses for joining us today. It's really good testimony already, and I know it's a lot to think about. I appreciate that all of you touched on the aspect of income and that we have to do more to raise incomes in the north and, of course, look for more opportunities to do that.

I will get back to that, and I hope I can put a question to all of you with the limited time I have.

I first want to go to Mr. Wilson. If I was understanding correctly, I guess you were talking a bit about how there doesn't really seem to be an advantage for companies to scale up their production. I suppose, if I'm understanding correctly, the cost per unit is still relatively high regardless of how much they are ramping up their production.

I'm curious. Can you speak in a bit more specificity to the circumstances that are leading to this result and what potential measures you feel might be able to address that.

Mr. Duane Wilson: Thank you very much for the question.

I wouldn't look at it so much in terms of ramping up production. I look at it more from the perspective of the size of the community.

The reality is.... In my past I worked for a large retail chain that wouldn't even look at a market unless it served 50,000 people for one store, so their draw was 50,000 people. When you took all of their fixed costs and you divided them over a consumer base that large, they're now very thin.

Compare and contrast that to some communities in the Arctic. If I look at Kimmirut as an example, there are about 440 people served by two stores. Many of the economists would describe markets that size as being where competition is destructive, where the intended benefits of competition are actually outweighed by the costs of the duplication of those services—two management salaries, two banks of refrigeration, two separate sets of repairs and maintenance and on and on—so that you have a little bit of a compounding effect.

Really, it's not so much about production as it is about the demand side, owing to the size of the communities. If the economists would describe these markets as being of such a size that competition is destructive, they are actually best served from an economics of scale perspective by a monopoly.

I guess that begets the next question. If a community is best served from a cost perspective by a monopoly, what type of monopoly is it best served by? We're of the belief that it's a monopoly that sees the owners of the business and the consumers as the same people. That monopoly position is not going to be abused because the group of owners and consumers are the same people.

• (1130)

Mr. Eric Melillo: I appreciate those comments. Thank you for going into more detail.

With the time I have left I will go back to you, Mr. Wilson. Hopefully, we can get to everyone else as well. We have heard some testimony, some suggestions about reforming nutrition north, specifically so that it goes directly to individuals living in the north rather than to retailers.

I guess I'm curious about two things: how you would see that benefiting the individuals themselves, and how potentially the retailers might be impacted by that. How might they have to adapt to that change if it were to be made?

Mr. Duane Wilson: I'll attempt to answer the question, given that it's somewhat hypothetical.

At the heart of it, really, I think what we're actually talking about is boosting incomes. If we use Iqaluit as an example, where the NNC level one rate is \$3.45 a kilogram and a four-litre of milk is four and a half kilograms, if the desire is to change the program entirely and, instead of subsidizing milk, to provide it in the form of income, then as long as everybody is prepared to live with the consequences that the unsubsidized milk is probably going to be priced—just doing the simple math—at between \$15 and \$20, that's probably an acceptable choice.

However, that's now reliant on the individuals taking that extra income and directing it to those nutritious perishable goods, and that is outside of my control. Those are the individual choices that people would make day in and day out.

It's important to recognize that you need to consider both halves of that equation equally, because the removal of the NNC subsidy is going to have some pretty significant consequences on the price side of the equation.

Mr. Eric Melillo: Thank you.

I was hoping to get a round here, but I think I'm running short on time, so I'll end it there.

The Chair: You're at 10 seconds. Thanks, Mr. Melillo.

Mr. van Koeverden, you have six minutes.

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

Thanks to all the witnesses for joining today. It's great to hear from you. I think I speak for all of us when I say that one of the silver linings of this Zoom meeting world that we're all living in is that we can come together without having to travel from our very distant locations.

I'm joining you today from Milton, which is the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, and many others.

I appreciate the call-out, I think it was from Mr. Wilson, to the C3 alumni. I am one, and my main exposures to life in the north have been on those vessels. I was very grateful to have an opportunity to both paddle an indigenous kayak and meet many people who live in the north. I continue to talk with them relatively often, actually.

I have a couple of questions for anybody who would like to chime in. I applaud the message of poverty reduction being the most tangible method by which we can improve the issue of food insecurity.

I would also highlight that included in the budget is over \$160 million over the next three years to expand nutrition north Canada, which I think is good news. As you have very correctly pointed out, it doesn't necessarily achieve all of the necessary outcomes that are important to highlight and consider as we look to improve social and health outcomes in the north, but one that I think might get us a little bit closer to that is the enhancement of the Canada workers benefit.

I'd love to hear from anybody who has any insight or suggestions on how the improvements to the Canada workers benefit will have an impact.

Mr. Wilson, you referred to the cohort of people who are earning less than \$30,000, which is certainly not enough to provide for a family in the north with the additional costs associated. Budget 2021 proposes to expand the Canada workers benefit to support about a million additional Canadians in those low-wage jobs, helping them to return to work and increasing those benefits.

One of the aspects of this is for people who, until now, were only eligible once they were making about \$23,000 a year. It's going up to over \$26,000 a year, so this means that, for the first time, most full-time workers earning minimum wage, which will also go up to \$15 with the national minimum wage, will receive significant support. It's an important benefit.

I'm asking for any reflections on our current poverty reduction measures and how they'll impact your customers, people living in the north, and what we could do specifically for people in the north with those programs or other ones.

Thank you.

• (1135)

The Chair: Who would like that?

Mr. Michael Beaulieu: I might just comment on that question quickly. The various programs we have seen unfold through the pandemic over the past year—whether they're provincial, territorial or otherwise—that have been directed at low-income wage earners have had a very positive impact on employees at North West across the north in terms of improving quality of life and making more affordable household decisions for those families. We're certainly in favour of the continuation of those types of benefits, in addition to the federal approach of adjusting minimum wage. We think it's a very favourable move for our employees and customers across the north.

From a policy perspective, a perspective that is worth keeping on the agenda to talk about is one that allows people to move effectively from social environment programs to wage economy programs. I think it was Mr. Wilson who commented in his earlier testimony on the difference in food security in households. Those who are in social programs are reporting somewhere in the 60.5% range in terms of food insecurity versus only 12% in the wage economy. I think it's important for government to keep on the agenda programs that allow people to transition from social programs into the wage economy without potentially losing a lot of the benefits that go with social programming.

Across many of our northern markets for instance, heating fuel for households is supported by income programs. When somebody joins the wage economy, often the trade-off is so great that they essentially can't afford to work. I'll just leave that comment with you.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Do you think that balance between not being able to afford to work...?

This increase is about \$2,400 a year for families and I presume that it would have a similar impact on families in the north. My question is for you or anybody who would be interested in taking it. An additional \$200 a month for families helps, obviously, but will it have an impact? Do very many people living in the north earn minimum wage? The current minimum wage is less than \$15, which is certainly not a living wage anywhere in Canada, but particularly not in the north.

Do you think that additional threshold of \$4,000 would maybe offset, as you put it, not being able to afford to work?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds. Go ahead.

Mr. Michael Beaulieu: I think it certainly heads down that path. I don't know if I have enough data to give you a real, accurate answer on that topic, but it definitely is headed in the right direction.

For our own workforce, we're above minimum wage for almost all roles except for potentially what we would call our casuals, which are really just starting, part-time, student-type wages. We continue to look at our own wage programs as helping address some of the food insecurity issues and enabling our employees to live better lives.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Mr. Beaulieu, in my very limited time, what you're saying is that the addition of a \$15—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. van Koeverden. We're out of time now. We're past six minutes.

Madam Bérubé, you have six minutes. Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

I am on the territory of the Cree and Anishinaabe of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou. It is a very large territory, covering almost half of Quebec.

My sincere thanks to the witnesses for joining us. Their testimony is very valuable.

The Fédération des coopératives du Nouveau-Québec, represented by Mr. Lelievre, belongs to a group of 14 member co-operatives from Inuit communities located along the coasts of Hudson Bay and Ungava Bay, all the way to Nunavik. So I would like to ask Mr. Lelievre a question.

Mr. Lelievre, earlier, you mentioned non-refrigerated transportation. Can you elaborate on that and on the potential impact in relation to what you have told us?

Can you give us some examples of infrastructure issues and what could be improved?

• (1140)

Mr. Daniel Lelievre: Right now, the nutrition north Canada program causes a big price increase for certain categories of food, such as fresh milk.

When transporting fresh milk to Salluit, we have to consider the delays in loading the plane in Montreal. This means that the milk can be unrefrigerated for six to seven hours. Occasionally, the plane has to return to the Montreal airport because of changing weather conditions. Products very often have to be thrown in the garbage before they even reach the shelves. This causes a significant increase in cost. In small communities of 150 or 200 people, when two deliveries of milk are thrown away, the impact on the profitability of the co-operatives is significant. So they may look for extra profit to compensate, because the infrastructure is not adequate. This results in additional losses, which could be avoided if the infrastructure were better in terms of storage or of transportation by air or boat.

Right now, everything is very expensive. The nutrition north Canada program helps us a lot, it's true, but increasing the sales of certain products does not necessarily mean profitability for the co-ops. For example, repairing a refrigerator is very expensive. Each time a refrigerator breaks down in a co-op, it costs an average of \$3,000 to \$5,000 for the actual repair and for the return transportation of a technician from the south. For a small village of 200 people, that is a huge cost.

Everyone focuses on transportation, but it's not the only thing to consider. Local labour and labour from the south are very expensive. That contributes a lot to the increase in prices. I always talk about food, because that's what I know best, but the fact that infrastructure is not keeping up with the demographics has a tremendous impact on everything else.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Do you believe that the nutrition north Canada program should be reviewed so that we can ultimately reduce food insecurity?

Mr. Daniel Lelievre: Of course, every program must be reviewed regularly, but we must have reliable statistics if we want to make the right decisions. If the decisions are made too quickly, we can end up with negative consequences. I would say that the nutrition north Canada program is still good for Nunavik right now. However, it is different for Nunavut.

From my point of view, the biggest problem remains the personal purchases of products ordered from Montreal, for example. The revenue goes to outside businesses, not those in Nunavik. When consumers order from the south, they do not participate in the economic development of their community. The repercussions are not huge, but they are still quite significant. People need to be made aware of the fact that buying from outside has an impact on the development of communities, which could otherwise have more local jobs. I think that is what needs to be reviewed.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Have you noticed an increase in the current crisis?

Mr. Daniel Lelievre: The co-operatives have seen a nice increase in sales during the pandemic. This is mainly because people from Nunavik could not travel to the south, at least not easily. They were therefore forced to buy local.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: What do you think the government should do to ensure food security for all northerners and indigenous people, regardless of their socio-economic status?

Mr. Daniel Lelievre: Increasing the guaranteed minimum income is a good solution. Poverty comes in different forms in Nunavik, as you mentioned. The minimum income should be increased there. Many people earn less than \$30,000 per year and have four or five children. That is very expensive.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Earlier, we talked about increasing income, about the importance of increasing support, but there is also traditional food. In your opinion, what is the situation in northern Quebec?

• (1145)

Mr. Daniel Lelievre: In northern Quebec, traditional food—

[English]

The Chair: Please make it short.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Lelievre: In northern Quebec, traditional food is made only locally. No company smokes char or cuts meat. It is only done between villages at this time.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry. We're well over, and we have lots of business to continue to. Thank you for that.

Ms. Ashton, you have six minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Thank you.

First, to all of the witnesses today, thank you. Many of you have referenced the dire infrastructure needs across the north and of course how it impacts the work you do. You've talked about the impacts on the cost of shipping. You've also talked about how climate change is hitting the north. As anyone working in Manitoba knows, first nations across the east side of Manitoba have worked tirelessly, over a number of years, to try to realize long-term infrastructure solutions—specifically, the construction of an all-weather road. I want to acknowledge that Bloodvein and Berens River first nations were able to get the road built before the provincial government cut the program and of course the federal government stepped away as well.

Of course, the North West Company would know the circumstances or the work that first nations have done on this front, because you have stores in every single one of these communities that are still fighting for an all-weather road—Pauingassi, Little Grand Rapids, Poplar River First Nation, St. Theresa Point, Garden Hill, Wasagamack, Red Sucker Lake, Oxford House, God's Lake Narrows and Gods River. All of these first nations were slated to build all-weather roads themselves, along with the work of others, and of course it's been devastating to not have that project come to fruition. We know that climate change has hit hard, further isolating these communities. We know that the COVID-19 crisis has also exacerbated isolation and has had impacts in terms of food insecurity.

To the North West Company representatives, the goal of this meeting is to bring forward recommendations to the federal government. Of course, it's important to have recommendations that are in line with what first nations are calling for and recommendations that really look towards the long-term well-being of these communities.

Would you support the call of east-side first nations for federal support—and, of course, provincial government support, but the focus here is the federal government—for the construction of an all-weather road along the east side of Lake Winnipeg as a way of dealing with food insecurity and overall well-being?

Mr. Alex Yeo: Thank you, Ms. Ashton, for the question. We'd support any infrastructure investment, including the projects you mentioned, that would address the underlying costs of operating northern food security. Obviously, all-weather road access is one, but there are other forms of infrastructure investment that are just as important for the northern communities that we serve.

One example would be the move to renewable or more reliable sources of energy. One example I can share with you is in Pikangikum. The move from diesel-generated power to line power has made a huge improvement in the food security of that community. Their breakdowns and their brownouts are much fewer, with therefore less wear and tear on their appliances and houses. That's one example. Another example would be the investment in community freezers in the north so that local food and local food production can be used as part of the food sources.

Yes, we would support and definitely be part of any form of infrastructure investment, especially a broad infrastructure investment program that really addresses the underlying issues I've highlighted around income security and food insecurity.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I appreciate that.

Of course, all of these first nations I just referenced are already on the hydro line, so really, the need for an east-side road is top of mind.

I referenced Pauingassi. This is a first nation that received national attention during the COVID crisis. They don't have an all-weather road, and an acute COVID patient ended up waiting 17 hours for a helicopter to land on the ice. These conditions are, I think we can agree, unacceptable, and whether it's in terms of food security or broader life-and-death issues, there needs to be a long-term solution here. I appreciate your response on that.

Again to the North West Company, I want to acknowledge, of course, that we know that high costs are a real concern, and often we see on social media people sharing the high cost of goods in northern stores to call for action. For example, in July of 2020, during the pandemic, in Arctic Bay, many people spoke out against the fact that a package of baby wipes was priced at \$31.25, a shocking figure.

I understand that the North West Company took steps to apologize, but that was only after this came to light through social media. It shouldn't have to take people taking to social media to expose such an unfair practice.

What does the northern store have in place to make sure that the prices you are charging are, in fact, fair practices, in line with the subsidies you receive so that it's not only when social media storms hit that we see action from your company?

• (1150)

The Chair: You have just half a minute.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Alex Yeo: Thank you for the question.

I'll start by saying that, during COVID, we've been especially sensitive to the issue of food prices. We froze prices for 60 days after COVID hit, and we didn't take any cost increases and pass them

through. We pass through all freight subsidies from NNC, and we do not take a single cent. We audited it, and that's been proven. The last piece I would say is that, as a whole in the company, we make four cents on the dollar for every dollar of revenue because of the high operating costs I've referenced.

Are we perfect? No, there will be some examples where we've made mistakes in terms of our own systems, but that is never intentional and we've always learned from it and put controls in place to ensure that those kinds of mistakes, in terms of the way the prices are communicated, don't get repeated again. Those examples, as we've said, we've apologized for, but those were unintended. We've always corrected them, even as soon as we've noticed them on the shelves. We do not take any unintended profits, and we've taken the right steps during COVID to ensure that the customers we serve are taken care of.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to ask the committee's indulgence. We're almost at noon, so I'm going to suggest that we have an intervention from each of the parties for the five-minute and two-and-a-half-minute round, which would be Mr. Viersen, Ms. Jones, Madam Bérubé and Ms. Ashton. If there is no opposition to that, because we still have another panel to go, then I propose that we proceed in that manner.

Is everyone okay with that? I'll take that as a yes.

Mr. Viersen, you have five minutes.

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

I want to thank the witnesses for being here today.

I want to pick up on a comment that Mr. Thorhaug made about northern Iqaluit when he talked to us about northern food production. I've been to Iqaluit once, along with Mr. Anandasangaree. We went there together with the committee a couple of years back, and that was a comment that I made as we left there around northern food production. We heard that, for the last 100,000 years, there had been 14,000 people living in northern Canada and they survived, yet today, those people seem to be struggling to get food. I asked, "Where's all the local food production? What happened to it?" He commented about that as well. I wonder if Mr. Thorhaug has any ideas about how we can restore that northern food production, one idea in particular or maybe a broader strategy on that.

Go ahead, Mr. Thorhaug.

Mr. Wade Thorhaug: Thank you for the question.

The reasons for the lack of capacity in local food production are numerous. They go back to our colonial history, to the forced settlements and communities and to the dog slaughter, but the biggest reason today is that it's been hard to reconcile food production, harvesting and hunting activities with the wage economy. A lot of hunters who are operating now are doing this on a part-time basis. They have to find sources of revenue elsewhere, say from a spouse or from a full-time job. They're not able to pursue this as a full-time profession or a full-time activity.

There was a point in the not-too-distant past when a hunter could generate revenue through the sale of furs. Now the price of furs is continuously declining. There isn't really a market for that anymore, so their sources of revenue are essentially nil. That's why we are looking at ways to return hunting to what it once was, the most respected profession in the community. I don't know the exact mechanism to do this, but there are a few ideas that have been floated. One is that we provide a salary to hunters and they provide the food freely to communities. There have already been some pilots that have shown the benefits to communities more than outweigh the cost of the salary. In the meantime, there could be smaller-scale ways that we could support hunters.

• (1155)

The Chair: Mr. Wilson had his hand up, Mr. Viersen.

Mr. Wilson, go ahead.

Mr. Duane Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to comment briefly on this. It's really twofold. Mr. Thorhaug mentioned some of the obstacles to hunting today and the need to have an income to, in essence, subsidize hunting. One of the obstacles to hunting that many of us are hearing about is the high cost of supplies. I think that comes back to the question of income to be able to equip oneself to pursue hunting.

The other thing worth mentioning—and this is why country food is only a part of the solution—is that for millennia, the people were part of nature and these things were always in balance. Now, whether it's through modern medicine or through health and other social services, the life expectancy is improving. That's a good thing, but it might be throwing the balance of nature off. Hunters are now reporting having to go further and further. Climate change is impacting where game are. All of these things are very intertwined. It's like a spider's web. When you pull on one side, other strands tighten or loosen accordingly.

Thank you for the opportunity.

The Chair: You're just about out of time, Arnold.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: I'll cede my time. Thanks.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Ms. Jones, please go ahead for five minutes.

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

I was really glad to hear these witnesses today. I know that you have first-hand experience in providing services around food security in the north.

I want to say to Mr. Thorhaug, I've been in your facility in Iqaluit and I've been very impressed with the work that you've been doing there.

Mr. Wilson, I'm a C3 alumnus too. I had the pleasure of travelling with MP Adam van Koeverden and saw him in that Inuit canoe. He was pretty awesome, let me tell you.

I know that we also have another guest coming up from Arctic Fresh. I've toured their facilities as well. I want to acknowledge the good work that's being done.

I also want to say that over the past year we've talked a little bit about the CERB program. There have been over 10,000 Nunavummiut who have received the CERB program. That's more than one in four of every resident. When you look at these programs that we're translating into benefits on the ground over the last year, everything from caregiver benefits to the emergency response benefit in particular, there has been over \$100 million in new money that has been generated in that economy. That's why we've been able to see things like a little less pressure on the food banks and other services.

However, having said that, we know that the demand is still there. This year, in the budget we added \$163 million in additional funding for food security. That's in addition to what is currently being paid out now under the harvester support program, which, in its first years, has already been shown to be successful, and there are many opportunities to build on that program to meet the need for food security of traditional foods. Also, it's in addition to what we currently pay out to supplement nutritious foods like those that come through the North West Company and through other companies across that region.

I hear several things from people on the ground on a regular basis. One is that they want to have the ability for direct ordering. What do you think is the role that government can play in that and how do you see that translating on the ground?

We also get requests for subsidized shipping for online orders. Is there a role for the Government of Canada, and how do you see that we could play a role in seeing some of these things materialize?

Of course, the other one is with regard to an income supplement. As I said, this past year, over \$100 million in additional money went into the local economy, into families' pockets, into homes. We also added more money into food banks, food services, seniors networks. In addition to that, we paid out money directly to Inuit-based governments, which they could use for both food security vouchers and heat security vouchers for residents.

All of these things we've seen are making a difference. How do we improve on it and how do we ensure that people have more options for food security than what they have today?

I'm going to listen to what the panellists have to say. You can speak from your perspective of the services you currently deliver, or maybe you have thoughts that are outside of what what you're currently doing that we'd be interested in hearing.

• (1200)

The Chair: And do it in one minute....

Ms. Yvonne Jones: We can start with you, Mr. Thorhaug.

Mr. Wade Thorhaug: Thank you.

I do remember your visit at the centre back when in-person visits weren't frowned upon.

I won't speak to the first two questions because there are a lot of logistics experts on the call who could probably answer that. However, on the third one, the benefits that have been flowing into the territory this year have been amazing because we've had these problems for years and we've actually been able to see an improvement in a lot of people's livelihoods thanks to this.

That being said, because in the years to come we won't be dealing with a pandemic, we're worried that we'll have the same problems of food insecurity but we won't have the same level of financial supports that we did in this year. In a way, while the country was essentially in crisis, a lot of measures, the supports, actually created some benefit for the territory.

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sorry. We're out of time at this point.

We go to Madam Bérubé for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

On the subject of food insecurity, we were just talking about the environment and climate change, which is taking place despite everything.

Mr. Lelievre, can you tell us about the possibility of increased risk of food insecurity and environmental contamination because of climate change and everything else that is happening?

Mr. Daniel Lelievre: Let me tell you about what I see personally. When I started working in the north 20 years ago, the ice was forming at the end of September. You could start ice fishing the first week of October. Today, sometimes you can't start ice fishing until the end of December. In just 20 years, we have lost two to three months of ice fishing. So I can imagine that, if we don't do anything, if we don't do what we have to do, there may no longer be ice in Nunavik in 15 or 20 years.

The infrastructure is not keeping up with the demographics, as I said. In the past, we could send strawberries to the north with no problem. Today, the strawberries have to be wrapped in styrofoam to protect them, which is an additional cost. The same is true for fresh meat, which is frozen before shipping. In the past, the risk of the ice breaking up lasted for one or two months. Today, it's five or six months. The meat also has to be placed in styrofoam to protect it. For this reason, consumer prices are increasing dramatically.

• (1205)

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: What do you think the government could do to allow indigenous communities and northerners to hunt, fish and ensure their food security more?

Mr. Daniel Lelievre: As many people have mentioned, the cost of basic hunting equipment, such as snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles and canoes, is very high in the north.

A low-income family cannot afford a canoe, an outboard motor and a snowmobile all at once. This greatly limits hunting and fishing, which allows people to be self-sufficient in food.

An additional subsidy program for hunting and fishing could be helpful.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you for that.

I'm not sure, for the NDP intervention, whether it's Ms. Ashton or Mr. Cannings.

Niki, are you ready to go?

You have two and a half minutes. Please go ahead.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Yes. Thank you very much. I think in the second hour my colleague Richard Cannings will take over.

There's a lot of focus on poverty reduction, which is absolutely critical. I also very much appreciate the federal government initiatives that many are pointing to, which were very impactful during this crisis. I want to acknowledge the work of the federal government, and the way they responded to many of our calls in the NDP as well, to get at poverty reduction across the country, but specifically, obviously, in the north.

I think it's really critical that we acknowledge that many across the north are in a constant state of crisis when it comes to poverty and food insecurity. COVID exacerbated it, but this is ongoing. We need, then, to see measures, including direct financial supports and the creative measures that have been developed, such as the harvesters food program. From it, for example, here in Manitoba many received fish through the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation. This was brought together by northern fishers. This was a really critical program, and of course there are other programs to point to as well.

In terms of poverty reduction, we know that co-op models and community food centres are very important models to get at both meeting the needs and bringing back revenue into communities, job creation, etc.

I'm wondering whether, perhaps from the co-op, you could speak to how important the co-op model is in terms of poverty reduction.

Mr. Wilson...?

The Chair: You have one minute. Go ahead.

Mr. Duane Wilson: Thank you for the question.

Obviously, I've drunk, swished and swallowed the kool-aid about the co-op model, because I believe firmly that small isolated communities, which many would consider a captive market, are the types of communities that, if they're best served by a monopoly, are at risk of that monopoly's power being abused.

To me, it's only natural that you get the best of both worlds when the owners and the consumers—the users of the business—are the same people. That's how these things can operate in harmony.

Anything that represents allowing for direct orders or other distractions takes away from that critical mass. It represents economic leakage and is ultimately bad for the community.

Through the co-op model, which is autonomous local ownership and member democratic-control based on its seven principles, you are now returning control—influence on pricing strategies, what to do with surpluses and investments in local infrastructure—back to the community level and not to an office in Winnipeg like ours.

I think that's very important. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That brings our committee to a suspension for the replacement of the panel.

I'd like to thank our witnesses for excellent testimony. We've spent a very productive and informative hour or more.

Now we need to set up for our next group, so this meeting is temporarily suspended.

• (1205) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1210)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

Welcome to our witnesses who are now all wired up technically and ready to go. It sounds good.

From Arctic Fresh Inc., we have Silvano Cendou, vice-president, operations; and the vice-president of business development, Merlyn Recinos.

Also with us is the chief of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation, Roberta Joseph.

Arctic Fresh, please go ahead for six minutes.

Mr. Silvano Cendou (Vice-President, Operations, Arctic Fresh Inc.): Mr. Chair, thank you very much.

Do we each have six minutes or is it six minutes in total?

The Chair: Normally it's the one. You're both representing the same group.

• (1215)

Mr. Silvano Cendou: I'll make mine very quick, then.

I've listened to the witnesses in the prior session and it sounded quite good. They're doing a lot of things, but it sounds like they're relying on the government quite a bit. They have all kinds of issues that are happening and not a lot of solutions.

I would like to pass on the rest of my time to Mr. Recinos, who will talk about Arctic Fresh and what we're proposing.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Merlyn Recinos (Vice-President, Business Development, Arctic Fresh Inc.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, thank you, everybody, for the opportunity to appear before the committee today to discuss this. To us, it's very important and it's what drives us. Food insecurity is our mandate.

I'll tell you a bit about Arctic Fresh and how we started. We started because, when my wife was growing up, she went through a very food insecure time, all of her childhood. She told me that, when she used to have tea and bannock to eat once a day, most of the time they had to use the same bag of tea for multiple cups. This went on through most of her childhood when she was growing up. Now she's a teacher and she started to see this again in schools with all the kids.

One night we were here and thought, how can we change this? How can we do this? That's how Arctic Fresh started.

Arctic Fresh is a social enterprise. Our mandate is to fight food insecurity and to build Inuit capacity to empower individuals and communities.

We first started with an online store. The online store was to provide personal orders directly to the customers. This would allow us to give them an opportunity to be able to order directly but also at reduced price, not having the cost of a heavy overhead.

We did really well when we started. The communities responded very well. As we progressed, we realized that we needed to really dive deep into food insecurity and what food insecurity is, especially in the north.

What we quickly realized was that the same shirt does not fit everybody. There are different levels of food insecurity. What the government and everybody was doing was really not fighting food insecurity but making things more available to the people who already were able to be food secure.

What we did was level down and really dive more into the food insecurity. We quickly realized that we do not have an economy in our communities. Every time a dollar gets spent in our communities, 93¢ of that dollar leaves the community on the first transaction. That is huge.

We started to look at it and we asked, “How can we create an economy?” What we need is to create an economy to be able to create those jobs. If you create those jobs, you are creating wealth within the community. If you rotate that dollar as many times as you can before it leaves the community, you're actually creating wealth within the community.

We looked at micro-businesses. I was listening earlier about how there is not a big market for an operation. Yes, that's correct if you're looking at the operation as a normal size. We have to be innovative. Inuit are the most innovative people ever. That's what kept them alive for thousands of years. They thrived because they were innovative. They invented sunglasses. They invented the kayak. They invented so many things because they needed them.

By creating micro-businesses, you are able to rotate that dollar many times, which then in turn creates wealth for all those people to have those things.

In regard to our operations, we have the online store, but we're also looking at creating a self-sustaining store. We believe there is a huge inequality of wealth in the communities, and most of the previous speakers have talked about this.

How can we create it? We're looking at a harvesting support program. We have done mainly pilot projects where we pay hunters to go hunting, they return with the food and, in return, we take that food and sell it locally at a much reduced cost.

Most of our community relies on country food for over 30% of their food. Some rely on it very heavily, for over 60% of their food consumption. We've developed a study and a business plan to create a self-sustaining store. This self-sustaining store will be able to have a greenhouse that can produce the product, but it also has a meat shop. It's all modular, so it can be made into different things. Whatever the community needs, that's how it can be set up.

• (1220)

This modular house would enable hunters to hunt seal, fish and caribou, come back and process that. Now we will exchange with other communities. Naujaat is very heavy with caribou, but they don't have some of the other things. Now we can do an interchange of processed country food that would allow us to create a market within our communities.

We are also working—

The Chair: You're almost out of time, Mr. Recinos. Can you finish, please?

Mr. Merlyn Recinos: Yes.

We have looked at different things and we're working with the Canadian Space Agency as well as NASA to create systems for how we can give food autonomy back to Inuit communities.

The Chair: I'm sure this discussion is going to be picked up. If there is anything that is missed, and if we don't hear it come back again, you can certainly submit more written information to our committee.

Thank you for that.

Mr. Merlyn Recinos: Thank you.

The Chair: I now invite Chief Joseph to go ahead for six minutes.

Chief Roberta Joseph, welcome.

Chief Roberta Joseph (Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation): Good day.

I would like to thank you all for the opportunity to present on behalf of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in to today's committee on food security in northern communities, as this is a key priority for Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in.

Food security is a growing concern in our northern community. Having access at all times to fresh nutritious food is crucial to the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in culture and physical well-being. Our elders have advised us about the importance of ensuring adequate food supply and the possibility of future scarcity.

Yukon first nations have taken steps to address these concerns, including the establishment of community gardens and farms. The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in general assembly provided direction to its council to address issues associated with food security, including the development of sustainable local food production and ensuring that aboriginal rights to traditional foods are respected and maintained.

Nearly all of the food sold in Dawson stores, including perishable items, are shipped to our community by transport truck. The lengthy drive to Dawson City from major distribution centres in the south, often 35 or more hours away, adds a considerable cost to groceries. The increased prices for food are often a hardship for our first nation citizens, especially those living in marginal circumstances. The guarantee of supply is also tenuous, as illustrated by a highway washout in 2012 that severed supply routes to the Yukon. Fresh produce was not available in stores within hours of the highway closure, as people stocked up in anticipation of lengthy supply disruptions.

Less appreciated is a diminishing supply of traditional foods and impacts on the first nations way of life. Food security in Canada is also defined through a western lens and measured using economic indicators. More specifically, one's ability to purchase food is the sole determinant of food security. This measure, however, does not account for the importance of traditional foods and medicines. The diet of first nations people in the Yukon relies on the access to healthy populations of fish, caribou, moose and birds. Harvesting this wildlife involves traditional practices integral to our sense of self and maintenance of culture.

While our people have had access to abundant numbers of wildlife for millennia, that supply is no longer guaranteed. Recently, plummeting chinook salmon stocks have meant several years of voluntarily forgoing harvest of traditional food, and chinook are now listed as a species of concern. Not harvesting salmon has meant the abrupt termination of a cultural practice that survived untold generations.

Climate change and encroaching development is also impacting migration patterns of wildlife, including caribou, which has led to disconnect between Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in citizens and traditional harvesting practices. Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in council has lent its voice to efforts aimed at limiting development in both Alaska and the Yukon that would impact those migratory patterns.

At the direction of our citizens, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in established a working and learning farm to ensure food security for our citizens and the greater Klondike community. We built the farm with financial assistance from the Canadian government and developed culturally sensitive agriculture training with Yukon College. The initial cohort of students included 18 Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in citizens, including a significant number of youth and vulnerable individuals.

Our efforts were also recognized with substantial investment from the Arctic Inspiration Prize that was used for the construction of a three-season greenhouse. The farm is steadily increasing its capacity to supply local produce and meats. Feeding our community is a great source of pride for our first nation. We are hopeful this farm will become as integral a part of our culture as fishing and hunting game has been since time immemorial.

In conclusion, the rivers and the forests of hundreds of kilometres in either direction of Dawson City have sustained the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in for millennia, but a changing world and quite literally a changing landscape have meant adapting to ensure adequate food supply.

There are still many questions about what the future might bring, including how food will be transported to our community as petroleum-fired vehicles are phased out. Ongoing federal financial assistance for our farm and other similar first nations operations is crucial, as is a commitment from Canada to honour its national and international obligations with respect to first nations right to access, use and benefit from a safe and healthy food environment.

I'd like to thank the committee for the opportunity today, and I appreciate all of the presentations that have been provided.

Mahsi cho.

• (1225)

The Chair: It's our pleasure to hear presentations such as you just made, Chief Joseph, and from our Arctic Fresh guests as well.

Now it's time for committee questions. I have Mr. Schmale, Mr. Battiste, Madam Bérubé and Mr. Cannings.

Jamie, are you okay to go?

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): I am.

Thank you, Chair, and thank you to our witnesses.

Chief Joseph, maybe I can start with you. You talked about the changing landscape. It seems in some cases that we're looking at transportation as a major issue. Is there any discussion in your community or even in the territorial government about deepwater ports to help with shipping access?

Chief Roberta Joseph: Unfortunately, we don't have availability for deepwater ports. We have the Yukon River, which freezes up every winter. The Yukon River is a lengthy river, the longest in northern Canada. It goes through Alaska and into the Bering Sea, so it's quite extensive.

The other port that's near the Yukon is Skagway, Alaska. I guess it makes it more complicated to ship from another country. We haven't had discussions about that with the Yukon government. We've had discussions with regard to transportation and ensuring there are emergency measures in place should something disrupt the transportation process into the Yukon. There are times when emergency measures can't be taken quickly enough. That's something we'll have to take into greater consideration within the emergency measures process.

Thanks.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Thank you very much, Chief Joseph. I appreciate that.

Perhaps I'll quickly jump over to the Arctic Fresh group.

I want to continue the conversation about keeping money inside the community and providing that economic opportunity to citizens. Can you talk a bit about what you were just closing on, the work you're doing with the Canadian Space Agency to help with food access?

Mr. Merlyn Recinos: Thank you.

We are working with this [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. We started with a program in Cambridge Bay, where we're building capacity for individuals, with the arctic research station in Cambridge Bay, for the growth of vegetables. We have actually developed it further. As you know, they have launched what is called the "Deep Space Food Challenge", which is about how we use technology to innovate food production in harsh climates. It's potentially to be done in space, but the testing is done on earth so it can have a significant impact as well on our human population.

We are working with them to see how we can utilize technology from around the world—because the challenge is open to the world—and incorporate it into what we already have here. We hope to be able to return that food autonomy to our communities so they can grow, harvest and process their food and create jobs as they're doing it. If you bring a vegetable or meat from the south, it creates jobs in those places, but the jobs it creates here are low-paying ones.

How do we create better jobs within our community? That's about building capacity and utilizing the systems and innovations to be able to create it.

• (1230)

Mr. Jamie Schmale: What about the processing capacity? Obviously it's quite low, but you're right about the jobs down south. Are too many rules, regulations and red tape stopping somebody—even a co-op or whatever structure you want—from opening up a processing plant, whether it be for meat or otherwise, in the north?

Mr. Merlyn Recinos: No. As I said, we have developed the feasibility as well as the business plan for it. The biggest thing was to get a health-certified processing place. It has to be certified for us to be able to process the food. What we have done is look at modules. The self-container storage module is really as much as we need. If the community is big, you would potentially have two processing modules. If the community is small, you would potentially have one processing module.

One of the biggest issues is infrastructure. Infrastructure is costly in the north. For someone to invest in this, they would require a very strong commitment. We need them to make that commitment, though, if our end goal is to be able to fight food insecurity. Now we're doing it in two ways: We're creating local food at a reduced cost, and we are also creating jobs within the community.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Is there any look towards—and probably your group is already looking at this—large-scale greenhouses or something like that, to grow vegetables year-round and try to help stabilize that market?

The Chair: Very briefly, go ahead.

Mr. Merlyn Recinos: Thank you.

Yes, we have looked at it. To be honest with you, the large-scale greenhouses don't make too much sense because our community is small and the cost of transportation to other communities is too high. What we have looked at as well is a modular greenhouse that would allow us to expand it or retract it as the community needs.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Battiste is next for six minutes.

Jaime.

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

I want to start off with Arctic Fresh. One thing you mentioned was that there are not a lot of solutions being mentioned, but you did have a unique idea, which I heard. You mentioned the importance of establishing an economy through micro-businesses.

Can you tell me how that is different from the way co-ops work, and why this is a best practice that the government should consider?

Mr. Merlyn Recinos: The co-ops work in a system where the whole thing is to create revenue for the community, for the owners, at the end of the day. Most of this system is not managed or run by the owners. They purchase, they pay and then at the end of the day they receive a patronage if the system is well run.

The difference between that and a small economy is that you, as an individual, your livelihood, is invested into this micro-business, so you want it to be successful. Not only that, but you have the autonomy to make decisions in regard to how and what you want to do within your business.

We're building capacity right now. We've helped 15 small businesses to open across Baffin Island, and we're doing this by teaching them how to properly run a business on the ground. We're supporting them with logistics. We're supporting them with everything else. Now they're running their own businesses, and it's about their investments into them. The biggest thing they talk about is how they want to make something for their community, but also for their kids. The investment is bigger and they take ownership of it and pride in it, versus a system where it's tailored and layered out so that they purchase and they get patronage, but they have very little in between.

• (1235)

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Can you expand on that a bit and tell me if you believe that it's just a matter of communities supporting each others' economies that would help the food security, or is there more to this solution? Feel free to elaborate on it, because I find it interesting.

Mr. Merlyn Recinos: I'll give you a quick example.

Right now, let's say that you have \$100, and you want to go and buy a coffee cup at the co-op. You go and buy that coffee cup at the co-op and you pay the \$100. The co-op, let's say, makes \$20 on the coffee cup. The remaining of that is shipped down south. Now, what the co-op does is reinvest that and hire a few people here and there.

With the micro-businesses, let's say, you have that \$100 and you go and buy it from a micro-business. You give that person \$100. They're going to need clothing. They're going to go to the clothing micro-store to buy it. Now you have rotated that money and you have created an economy.

As many times as you can get that \$100 to go around the community, you're creating that economy. You're giving them an opportunity to really gain that employment. They're in control of it, so they're the ones who are deciding.

It plays at how we get people into the paying system or the wage economy—but on their own terms.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Do you think that would remedy the fact that there are a lot of inequalities in how much things cost up north? You're still dealing with higher rates and higher prices, but you're still, I understand, spreading it out.

Does that mean it solves the challenges facing food security?

Mr. Merlyn Recinos: It does, in a way.

When we look at food security, a lot of times we look at food. We don't think about everything else that is part of food security. When we dive deep into the acknowledgement of food security, it's not just about the food. It's about the wages, the employment.

I'll give you a quick example. Housing is very expensive in the north. Why is that? It's because most of the people who are building those houses in the north are coming from outside our territory, which then increases flights, accommodations and meals for all of the people who are here. You take the housing, which potentially would cost you, let's say, \$150,000, to about \$250,000 because now you're paying for flights, you're paying for accommodations and you're paying for meals.

By doing this locally and creating those local economies, you're then able to lower that cost of housing, but also keep as much money as you can within your community. By doing that, you have created more employment and you have created more wages that are able to be spread around the community.

Like I said, going back to food security, it's a really complex term. When we look at it, we have to look at it with a complex view.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Given the unique market you operate in, are there specific areas in which government policies could be put in place that would support your work?

Mr. Merlyn Recinos: There are many things. We talked about the nutrition north program. We struggled very heavily with nutrition north at the beginning. In the way it was done, nutrition north is really created for large retailers. It's not really created for the people. It's not created for the small retailers. It's created for the large retailers.

Also, there's opportunity for funding more harvesting support programs that are able to bring more economy into the communities. As for infrastructure, most of the previous people have talked about it, so I don't want to repeat, but that investment goes into the community and its people—not so much the retailers and their people, but the community itself.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Madam Bérubé, you have six minutes. Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

My questions are for the representatives from Arctic Fresh.

Earlier, you said that you were fighting food insecurity and that you had an online store. You also talked about the different levels of food insecurity.

Could you elaborate on that?

• (1240)

[*English*]

Mr. Merlyn Recinos: Yes, thank you.

We operate what I call an octopus—I guess it has grown to be an octopus.

At the beginning we operated the online store, through which we wanted to provide more affordable and better food and in a bigger variety to the communities. Slowly, as we progressed with the concept of food insecurity, we realized that it's not as easy as that. If we truly wanted to fight food insecurity, we needed to do more. Today, therefore, we operate the online store, we have a construction company, we have an airline charter company and we have this business development company as well. All of this is to help the communities and the people in the communities, to empower them to do something, as they want to do.

I said that we operate many different things. Right now we're renovating a 4,000-square-foot building in Igloolik that we're going to turn into our head office, where we're going to be hiring people to manage all of our operations, from here in Igloolik.

We're also looking at building three of the self-sustaining stores that I told you about in three different communities in order to do an interchange of country food. We are heavy with fish and seal, for example, but we don't get a lot of muktuk or caribou.

We're breaking down food insecurity as a complex issue and are trying to see how we can tackle each level of it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Earlier, we were talking about traditional foods. We know full well that traditional foods are important to the physical and mental health of members of all communities.

Could you tell us more about the importance of those foods?

[English]

Mr. Merlyn Recinos: Yes. Traditional food is irreplaceable. It's something that connects the individual to the land, and back and forth. Our communities rely heavily on country food—fish, caribou, seal, walrus. As I said, at least 30% of our communities—this is from a study we have done—rely on country food. Now what we need to do is figure out how we can support this.

Wade talked about the wage economy and how, for hunters, it is expensive for machines and for different things. We can support that by subsidizing part of that. We can support them by subsidizing some of the machines and the oil and gas that are being used. In exchange, they come back and sell their food to us, the char and whatever. We process it and are able to sell it locally at a much reduced cost.

Right now, we only have a couple of processing places in Nunavut, but if I want, here in Igloolik, to buy a fillet of Arctic char from the processing plant in Rankin Inlet, I'm paying \$60 for it, even though I can go and grab an Arctic char from a hunter here for \$20.

How, then, do we gain back by processing locally, creating jobs and creating an economy?

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: I would like to ask Chief Joseph a question.

Do you think access to federal programs could be improved in terms of community food infrastructure?

[English]

Chief Roberta Joseph: Thank you for that question.

Yes, I think it would be great to improve access, for example, if there were an emergency situation. One of the things that we were considering was an airship, as well as working in conjunction with them. I think other first nations would also jointly assist our first nations. If we had something like that, we would be able to address emergency situations. We would be able to support the emergency measures in that sense, as well.

Transportation is not the only issue here in the north. There's the high cost of food, especially for those individuals who have low incomes or who rely on social services for assistance. They can barely make it through the month. There are so many factors with regard to food security that have already been mentioned in the presentations.

• (1245)

The Chair: We're at time now. Thanks, Chief Joseph, and thank you, Madam Bérubé.

Richard Cannings, welcome to the committee. Please go ahead for six minutes.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Thank you.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here today. I'll start with Chief Joseph. In my previous life, I was a biologist. I had the pleasure and privilege to spend some summers doing biological surveys in northern Yukon. It was interesting to hear you talk about

farming. I don't think a lot of people in southern Canada appreciate how hot it gets in Dawson in the summer. I'm from the Okanagan Valley and believe me, it was often very hot in Dawson when I was there. With those long days, I know you can produce some wonderful food.

I wanted to talk to you about a couple of the other country food items you mentioned. One was chinook salmon. You were concerned about populations of chinook. That's a broad concern throughout British Columbia and Yukon.

I'm speaking to you from the territory of the Syilx people, the Syilx Okanagan Nation. They have an active chinook salmon rehabilitation program going on. I must say I've had the pleasure of eating chinook out of the Yukon system that was caught by first nations around Mayo.

I just wanted to ask you how much help you get from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans with respect to your concerns about the chinook populations, what's causing that and how you can improve it.

Chief Roberta Joseph: There are a lot of good questions there.

Through our collaboration process outlined in our treaty agreements, we're able to work collaboratively with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans regionally to try to address the decline of the chinook salmon. We mainly work with them in terms of how we manage the harvest, because it's an international species. It migrates from the Yukon down to the Bering Sea through Alaska and back.

There are over 100 communities, mainly along the Yukon River and in Alaska, that are relying on the chinook salmon. We had to volunteer not to harvest for one full life cycle. We just recently extended that for another year until we have a salmon harvest management plan in place for our first nation. We work with the other first nations as well in the Yukon.

From time to time, we meet at the international Yukon River Panel, in Alaska or here in the Yukon, on the management of the chinook salmon. We review all of the indicators that identify the salmon genetics from Alaska, the U.S. side, and the Canadian side and determine the total allowable harvest. Unfortunately, for many years now there's also been border escapement to consider. For many years now, the border escapement hasn't been met and the numbers have just been declining. There are many different factors for the decline, such as warming oceans and warming rivers through the migration, such as the rearing streams and the Yukon main stem.

• (1250)

Mr. Richard Cannings: The other species you mentioned that has that migratory pattern between Alaska and the Yukon is caribou. I spent a summer in Old Crow with the Vuntut Gwitchin and I know how they're inextricably tied to caribou. We've had a lot of concerns recently with threats of opening up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil exploration and development. I'm wondering how the caribou management is going, from your eyes, and how the federal government might help there.

Chief Roberta Joseph: In terms of the Porcupine caribou, which is the international species we're referring to here, we have the Porcupine Caribou Management Board. Eight communities in the north and the federal and territorial governments are part of the board. They meet and review all of the information—the biological indicators, the migration patterns and the population census of the herd.

Our communities work together closely through the board. There's an annual meeting that provides recommendations to all of the parties affiliated. There's not a really strong relationship on the international board, and I think that's where the federal government can come in and assist with ensuring that the international agreement is being pursued and is actively working. The Alaskans have a lack of commitment to provide members to the board. As a result, there are no international board meetings on the Porcupine caribou. That's one of the challenges.

We do have a challenge here with the Porcupine caribou due to climate change. The Porcupine caribou hasn't fully returned into our traditional territory for at least six years now.

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt. We're at time—beyond it, actually.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Thank you.

The Chair: I'm going to ask for the indulgence of the committee once again. I think we can get a partial second round of questions, but we would need an extension for that. Are we okay, committee members, to do another set of questions with interventions from each of the parties—that would be four—to conclude this witness testimony? Is anyone opposed to that?

Seeing none, I need a motion to extend past one o'clock. Will someone offer a motion? Eric Melillo.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We'll go to two five-minute questions with Mr. Vidal and Ms. Zann, and then finish with Mr. Cannings and Madam Bérubé, of course.

Gary Vidal, you have five minutes.

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

I want to start by saying how much I've appreciated the testimony of all of you today. The information provided has been fascinating and valuable.

Solutions that come from the local community level, where it's your lived experience and you're seeing what goes on, are always more valuable than solutions being imposed on somebody from a distance somewhere. I appreciate the testimony you've brought and the comments in response to the questions you've already been asked.

For the Arctic Fresh folks, Mr. Recinos and Mr. Cendou, I so much appreciate your entrepreneurial approach to solving problems that talk about local economy and that talk about opportunity for people in your communities. That's a conversation I've been having for years in northern Saskatchewan, a long way away from where you are.

I could listen to you talk about what you've done for hours. I'm fascinated with what you're doing, and I appreciate it. However, I want to change the focus to hear a different perspective for a second, just for something new.

I looked at the information on your website, your story and your history. You talk about your three pillars, the pillars of health, community and youth. I want to drill a little bit into or ask your opinion maybe on the value of educating your youth relative to the context of healthy eating, the entrepreneurship, the.... It's so important that we educate our youth to make that long-term change in the context of all this. I'd be curious as to your perspective on that.

I'll start with Mr. Recinos first.

Chief Joseph, I want to prepare you that I'm going to come back to you and ask the same question in the context of your lived experience, as well.

• (1255)

Chief Roberta Joseph: Sure.

Mr. Merlyn Recinos: Thank you.

Definitely one of our pillars is youth, and it's really about how we build that capacity.

Not everybody grew up eating vegetables in our communities. Not everybody grew up eating this sort of food, so how do we build capacity locally so we're able to utilize those? Most of the stuff that is highly subsidized right now are things that we're used to eating in our southern communities, but not so much what has been historically eaten in our communities and now.

One of the things that we do is every time.... We do cooking classes at the community hall. We teach how to utilize different things, how to make different recipes. We incorporate traditional hunting food, like char, caribou and things like that, with other things, like vegetables and different things like that. I'll give you a quick example.

One time we had a bunch of broccoli in our community, so we started to teach how to make different types of broccoli salads. Before, in the sell swaps, everybody would sell poutine in the evenings. When people were trying to get a little bit, they were selling poutine. Now they sell broccoli salad with clubhouses. It's something the community really likes. They enjoy the different flavours, the different types of broccoli salads that can be made. You have to have that. You have to focus on that, building that capacity locally.

The youth are our future. We really need to focus on that, as well, but we also do it in a business capacity sense. We're teaching different youth from different communities how to start and run their own business. We partnered up with Makigiaqta. We cover their costs. We help them with logistics. We help them make partnerships with suppliers, and things like that, so that they can start operating their small business in their community.

Once people start to see that somebody else is doing it, they want to do it too, and it creates this ripple effect. Now you're learning how to eat, you're learning how to cook different things, but at the same time, you're also learning different activities that are going to be self-sufficient for you and your community.

The Chair: Chief Joseph, you just have a minute, if you want to reflect on that question.

Chief Roberta Joseph: As mentioned, youth are really key and an important part of our community. We invest a lot in our youth. Various youth have different interests, so we try to meet their level of interest. We had many youth who were interested in working on the farm and learning about agriculture through the training program. It's key and important to our community that one day they'll be taking over management of the farm.

We look forward to when that time comes, because we continue to invest in the farm heavily. It's important that we have some level of food security, and it's providing a much stronger and growing economy in our community.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Chief Joseph.

We now go to a five-minute intervention with Lenore Zann.

Lenore, please go ahead.

Ms. Lenore Zann (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

To the witnesses, thank you so much. It's very interesting and very exciting work that you're all doing.

In budget 2021, we announced \$163.4 million, over three years, to expand nutrition north and engage with indigenous partners to address food insecurity. Obviously, this investment is going to be important.

I have a question for you regarding where the help should go.

Mr. Natan Obed, the president of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, noted that there are huge socio-economic disparities in the north—as you know—especially, he said, between the Inuit and the non-Inuit, and he continued:

...yet the nutrition north program is need-blind, so the family that has a median income that is three to four times that of another family is going to the store and getting the same subsidy for the same items.

Would it be desirable for the nutrition north Canada program to provide more targeted supports to families with lower incomes? If so, how do you think this should be done?

Perhaps we could start with Chief Joseph and then go to Mr. Recinos.

• (1300)

Chief Roberta Joseph: It would be great to be able to provide funding to the first nation or the band to be able to develop the programs that they see are needed in the community, that can meet the needs of those who need it the most. With Jordan's principle, we provide a food program to our young people, ensuring that everybody has a good lunch three times a week and ensuring that our children have the nutrition that's needed. We have taken advantage of applying through the poverty coalition for foods there as well.

That was provided to elders. There was meat and poultry that was provided to all of the elders.

We know who needs it and are looking after those individuals in the community who would benefit the most from this, who have little or no income.

Ms. Lenore Zann: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Recinos, I see you nodding your head there.

Mr. Merlyn Recinos: Yes. Thank you.

I'm in total agreement with Chief Joseph. We need to co-create, and that's key, co-create with our communities to see how and what they see is the most needed. If we look at it and say, "This is what we think you should be doing," that would feel very unfair for the communities, because the reality is that they're the ones who need to tell us what they need and how they need that support.

As businesses or social enterprises, it's up to us to do our job to help our communities and the people we serve. What I would do is co-create with communities to see how that support can be given to the people who need it the most and need it at the community level. That would be very well done.

Thank you.

Ms. Lenore Zann: Thank you.

I have another question—I know time is short here—regarding infrastructure. You both mentioned infrastructure, and that equipment is needed to preserve and extend the shelf life of food products in the north. Some people have said that's the biggest gap in the north, that the infrastructure is not there for that.

Can you each explain the impact of infrastructure deficits on food security in northern Canada?

The Chair: Answer very quickly, please.

Chief Roberta Joseph: I think, for some places, freezers could be a great way of preserving food. I know in some places it's very expensive to transport freezers, but it's one of the most beneficial ways of preserving food in the north throughout the summer. You'd be able to preserve your food throughout the summer rather than letting it go to waste, because that could happen as well. As well, there's storage for cellar root vegetables that you grow in the summer so you can keep all winter as well, and we need facilities for that.

Thanks.

Ms. Lenore Zann: Thank you.

Mr. Recinos, answer very quickly, please.

Mr. Merlyn Recinos: Thank you. Yes, we definitely need community freezers but also packing material for those freezers. It's one thing to put a caribou in a freezer, but then it gets freezer burn, and then you're sort of left with some spoiled meat. It's not just the infrastructure but also other capacity within the infrastructure.

• (1305)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Madam Bérubé, you have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

My question is for the representatives from Arctic Fresh.

What are the main problems you are facing and what are the solutions to improve the situation for your co-operative?

[*English*]

Mr. Merlyn Recinos: Thank you.

The biggest issue that we encounter is logistics with our airline partner. That really is one of the biggest issues that we have, the amount of time the food sits at different locations before making its way to the community and how that is stored in those locations. That is one of the biggest issues that we encounter.

The second one that we encountered at the beginning—not so much anymore—was the level of scrutiny that nutrition north took on our reporting. We were given no support, education or capacity to do the reporting that they needed, but they required us to be on point to make sure that we were able to deliver it how they wanted it. That really caused us a lot of problems at the beginning, because, first of all, we had no money, we had no time and we had very little staff.

We had to invest, and we had to shut down for approximately seven months because of that. They were not satisfied with how we were submitting, yet they provided, again, very little when it came to support for us to be able to do how and what they wanted.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Chief Joseph, what do you think are the solutions to improve access to traditional food?

[*English*]

The Chair: Answer very briefly.

Chief Roberta Joseph: Access is not a real concern here. What's happening is that our traditional foods are declining, so it's making it more challenging in that sense, as I mentioned earlier. As well, climate change is affecting the migration of the Porcupine caribou, and they're not migrating in the normal migration patterns that they used to travel in. Maybe more studies in terms of what's affecting the declines of various species, I think, would be helpful.

As well, during emergencies, if we were able to help our economy by investing in an airship and being able to manage it with a number of our first nations here, that would assist our communities, and it would assist the Yukon and other businesses as well.

The Chair: Thanks, Chief.

To finish this off, we will go now to Mr. Cannings for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Thank you.

I'll start with you, Mr. Recinos. I really appreciated the comments in your testimony about self-sufficiency in northern communities. My own small experience with food insecurity in the north was the summer I spent in Old Crow. Everybody, in the early part of the summer, was waiting to get out on the land and go to the fish camps, but they needed their food supplies to go out there for any length of time. The food all came in on the plane, TNTA from Whitehorse. It was very hard to predict what you'd get. On Tuesday you'd go down to the plane and all they'd have was ice cream. The next week you'd go down and all they'd have was soft drinks. The community was really held hostage by that. Everybody was waiting for pilot biscuits.

You made the comment, I think, that micro-businesses were a better model than co-ops. I assume that you mean co-ops in the big co-op sense, where that money flows out of Old Crow or Igloodik or wherever and goes south to the head of co-op land. What about the difference between micro-businesses and small co-ops that are based in a community? That's where I got a bit confused. Perhaps you can clarify that and whether smaller local co-ops would be a good model.

• (1310)

The Chair: We have about a minute, but go ahead, please.

Mr. Merlyn Recinos: Thank you.

At its fundamental core, the co-op is a really good thing for communities. The problem is that, a lot of times, we don't use or we don't do what is fundamentally on paper. That's where the problem comes in. When you don't have autonomy over what you're doing within the community, it becomes really hard for the community to be able to do something.

For me, the co-op does play a really good role within it, but we have to innovate. That is key. We can't stay still within the same frame of mind, because that's how we become extinct. We have to innovate. If we can't innovate, we have the Amazons. We have the different players now in Iqaluit and things like that. That's because before there was that system that no competition was good—until the big guys came in and just destroyed the economy, which is what's happening in Iqaluit with Amazon and all of those things.

Before we get to that level, we have to innovate locally by creating micro-businesses, by creating opportunity within our community, so that we don't leave it to the big boys—the Amazons, the Wal-marts and things like that—to take over and really destroy our economy at the end just because they have the money, the know-how and everything else.

The Chair: Thank you.

Chief Joseph and our Arctic Fresh guests, thank you so much. You heard the accolades from members of the committee. That's not false flattery. This has really been outstanding testimony and very helpful. Our analysts now have a lot of work to pore over as we prepare our report.

Again, thank you so much. You are free to go. We have just a brief bit of committee business to do right now.

Mr. Clerk, Ms. Jones has an issue with regard to the changing of witnesses. I think we could give quick approval to that.

Ms. Jones, do you want to outline once again your request?

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Yes.

My request is that we exchange the Tsawwassen First Nation peace officer program witness, who was scheduled for May 13, and replace them with Andrew Beynon, the director of land code governance. That's for the First Nations Land Management Resource Centre and the work plan.

Is that okay with everyone?

The Chair: Is anyone opposed to that? Everyone's good...?

I think you just passed muster there.

Mr. Cannings, did you have your hand up?

Mr. Richard Cannings: Yes. I'm sorry. I'm new on this committee, so I don't know the history behind whose witnesses those are. I'm assuming they're not witnesses called by the NDP who are being transferred out. I just wanted to check.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: I can't answer that. I don't know whose witnesses they were. All I know is that there was—

The Chair: The clerk could tell us.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Yes, the clerk might be able to clarify, but one I think couldn't make it, so there was a request to change the witness.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Naaman Sugrue): Yes, that's correct. It would be replacing a Liberal witness with a Liberal witness.

Mr. Richard Cannings: That's fine. I just wanted to check.

The Chair: Okay, so we have agreement on that.

With that, I'll take a motion to adjourn.

Ms. Zann moves that we adjourn.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you everybody. What a wonderful two hours we had.

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