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Chair: Mr. Kody Blois



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• (1100)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Good morning everyone. I hope you all had a nice weekend.

Welcome to meeting number 24 of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

I have a few reminders before we get started.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. Just so you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking, rather than the entirety of the committee. Screenshots or taking photos of your screen is not permitted.

For members participating in person, keep in mind the Board of Internal Economy's health protocol guidelines.

[English]

Colleagues, we are back. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, May 30, 2022, we are continuing in meeting number three our study of global food insecurity. We have another great panel lined up today. I see them on the screen joining us.

From Oxfam Canada, we have Lauren Ravon, who serves as the executive director. We also have Brittany Lambert, a women's rights policy and advocacy specialist. Welcome to Oxfam.

From the Parliament of Ukraine, we have Dr. Lesia Zaburanna, who serves as a member of Parliament. It's very good to see you, madam.

From the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, we have Pierre Vauthier, who serves as the head of the Ukraine office.

For our witnesses, you know that we start with five-minute opening remarks. I'm going to start with Oxfam.

Ms. Ravon or Ms. Lambert, you have up to five minutes for opening remarks. I will turn the floor over to you.

Ms. Lauren Ravon (Executive Director, Oxfam Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's my pleasure to be here before the committee today.

Today and every day, Oxfam is on the ground meeting people's urgent needs in hunger hot spots around the world.

Extreme inequality, climate change and unprecedented food and energy price inflation, all accelerated by the war in Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic, are creating the perfect storm for the world's poorest people. Over a quarter of a billion more people could be pushed into extreme poverty this year alone due to this convergence of crises. This would reverse decades of progress in the fight against poverty and put many lives at risk.

Low-income countries do not have the resources to respond to these multiple crises or to put in place adequate safety nets to support the most vulnerable. Their foreign reserves have already been depleted by their efforts to respond to the pandemic and also to service their debts. As inflation outstrips wage growth and as the cost of staples rises dramatically, millions of families are struggling to put food on the table. The places worst affected are countries that rely on food imports, low-income countries in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, as well as Yemen, Afghanistan and Syria.

Three countries in the Horn of Africa in particular—Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia—import 90% of their wheat from Russia and Ukraine. The spike in food prices caused by the war in Ukraine comes at the exact same time these countries are facing unprecedented drought and ongoing conflict. As a result, many people are living in famine-like conditions, with one person dying of hunger every 48 seconds. The UN predicts that 350,000 Somali children could die by the end of the summer if we fail to act immediately.

Hunger affects women and girls disproportionately, as we know. They are the last to eat when food is scarce, the first to be pulled from school when their families can no longer afford tuition, and their unpaid care work in the home always increases in times of crisis. We will never achieve the promise of gender equality as long as women and girls continue to suffer from hunger and malnutrition at a higher rate than men and boys do.

In the face of this global hunger crisis, there is actually much that Canada can do.

In the short term, donor governments like Canada must help avert catastrophe in the hardest hit countries by urgently increasing humanitarian assistance. While there has been an outpouring of solidarity for the people of Ukraine, the international community has grossly underfunded the humanitarian response to the hunger crisis. There remains a \$13-billion funding gap for food security and nutrition responses globally. In the immediate, Canada should commit \$600 million dollars at the upcoming G7 to get back on equal footing with its peers as a leading humanitarian funder.

Charities like Oxfam and other members of the Humanitarian Coalition are doing everything they can to raise funds from the Canadian public to be able to respond to the humanitarian emergency that is unfolding. The government could further encourage Canadians to donate generously by activating a matching fund, which we know is an effective way to increase donations.

In the medium term, Canada and other donors must start anticipating and responding to hunger crises earlier. The Ukraine crisis is not the only factor driving global hunger; it's merely the latest shock for countries that were already reeling from conflict, from the economic disruptions of the pandemic and from an escalating climate emergency. Famine is not something that happens suddenly or unexpectedly. It comes after months of ignored warnings and procrastination on the part of those who have the resources and the power to prevent it. Starvation is a political failure. Early warning systems do exist. We can save money and, most importantly, lives by acting earlier.

In the long term, governments like Canada must support the development of sustainable, resilient and local food systems. The current crisis underscores how important this is. Overdependence on food imports is dangerous for low-income countries and makes them highly vulnerable to market disruptions and price hikes. Canada must boost its budget for local, small-scale farming in low-income countries. These family farmers need better access to land, funding, infrastructure and markets. We need to support modes of production that are less dependent on imports of feed and fertilizer and more resilient to climate change.

• (1105)

I would like to close by emphasizing that the real drivers of hunger are poverty and inequality, not food scarcity. Conflicts and climate change are fuelling cyclical and predictable humanitarian shocks that only political will and global solidarity can prevent.

Thank you again for the opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ravon.

You were right on time. We appreciate your thoughts and we'll certainly get to questions.

First, we're going to move to Dr. Lesia Zaburanna, who is a member of Parliament from Ukraine.

We have had your colleague, Yulia Klymenko, and also Minister Solskyi at our last meeting, so we look forward to hearing from you as well.

You have up to five minutes.

Dr. Lesia Zaburanna (Member of Parliament, Parliament of Ukraine (Verkhovna Rada)): Thank you very much.

First of all, I would like to say that it's my honour and pleasure to address the committee of the House of Commons of Canada.

Let me start with a number of facts that will illustrate the role of Ukraine as a global food supplier.

Ukraine is a major exporter. We have always been among the countries leading in global food supply; we are the fifth country in wheat exports, fourth in maize, third in barley and the first in sunflower oil. Additionally, our state has been one of the top producers of nuts, rapeseeds, peas, millet, wheat flour, honey and other agricultural foods.

Last year Ukrainian grains fed more than 500 million people. This year they put a billion in danger. The unjustified aggression of Russia against Ukraine changed the order of things for good. Every day it causes irrevocable harm to the agriculture sector in Ukraine and undermines global food security.

The war has already negatively impacted the export potential of Ukraine. The seaports remain blocked by Russia while the water areas of the Black Sea remain mined by Russia as well. Currently, more than 20 million tonnes of grain are stacked in Ukraine forcing us to seek alternative ways to export our agricultural goods through the western borders.

Today, thanks to our partners, we have significant progress in exporting grains to the European Union compared to last month, but the numbers are still below the pre-war level. Most goods have been exported through water transport—river ports and ferry crossings—but the capacity of these facilities is still low for a stable global supply. Moreover, Ukraine may face additional problems soon due to the Russian attacks on the buildings to store harvest and the lack of the funds we would have gained by selling the goods abroad.

In addition, the Russian army blatantly steals Ukrainian wheat and grain in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and illegally transports the goods to Russia. The losses of farmers are estimated at more than half a million tonnes and more than \$125 million. In the Luhansk region, Russian soldiers force Ukrainian farmers to carry out planting and then appropriate the harvest.

The head of the UN said recently that the Russian war against Ukraine has resulted in disruptions in food affecting 1.7 billion people worldwide. The consequences may be disastrous. According to the FAO's latest forecast, the war in Ukraine could increase chronic undernourishment by an additional 18.8 million people by 2023.

According to the Ukrainian government, the spring sowing area is 25% less than the previous year. The main crops that were sewn are maize, soy, sunflower, millet, buckwheat, oats and sugar beet. So today Ukrainian farmers think about how to export, not only the last year's harvest, but the upcoming as well.

Indeed, the 2022 planting season has been the most difficult in the history of independent Ukraine because of the logistical issues. Ukrainian farmers face an acute lack of fuel, fertilizers and plant protection products. The government has reported cases of international destruction or appropriation of agricultural machinery and equipment by the Russian army in the occupied regions of Ukraine.

Russia purposefully attacks grain silos, warehouses of fertilizers, farm enterprises and other infrastructure trying to aggravate the current humanitarian crisis. Two months ago Russian forces shelled bread plants in the Kyiv and Kharkiv regions. In the liberated areas, the invaders mined agricultural fields.

• (1110)

Steadfast work of the agricultural sector is crucial for restoring Ukraine's economy. For this reason, going through the 2022 planting was one of the most important tasks of the Ukrainian government and farmers. The season was relatively successful, thanks to the credits offered to the agricultural sector. More than 13,000 Ukrainian farmers received more than 38 billion hryvnias, which is about one billion euros of credit in total. Eighty per cent of that amount was attracted through portfolio guarantees.

Exports improved a bit compared with March of this year, yet no visible alternative to the previous volumes of Ukrainian global food export is seen today.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has had a significant negative impact—

The Chair: Ms. Zaburanna, I apologize. I gave you a few extra seconds, and I should have been signalling to you.

We're at the time, but I know that my colleagues are going to have many questions, so maybe we'll leave it at that.

We'll go to Mr. Vauthier, and then we're going to go questions. As I mentioned, I'm sure my colleagues will have questions for you.

Mr. Vauthier, we go over to you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Vauthier (Head of Ukraine Office, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations): Thank you.

My name is Pierre Vauthier. I am the response coordinator on the ground in Ukraine for the Food and Agriculture Organization, the FAO, of the United Nations. I am in Kyiv right now, but I should note that we are active throughout Ukraine, including on the front lines. I also want to point out that our staff who were there before the war—

• (1115)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Vauthier, I apologize. We're having some technical issues on our end with translation, I'm being told by the clerk. I'm going to hand you over to the clerk.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Josée Harrison): Mr. Vauthier, at the very bottom of your screen there is an unmute button, and then there's a little arrow pointing up. If you click on the arrow under select a microphone, you should be able to select your headset, please.

Mr. Pierre Vauthier: I've done it already. Can't you hear me?

Ms. Lauren Ravon: I can hear you, for what it's worth.

Mr. Pierre Vauthier: It's okay. I'm going to do it in English, if you don't mind, since the rest of the panel is anglophone. Let me just try to be brief so as not to lose too much time.

It was true—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Vauthier, our proceedings have to be able to be handled in English and French. We're going to try to keep troubleshooting to the extent that we can here. Just give us a second.

Mr. Pierre Vauthier: I can do it in French and English if you want.

The Chair: Mr. Vauthier, for our proceedings we try to do both, but your testimony is very valued. You have up to five minutes and we've had a bit of a delay. I know you speak English and French. If you could try to bring your proceedings to two and a half minutes in English and then perhaps try to reiterate what you said in French.

That way we can get your testimony on the record. We'll have to troubleshoot what we do for questions and answers of course, but we'll certainly do our best. You're bilingual, so is that okay? That might be the best way.

Mr. Pierre Vauthier: Yes, I'll try to wrap up.

The Chair: I apologize for this. This is the nature of virtual proceedings.

We'll go over to you for perhaps half in English and half in French.

Thank you.

Mr. Pierre Vauthier: Thank you very much.

I will be very brief. I will just do part of the elements I wanted to introduce, but I think when we have the questions and answers, it will be more valuable for me to answer your questions.

Let me just say what has been said. I will talk just about the agricultural sector—one side—and food security of the population in Ukraine, as presented by Dr. Zaburanna.

• (1120)

At the moment, it's not just the crop sector that is affected. It is all the sectors of Ukraine, including the livestock, the fishery and the forestry. For the livestock, we know there was a lot of loss of milk production. There was a lot of loss of food for animals. At the moment as we speak, a number of people have lost their livestock or, due to the economical shrinkage, are going to reduce their livestock. They are consuming their livestock in particular in the area. We saw that and we witnessed that in the field.

[Translation]

The crisis we are currently facing involving livestock is due to the destruction of the distribution chain. Small and big ranchers alike are affected, and in some cases, farmers who are especially poor or have small operations are consuming their livestock, as I said.

[English]

For the fishery, as you know this is a land-locked country right now because of the war. Unfortunately, all of the Azov and the Black Seas are not proceeding. The fisheries are halted completely.

It's the same thing for forestry. We can mention forestry because it is something important that is shared between Ukraine and Canada.

[Translation]

Currently, 600,000 hectares of forest are no longer accessible or usable because of the war, contamination of the land and conflicts. That will give rise to environmental problems that will eventually have to be dealt with or, at least, examined.

[English]

Usually in Ukraine exports 45 million to 55 million tonnes of grain every year.

Dr. Zaburanna expressed that very clearly. At the moment every month pre-war, five million tonnes were exported via the sea to the world. The sea is blocked. At the moment, only 1.2 million tonnes, or one million on average per month are being exported. It's one-fifth of what has usually been exported. This is despite all of the effort and all the support of the neighbouring countries, but also the solutions that were managed by the government, the support from us, and also the pre-war sectors in country.

We think that we're reaching a limit. We cannot go back to the level of what we usually have with the sea exports. This is a big problem and it's causing a second problem. The harvest is going to come in a couple of months now. In fact, 20 million to 25 million tonnes of crop are still in storage right now. According to FAO's estimate, 14% has been destroyed or not available. Apparently, we're going to have an additional harvest, which will be between 55 million tonnes or maybe more.

We are facing a crisis right now. In a couple of months, the Ukraine will not be able to export and will not be able to store this capacity. I think Canada has a capacity to support the country in this aspect because it has valuable companies that able to talk and we are already starting to discuss. We need your support in order to

solve this immediate problem. It will be a problem in 2022, but it's going to continue in 2023. Canada can support us greatly in this.

[Translation]

Ukraine is short roughly 20 million tonnes of storage capacity.

[English]

Let me jump very quickly to the IDPs now. I think the colleague from Oxfam was very clear about that, but let me address it from the point of view of Ukraine.

This is very concerning. Most of the IDPs are coming from the east or leaving the cities because they feel threatened by the military strikes, and are living in the countryside in the rural areas. At the moment, what is very concerning is that winter is coming and their livelihoods are lost. The wages are reducing. The employers are lost. At the moment, some of the emergency livelihoods that the people are using are crop production, a bit of vegetable production, a bit of small livestock production.

As a favour, we recommend strongly to switch as soon as possible from humanitarian assistance to emergency assistance, in order to strengthen the livelihoods of the population in the rural areas. This is very important. The winter is going to be hard. It's going to hit this population hard, and we absolutely need to be able, not just to provide them with cover and cash for consumption but also to give them the means to restart or at least to use as a temporary livelihood capacity in order that they can adapt.

• (1125)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vauthier. We're at the time.

Colleagues, obviously, there are some technical issues with his sound. I think the testimony, if you choose to seek it, is important. He can answer in both English and French. With your permission, I would ask that we allow him to answer in English if he's asked a question in English, and to answer in French if he's asked a question in French.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Mr. Vauthier, if it's okay with you, if you're asked a question in English, we would ask you to respond in English, with a very quick summary in French, and vice versa if possible. I know that's not ideal, but that's the only way, and we want to make sure we get your testimony today.

We're going to start with questions.

Is that okay, Clerk?

The Clerk: No.

Sorry, I was trying to get your attention.

Unfortunately, if your mike is not connected properly, Mr. Vauthier, you cannot provide your own interpretation. It's very important that you connect your mike. We've been trying to reach you. A technician is trying to reach you on your cellphone, so if you could please....

The Chair: I think we have agreement.

Are you happy? Are you guys okay?

An hon. member: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. I think until I'm told differently by the clerk, we'll proceed in the way that we talked about. I don't mean to overrule you, Ms. Harrison, but I do want to make sure the committee members get this testimony.

Mr. Vauthier, until you hear differently, please move that way.

I do want to get to questions, though, so Mr. Barlow, for six minutes, it's over to you.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): I do have questions for Mr. Vauthier, who's on the phone, so can we just wait two seconds, or I can try to be agile here, but...

The Chair: Why don't we just perhaps suspend for a minute or two and see if we can get this resolved.

• (1125) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1130)

The Chair: Colleagues, we're going to keep going. Mr. Vauthier continues to stay on the phone, and we'll look at different options. Mr. Barlow has agreed to start a line of questioning with some of the other witnesses we have.

Mr. Barlow, I'll let you start.

Mr. John Barlow: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Certainly, we apologize for the technical issues with our witnesses, but it's important that we have them here and take advantage of that opportunity, as I know they're very busy with what's happening on the ground.

I'll start with Ms. Zaburanna, the member of the parliament of Ukraine.

Thanks for taking the time to be with us.

I had an opportunity to read the rapid response plan that the FAO did earlier this year. It mentions that you're expecting about a third of your spring crop not to be harvested. Is that accurate? I know things can change very quickly in a conflict. Is that still accurate, or has it become better or worse than what was anticipated?

Dr. Lesia Zaburanna: Thank you for your question.

Yes. As I mentioned, indeed the 2022 planting season has been the most difficult in our history—that is, during the last 30 years. This is not only because of occupied territories—though I would like to mention that now, unfortunately, we do have about 23% of our territories occupied—but also because every day we have the risk of bomb attacks in each region. For example, last night we had the risk of bomb attacks in close to 80% of our country.

There are also logistical issues because Ukrainian farmers face an acute lack of fuel, fertilizers and plant protection products. As my colleague mentioned, we also have a lot of destroyed infrastructure objects—storage—so our farmers are very afraid that this year we will have a very unsuccessful planting season.

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you very much for that update.

What would be the impact? I'm assuming it's very similar to your planting season in October. I know that's a long ways away and

hard to predict, but are you already doing some forecasting on what that may look like if this continues in the way that it is now?

Dr. Lesia Zaburanna: It will absolutely depend on our position in this war.

First of all, as my colleague, Yulia Klymenko, mentioned the last time, we now need military assistance because only thanks to this support can we be more sure that in autumn we might have a really good planting season.

Right now it's very difficult to do any forecasting because you know that every day we have the risk of bomb attacks in each region, in each city, in each village, so now the most important instrument for our future successful agrarian development is military assistance from our partners and from Canada also.

• (1135)

Mr. John Barlow: Thanks. I appreciate that.

Your colleague had mentioned last week that because of the blockade of the Black Sea and the loss of the port of Odessa, you're looking at trying to move commodities by rail or by truck but that to do that you needed additional veterinary and phytosanitary services at the borders.

I know that for us, even in Canada, those resources are not readily available. Are you able to access those needed resources to be able to move commodities through other means in the supply chain, or has that been difficult to access as well? What is your source to access that additional veterinary or phytosanitary service?

Dr. Lesia Zaburanna: You know, we also now have a problem, and it's a big issue for us. You know our situation with gas—with fuel—so it's also very bad for transportation.

We also have really limited access to the European borders. I would also like to say that the value—the price—of such transportation is very high. You know that now we have a lot of destroyed train infrastructure, and each day we have destroyed train stations and destroyed train infrastructure, so it's also not good for any logistical channels to Europe.

Mr. John Barlow: I just have one last quick question for Oxfam.

What would be the impacts...? You were talking about famine in other countries like Somalia. Are you anticipating social unrest? Maybe Mr. Putin is trying to initiate conflicts in other parts of the world as a result of what's going on in Ukraine. Is that something that Oxfam and maybe other groups are eyeing? Is it a possible consequence of this conflict in Ukraine?

Ms. Lauren Ravon: Social unrest is linked to food crises. The two are always tied. What I think is important to note here is that we've had early warning signs of the famine on the horizon since 2020. What is happening in the Horn of Africa, east Africa and west Africa, is not caused by the situation in Ukraine; it's exacerbated by it, but we have not been investing in or responding to early warnings that we've been receiving by ramping up humanitarian assistance in these regions.

These regions are already hit by the impacts of the climate crisis and of conflict in many of these countries, but we put in place over the past decade early warning systems to alert the international community when drought is on the horizon, when crops are failing and when we know there won't be enough rain to sustain agricultural production.

This is, as I said, exacerbated but not caused by the situation in Ukraine.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Ravon and Mr. Barlow.

We'll turn to Ms. Taylor Roy for six minutes.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for being here, and in particular to the member of Parliament from Ukraine. We really appreciate your time in helping us understand the situation even more fully.

One of the things that you've been talking about this morning that's of concern is the number of internally displaced people in Ukraine right now. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights estimated at the beginning of May that there were 7.7 million internally displaced people, about 17.5% of the country's population. How is that affecting the production on farms, and what are the major concerns about getting food to these people? You mentioned going into emergency mode as opposed to humanitarian assistance at some point.

I'll follow up later because I did want to speak to Oxfam too about the specific impacts on women of the internally displaced people and refugees as well, but perhaps we could start with what's been happening on the farms as people have been displaced.

Mr. Vauthier, are you able to answer now?

Mr. Pierre Vauthier: Apparently, I am. I don't know if I'm authorized.

I just said yes. I don't know if you....

Dr. Lesia Zaburanna: I'm sorry, is this question for me?

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Yes, Dr. Zaburanna, for you and for Mr. Vauthier.

Dr. Lesia Zaburanna: Okay, thank you. I didn't understand you clearly.

You're absolutely right that more than seven million people have been displaced, and now we have, as I mentioned, about 23% of our territories occupied. In the other territories, a lot of farmers are at very high risk of different bomb attacks, but you know, in our villages, we have a lot of people in the villages from other places, so we don't have a shortage of people who will try to do something in the agricultural sphere in villages. The most risk for us, as I mentioned, is aggression, war and bomb attacks. A lot of small and medium-sized farmers have very good technical equipment, and I am sure that if they have the stability to work safely, they will try to realize all of their plans during the planting season, so it's not a problem or an issue. Of course, we are very sorry that a lot of our people were replaced, but the most important problem for us is safety for our farmers.

• (1140)

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Thank you.

Mr. Vauthier, do you have anything to what's happening, especially with the farmers who have been displaced from their land? What's happening with them right now?

Mr. Pierre Vauthier: For the people from occupied territories now, they moved everywhere in Ukraine close to their relatives. Most of the time, as Dr. Zaburanna was saying, they go to the countryside. The majority of the IDPs, the poor IDPs are in the countryside; the rich are in hotels. I have to say something. In fact, there is a lot of solidarity at moment among Ukrainians, so there are Facebook pages where they can find houses that are not occupied, and when they go to these villages, they they receive a few things, such as chickens—

The Chair: I apologize, Mr. Vauthier. We're still having trouble with the audio, and the direction I'm getting right now is that the House rules state that we have to have simultaneous translation. We can certainly work to have you come back at another time. I know some committee members would really value hearing from you.

We'll let you carry on, Ms. Taylor Roy.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Thank you.

I did have a question regarding the effect on women.

Lauren, I know you're joined here by Brittany Lambert, who specializes in women's rights policy. I'm interested in hearing from her on what the specific concerns or effects are for women among the internally displaced people and the whole war situation in Ukraine for them.

Ms. Brittany Lambert (Women's Rights Policy and Advocacy Specialist, Oxfam Canada): Thanks for that question.

In Ukraine, one of the things that we're seeing, not only with the internally displaced people but also with the people who are being forced to cross the border, is that women and children make up about 90% of those fleeing because the men are staying back to fight. The gender and age profile of these refugees, who have lost everything and then are forced to put their trust in strangers, significantly increases the risk of gender-based violence, trafficking and abuse, so that's something we're very concerned about.

We're also concerned about similar issues for the people in Africa, for example, who are suffering from hunger and who are forced to migrate or flee because of that. There are many similar issues, namely, your vulnerability to gender-based violence or sexual exploitation and abuse when you're desperate for food, and the propensity to resort to harmful coping mechanisms like pulling daughters out of school or marrying them off early for a dowry to secure income for the family. I think that regardless of what area of the world we're talking about, hunger and displacement are having a disproportionate impact on women and girls.

The Chair: Ms. Taylor Roy, you have about 25 seconds.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Very quickly, Ms. Lambert, can you tell us what is being done to address that, especially in the situation of Ukraine right now?

Ms. Brittany Lambert: Humanitarian response specifically in the protection sector protects vulnerable people like women who are forced to flee and makes sure we keep them safe.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Taylor Roy.

Thank you, Ms. Lambert.

[Translation]

Go ahead, Mr. Perron. You have six minutes.

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Thank you.

Ms. Lambert, you said we needed to do more to protect this group of people. What can our committee do to help women and children, besides what we are already doing?

Is more humanitarian assistance funding the answer?

Do you have any recommendations for us?

Ms. Brittany Lambert: Thank you for your question.

[English]

I think the pure scale of need shows that what is needed most of all right now is increased humanitarian response. In terms of how that response is happening, Canada is already very good at funding organizations and responses that focus on gender-sensitive approaches and take women's needs, unique vulnerabilities and also leadership capacities into account.

I think what needs to be done, just given the magnitude of the crisis in the world, is to scale up that humanitarian response and the levels of funding associated with it.

• (1145)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much.

By the way, the interpretation is working for you, so feel free to answer in French if you wish.

Is the situation the same in the African and Middle Eastern countries that are expected to be hard hit by famines?

Women and children are affected by famine to a much larger extent. Does it have to do with displacement? Are there other contributing factors?

Ms. Brittany Lambert: Displacement certainly plays a major role. When people have to leave their homes, their jobs, their fields, their crops and so forth, it has consequences. In addition, those families tend to have lower incomes, so they can't pay today's prices for food.

We need to find ways to make sure that families have more money to buy food and meet all of their daily needs. We also need to think about the social security dimension so that vulnerable people who lose their entire crop, for example, can access emergency income in a time of crisis like this.

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much.

When the committee last met, we spoke with the witnesses about the importance of reopening Ukraine's ports, which are an export corridor. Talks are under way, and if any progress is being made, it's not being made quickly.

Ms. Lambert and Ms. Ravon, as Oxfam Canada representatives, can you tell us why it's so important to do everything possible to get this export corridor opened back up and, perhaps, what additional steps the west should be taking to make that happen?

[English]

Ms. Lauren Ravon: I'm happy to jump in here. Thank you.

Yes, the high dependency on grain from Ukraine to respond to the hunger crisis in Africa is very concerning.

I also want to loop back to your initial question, which was about what more Canada can be doing. There is an incredible generosity and response to the Ukraine crisis and every life matters equally. Our concern here is that we're seeing a displacement of humanitarian resources globally, so that we're not able to respond as we should be to the African hunger crisis in particular.

In addition to increasing Canadian aid, we're also calling specifically for Canada to put in place a matching fund. We know that Canadians have been incredibly generous in their response to the Ukraine crisis, as they should be, but we haven't seen that outpouring of generosity or even consciousness and awareness that hundreds of thousands of people are on the brink of dying of starvation in countries like Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya.

Canada can urgently put in place a matching fund to call on the generosity of Canadians. As my colleague, Brittany, was saying, not only is it a matter of food that flows, but it's also a matter of cash assistance. In some communities, food is actually available, but it is out of people's reach because of the price. Getting emergency cash assistance to families to purchase on local markets is incredibly important. It's just as important as opening up flows from Ukraine and other regions to get food into local markets.

Ultimately, local food production is the response to these types of recurring food crises. It's not global flows. In some parts of Africa, up to 70% of production is local. People are relying on their local family production and their local family farm. If we're not getting cash into people's hands to be buying on the local markets, then you have a further deterioration and a decrease in food security in the long run.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much.

I also took note when you talked about the importance of supporting long-term local farming. We shouldn't wait for a crisis in order to gear assistance towards the development of local food systems.

I want to come back to the situation in Ukraine.

We have repeatedly called for chartered flights in order to bring refugees who wish to come to Canada here. We've had a few flights, but not many at all.

Do you think that initiative could make a significant difference in your work?

Do you think Canada should keep up those efforts, organizing more charter flights to alleviate some of the pressure on the ground?

• (1150)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Brittany Lambert: Certainly, Canada has a role to play in that effort. I want to commend the Canadian government on its efforts to date.

I think helping to bring people here is a good thing, because it gives them an opportunity to find work and earn an income until the situation in Ukraine is resolved.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lambert.

Thank you, Mr. Perron.

We now go to Mr. MacGregor for six minutes.

[English]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for joining us today.

I would like to start with Oxfam.

Ms. Ravon, I was looking through Oxfam's website. Your organization has done a tremendous job at documenting the figures associated with extreme weather-related humanitarian funding. Just in the last 20 years, we have seen an 819% increase in extreme weather-related humanitarian funding appeals. We've gone from \$1.6 billion to \$15.5 billion in the last fiscal year. Your organization has also detailed the fact that the economic cost of extreme weather events in 2021 alone was estimated to be about \$329 billion.

We're having a lot of conversations in Canada about inflation and I have always tried to stress the dangers of climate change-driven inflationary pressures. I want to put this in the context of the food security study we're doing right now and what Oxfam's projections are for the future if we don't really start addressing this in a meaningful way.

Could you expand on that a little bit more, please?

Ms. Lauren Ravon: That's a fantastic question. I'm glad you have done your reading about Oxfam's work. I appreciate that.

Our overall analysis is that we are no longer going to be in a world where we basically are in a status quo and once in a while there are humanitarian emergencies. We're entering a world where

crises are a constant because of conflict, because of displacement and because of the climate emergency we're facing.

We need a new way of working. Relying on the humanitarian aid system that jumps in—often too late—when a crisis occurs is no longer going to work. We need to be building up and focusing on local resilience. When I spoke about building up local markets, it's in that sense.

We know there's going to be increasing drought. It's going to be increasingly hard to produce food in many of the countries we've been referencing, but we can be building more resilient agriculture in those countries by working on water infrastructure, crop diversification and different resilient strategies because, ultimately, we can't keep up with responding every couple of months to a new food crisis and a new agricultural failure in this context.

If you look at Canada's food aid, for example, we're only actually providing about half of what we used to because of the rise in prices. If our international aid and our humanitarian assistance is pretty much flat, we're actually providing less and less in response to world needs.

Resilience on climate change means that we're no longer in a world where Global Affairs Canada should be funding and having long-term development and humanitarian appeals separately. We need to be merging the two and focusing on climate-resilient agriculture, women's participation in local markets, small-scale agriculture and investing in local climate adaptations solutions. This is something that's still far underfunded. The global community's focus has been on reducing emissions, which is important, but for most of the communities that are hard hit today, they are already in the midst of the climate emergency. This is not somewhere far off on the horizon. It's today.

Adaptation means helping local communities protect their river flows, protect from erosion, protect from drought, build new economies based on realities—

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

I'm sorry to interrupt. I want to get to a few other questions.

I did take note of the fact that you want Canada to step up at the next G7 summit and commit to \$600 million. I know that's in two week's time. It's a bit too soon for our committee to make recommendations, but we now have it on the public record.

Yes, farmers in those developing countries are not only experiencing inflationary pressures from the costs of a climate disaster, but also the costs of lost production and then the costs of the resultant increase in food prices because of scarcity. I appreciate you providing that.

I want to move, Mr. Chair, to Member of Parliament Zaburanna.

• (1155)

The Chair: Mr. MacGregor, I apologize. Her connection has dropped. We've had a number of challenges. Our tech team is working to try to find that, but unfortunately right now you only have Oxfam present.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I'll stay with Oxfam—

The Chair: Not “unfortunately”, but right now they're the only witnesses we can call.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: It's not a problem.

My question for MP Zaburanna was going to be on the history of Ukrainian food production. We know that it has been used as a weapon of war. We know that Joseph Stalin used it as a weapon of war and forcefully confiscated Ukrainian grain. Adolf Hitler and the Nazis had the same goals and designs for Ukraine to feed the future Reich, and it seems now that this is being done in the same way by the Russian invasion.

Do you have any thoughts on this? Ukrainian food production is such a strategic asset to so many in the world. Do you want to expand a little more on how we, as the world community, have to try to protect that asset to guarantee Ukrainian sovereignty, territorial integrity and their ability to act without any future aggression?

Ms. Lauren Ravon: I wouldn't dare speak for a colleague on Russian history, but what I can say is that food is very political. Access to food is political. At a time when we're facing, as I spoke about, 350,000 Somali children on the brink of dying of hunger, at the same time we see that the world's food billionaires are gaining wealth. Not specific to Ukraine, but acknowledging the power dynamics here, we have large agricultural companies and monopolies that are increasing their wealth.

We've seen billionaires' wealth from food supplies increase during the pandemic, and at the same time we see millions of people at risk of starvation, so I don't think that we can look at issues of famine, of starvation, in an apolitical way and not look at geopolitical dynamics but also at the dynamics of our market and how wealth is increasingly accumulated.

As I mentioned, the issues of hunger and poverty are really profoundly linked to inequalities, the inequalities at the local level but also global inequalities in our food supply chain.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ravon and Mr. MacGregor.

Colleagues, we've obviously had delays. We do have the ability to extend, but I know that many colleagues have activities right after this as you prepare for the House.

We are going to go to a second round. I'm going to ask Mr. Lehoux to keep it a little tighter. We're going to go for about four minutes to be able to tighten up for the next panel.

It's over to you, Mr. Lehoux.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Humanitarian organizations such as Canadian Foodgrains Bank and Oxfam provide short-term disaster response.

Has Oxfam Canada taken meaningful actions on the ground?

[*English*]

Ms. Brittany Lambert: Sure. Maybe I can take this one.

Just to give you an idea of what kinds of things we can be doing to respond to food crises, we're providing cash and vouchers to communities that don't have enough to eat. They can use this to purchase essential food items and meet their basic nutritional needs. We're also providing agricultural inputs such as seeds, tools and training on more climate-resilient production so that farmers can be better prepared for the future and the climate of the future.

In a lot of places, such as the Horn of Africa, the hunger crisis is caused by drought. We're also trucking water into remote communities and getting clean water to people. We're also helping people with their livestock, because one of the biggest problems is that when there's not enough to drink, livestock die as well, and that's people's food. We're doing livestock vaccination and treatment campaigns, and we're helping people who have been displaced by conflict, and who have lost their livelihoods for that reason, with things like protection, etc.

That gives you an idea of some of the things that we can do to respond on many levels.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I'm going to give my fellow member Mr. Epp the rest of my time.

• (1200)

[*English*]

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Thank you to my colleague.

I know that the direction at times from our Canadian government to the NGOs working in this space has been a bit mixed when it comes to longer-term development. I'm referring specifically to the testimony that we heard just a couple of minutes ago.

Having had involvement with some other NGOs around the food side, it's always that push-and-pull between short-term responses and the longer-term development, as you know, between giving a fish, teaching to fish and making sure everyone has access to the pond to fish.

Can you comment on what the overall direction is from Global Affairs and our international development sector, from our government, particularly as to the short-term crisis we have, but also as to the longer-term solutions? Is the mix of funding and direction adequate or appropriate?

Ms. Lauren Ravon: Thank you.

I think the Canadian feminist international assistance policy provides the road map we need to do development and humanitarian response well, so we have the right road map in place. The issue is that we're all learning to do development differently. We speak about a different approach where we're merging or linking development initiatives with emergency response. This is something that organizations such as Oxfam and such as the Foodgrains Bank you mentioned—but all of our colleagues in this sector—are learning to deal with. It's a new way of working.

I think our main concern right now in terms of Canadian aid is that we want to make sure any Canadian aid that goes to respond to the crisis in Ukraine is additional to what aid had already been allocated by Canada for international development and humanitarian response prior to the war in Ukraine. This is really our concern. We're concerned about this because we're seeing that some governments are diverting aid to Ukraine from other developing countries.

We're also seeing that, sadly, the public awareness and generosity have been really going all towards Ukraine, and it's much harder to raise public funds to respond to the food crisis we're facing. This is really of serious concern and is why I mention the issue of Canada in stating that a matching fund for the food crisis would be much needed in bringing more resources to it.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ravon.

Thank you, Mr. Epp. We're at time.

We're going to go to Mr. Turnbull for four minutes, and then we'll close up with our Bloc and NDP colleagues.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Thanks, Chair.

Thanks to all the panellists for being here today.

Mr. Vauthier, I have quite a number of questions for you. I know that unfortunately you're not able to answer. I am going to frame those questions, and if perhaps you're able to respond in writing, that would be helpful.

In particular, the FAO's rapid response plan talks about "life- and livelihood-saving interventions to support the most vulnerable smallholder and medium-sized farming households". I understand that for a diverse and nutritious diet, smallholders in Ukraine actually make up for a large portion of that diet. I note that is one-fifth of grain, 85% of vegetables, 83% of fruits and 99% of honey, and it goes on to milk production, eggs and one-third of overall meat production.

What I want to ask you is, what kinds of investments are you asking for or in need of in order to support those smallholders so that Ukraine can restart, as you said, and support that nutritious diet among its people? I'll leave that for you. Obviously, you can't answer, but I want to pose the question.

I also want to pose another question in relation to the food import financing facility, which I think is another proposal that has been put forward by FAO. Maybe I'll frame this to Oxfam and Ms. Ravon.

How does this work with the humanitarian aid? My understanding is that the food import financing facility is a way to target the rising food import and input costs and really help countries that are

net food-importing countries, but it takes a different approach. Obviously, it's a financing facility. It's maybe not going to meet the most immediate needs—I'm not sure—but how does that work with Oxfam's approach and the ask for humanitarian aid?

I'm not sure who wants to respond.

Ms. Lambert, I see that you have unmuted yourself, so go ahead.

Ms. Brittany Lambert: I think we have to look into the mechanics of that to be able to give you a detailed answer, but certainly what we want to see is humanitarian aid right now, but we also, at Oxfam, recognize that ideally we're in a world where there are more structural solutions, where we don't rely on humanitarian aid. Perhaps this food-importing facility could be something to that effect, but I would need to do some more detailed background research to give you a full answer.

• (1205)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you for that.

I would just note that in the notes we received from Maximo at this committee that eligible countries would commit to "increase investments in agrifood systems, thus increasing resilience for the future". I was really happy to see that in there and would welcome any additional information on that.

Lastly, Mr. Vauthier, I'm also going to put this out there to you. Maybe you can respond in writing. I am wondering what the status is of \$115.4 million U.S. that has been requested by FAO for implementing its rapid response plan and how much the FAO has secured in funding and how much in addition is still required. We've heard the ask from Oxfam for humanitarian aid, which is quite a large number—\$600 million—but I also want to check on how FAO is doing with its fundraising to implement that rapid response plan.

Thanks very much, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Turnbull. You are right on time.

We'll go to Mr. Perron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Perron, you may go ahead. You have two minutes.

Mr. Yves Perron: My question is for the Oxfam Canada representatives.

What is your view on the theft of Ukraine's grain and the fact that Russia's army is appropriating crops and sending them back to Russia?

Have you seen it happening on the ground? Do you have any information on that?

What can the west do to help mitigate the situation? Would it be helpful to follow up on site afterwards to quantify the crops that were stolen in Ukraine?

Ms. Lauren Ravon: I hate to disappoint you, but I don't have a good answer to that question, unfortunately. When it comes to stolen grain, we don't conduct any inquiries on the ground in Ukraine. All of our efforts are based along the border and in neighbouring countries. Our main focus is providing protection and assistance to displaced families and children.

Mr. Yves Perron: We've heard that many displaced individuals make their way to neighbouring countries.

Are there many people who move to other parts of Ukraine, regions that are not as directly affected by the war?

Is the assistance you provide fairly evenly distributed throughout? Do you have a lot of trouble with logistics and distribution?

Ms. Lauren Ravon: Logistics and distribution are definitely challenges. As in any conflict, people who are displaced within the country itself tend to receive the least amount of assistance. Once people cross the border, they come under the international system for refugee protection and assistance. However, those who are internally displaced are often overlooked, since the conflict makes it difficult to access areas within the country.

For that reason, I can't give you any specific information on what is going on in the various regions of Ukraine. I can say, though, that food, protective services and supports for women who are victims of violence are harder to access within Ukraine than they are in neighbouring countries right now.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ravon and Mr. Perron.

We now go to Mr. MacGregor for two minutes.

[English]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To Oxfam, in previous interventions you were talking about the fact that there are some structural inequalities that exist in the way our agriculture operates. With respect to countries like Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan and Ethiopia, which have been so reliant on food imports, you said that the warning signs were there in 2020. Of course, this war in Ukraine has exacerbated the crisis.

Can you expand a bit on the structural inequalities? Is it the fact that their local agriculture has been unable to compete with exporting countries? Can you develop that answer a little more for us, please?

Ms. Lauren Ravon: There is the issue of global market forces that make it difficult in any country to have a strong, local, vibrant agricultural economy. During the pandemic we even spoke about that here in Canada, in Quebec, about local agricultural production and not being so dependent on imports.

In poor countries, it's very different. If you have a strong economy, you have the cash reserves and the economic strength to be able to import during any given month of the year, whereas, in poor countries, you're too vulnerable to price increases and to market dynamics, like the ones we're seeing now.

What we've seen in this region is an under-investment in rural economies, in the capacity of people living in rural communities to make a living in their regions. This implies access to infrastructure: roads and water infrastructure as well as services to people. You

can't have a vibrant agriculture economy if you're not also investing in things like schools and child care. Women, who make up the vast majority of the agricultural workforce in some areas, can't go off and have productive agricultural small-scale businesses if there's no one caring for their children, if they're spending all of their time collecting water or if they have no way to leave their children and go to market.

It's also recognizing that we need investments in rural economies as a whole that take into account gender dynamics, that take into account climate change, that take into account women's care responsibilities so that these economies are fit for purpose for the future, where we have a lot of women and children who are left behind in these rural areas because there aren't the services to survive.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ravon, and Mr. MacGregor.

Colleagues, that ends our first panel. I apologize because I know there were a number of technical issues.

I'd like to thank the folks from Oxfam, MP Zaburanna—we don't know what happened to her connection, so we hope all is okay with her—and Mr. Vauthier. I saw that you would have wanted to get in on many of these.

I welcome you to respond to Mr. Turnbull's questions. We can certainly work to get you those questions in writing. I know that we all collectively heard from you informally with Deputy Director-General Bechdol the other day. That information was very helpful and if there are even a couple of pages that you want to get to us in a written submission, we would welcome that. I'm sure it would be very beneficial.

Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Just very quickly, I wonder whether the FAO would table its rapid response plan with this committee. I'm not sure whether that's happened yet, but given that Mr. Barlow and others, including myself, have referenced it, I think it would be valuable to have on the record for us to consider.

The Chair: Absolutely. I don't see any issue with that. Mr. Vauthier, that can accompany anything additional you would like to provide as context on the ground. You were very helpful in setting the stage for us, as was MP Zaburanna and others.

Thank you to our witnesses.

Colleagues, in two minutes we are going to be transitioning over.

Just quickly before we go, bells are expected at 12:30. I assume that you see that proceeding as far down the line with our next panel is going to be fine.

• (1210) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1220)

The Chair: Colleagues, this is the second panel. I know we've had a number of technical issues, but we're very fortunate to have three different witnesses today. We have Robert Saik, who is a professional agrologist and certified agricultural consultant; from Richardson International Limited, we have Jean-Marc Ruest, the senior vice-president, corporate affairs and general counsel; and from Fertilizer Canada, we have Clyde Graham, the executive vice-president—I know he's working on his technical side—and Catherine King, who is the vice-president, communications and stakeholder relations.

Mr. Ruest, from Richardson International, I'm going to start with you. You have up to five minutes for opening remarks.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Marc Ruest (Senior Vice-President, Corporate Affairs and General Counsel, Richardson International Limited): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Jean-Marc Ruest, and I am the senior vice-president of corporate affairs and general counsel at Richardson International Limited. I truly appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today.

[*English*]

I'm very honoured to have been granted the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Jean-Marc Ruest, and as stated previously, I'm senior vice-president of corporate affairs and general counsel for Richardson International Limited.

Richardson International is Canada's leading handler, exporter and processor of Canadian grains and oilseeds. With a network of grain elevators and crop input facilities situated throughout the Canadian Prairies and port terminal facilities in Vancouver, Prince Rupert, Thunder Bay, Hamilton and Sorel, we handle 14 million to 16 million metric tons of grains and oilseeds annually and export to over 50 countries around the world. Proudly headquartered in Winnipeg, we have been involved in agriculture and the international grain trade since 1857. As a company, along with our Canadian producer partners, we have witnessed and worked through world wars, the Great Depression and numerous significant conflicts that have occurred over the past 165 years.

In considering current global food security concerns and how they should be addressed, it is important to note that food sufficiency and food affordability are issues that predate Russia's invasion of Ukraine. While their impact has certainly been exacerbated as a result of the current conflict, it would be unwise to view the situation as a temporary one that will resolve itself when peace is hopefully achieved.

As a result, when we consider what Canada should be doing to address global food insecurity, in our opinion Canada should be doing so through a fundamental long-term policy lens rather than limiting itself to an emergency relief approach.

[*Translation*]

Canada is in a very fortunate position. We produce way more agri-food products than we consume, so we can export that surplus production to countries that don't have the capacity to meet their food needs. We are known around the world as a reliable supplier of high-quality agricultural products. That competitive edge has generated significant economic spinoffs for Canada and is regularly seen as a sure way to accelerate Canada's economic growth.

[*English*]

When we consider what Canada should be doing to address global food insecurity, the simple answer should be to produce as much as we can and to export as much as we can as quickly as we can. Doing that would not only address an urgent global need but also be beneficial to Canada's economy. However, as obviously beneficial as the strategy would be, we have struggled to adopt the policies required to transform those intentions into action. In fact, I would submit that in many instances, policies that run contrary to the objective are being pursued.

In order to produce as much as we can, we need to encourage the development and adoption of technologies that increase production through a regulatory system that is grounded in science rather than in socio-political preferences. Unfortunately, the primacy of science in the regulation of agriculture and more specifically with respect to the development, registration and use of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides—all tools that are critical to a farmer's ability to increase production—are under threat.

Policies such as the EU's farm to fork strategy will significantly reduce production and increase the cost of grains and oilseeds, obviously adding to the global food security concerns. Canada and other countries on whom the world relies to meet their food supply needs must immediately and unwaveringly commit themselves to science as being the foundation on which agricultural production, regulation and international trade will be based.

We also need to ensure that grains and oilseeds produced throughout Canada can move by rail and through Canadian ports in a timely fashion in order to reliably supply our international customers. Unfortunately, the challenges to our ability to do so for the last several years are well known. Rail service has been an ongoing issue, exacerbated by washouts, fires, blockades and labour disruptions. We have all witnessed how any one of these factors can effectively shut down the Canadian supply chain, including the exports of grains and oilseeds, for extended periods of time. Our ability to efficiently operate terminals and load vessels in key ports such as Vancouver is also under threat for a number of reasons including infrastructure insufficiency.

The question to ask, then, is if we are challenged to move what we currently produce, at a time when the world desperately needs our products, then how do we expect to supply the world with more in the future?

• (1225)

A significant part of the answer depends on our collective commitment to addressing those challenges head-on through a combination of regulatory reforms and increasing capacity, limiting disruptions, particularly those not caused by natural disasters, and investment in critical infrastructure.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for the opportunity to share my views.

I would be happy to answer your questions.

[*English*]

Thank you very much. I look forward to your questions.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ruest.

You may go ahead, Mr. Saik. The floor is yours.

Please position your mike exactly as it was during the technical test.

[*English*]

It's over to you, my friend.

Mr. Robert Saik (Professional Agrologist and Certified Agricultural Consultant, As an Individual): Hello, everyone.

My name is Robert Saik. I'm beaming in to you from San Sebastián, Spain. I echo the comments made by my colleague from Richardson grains.

I'm speaking here in Spain on the resiliency of agriculture globally. My background is that of professional agrologist. I've written two books on the subject of food production and technology integration. My heritage is 100% Ukrainian. Both sets of grandparents emigrated from Ukraine. I'm actively on the ground in Ukraine right now, even today. I've been playing a role in getting supplies to the people on the ground in Ukraine.

My concern from a standpoint of Canadian resiliency is that far too often we see ideology driving the agenda with respect to agriculture. "Farm to Fork" was already mentioned here. The objectives in the EU under Farm to Fork are a blanket 50% reduction in pesticides, a 50% reduction in antibiotics for animals and that 25% of the European Union would be organics production.

It's common knowledge—not rocket science—that organic production creates a drag on yield, so you have to put more land into production. We have to be very cautious about ideology driving agriculture policy. Agriculture decisions should be output based. No better example of poor policy is in the news today than Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka's policy to go 100% organic last April has been a disaster. It was the first domino in pushing that country to basically political and financial ruin.

What we need in Canada right now is close collaboration with those policy-makers to understand that agriculture must be output based and that the keys to sustainability in agriculture are soil health—so we need to concentrate on soil health—water use efficiency and greenhouse gas balance.

When I speak of "balance" in greenhouse gas, it's not a blanket reduction in 30% of nitrogen fertilizer across Canada. That's not the answer. It's a recognition by policy-makers of the technologies that are adopted by agricultural producers in Canada, including slow-release nitrogen fertilizers, variable rate application of fertilizer, split application of fertilizers, and soil testing, all the sciences that go into making Canadian farmers some of the most efficient farmers in the world, albeit we still have room to improve, but our nitrogen use efficiency in Canada is amongst the highest in the world.

We need to produce more. The world needs more Canada. It needs more canola. It needs more wheat. We've just been I think blessed with a good ruling on the recognition that genetic engineering, or gene editing, is sound science. That needs to be moved further and faster around the world.

I'll stop there. I'm looking forward to questions from the panel pertaining to agriculture food production and resilience from Canadian farmers.

• (1230)

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

I understand that we're having trouble with Mr. Graham's headset, but that you're able to step up, Ms. King. We'll go to Fertilizer Canada for up to five minutes.

Ms. Catherine King (Vice-President, Communications and Stakeholder Relations, Fertilizer Canada): Good afternoon. Thank you for having us.

Canada has a strong and diverse agriculture sector, and the foundation of this sector is fertilizer. Fertilizer Canada is an industry association representing manufacturers, wholesalers and retail distributors of nitrogen, phosphate, sulphur and potash fertilizers. These fertilizers are used in the production of agricultural crops that help feed the world. Simply put, fertilizer is food for plants.

In Canada, the fertilizer industry contributes over \$23 billion annually to the economy and over \$12 billion to GDP. Over 76,000 people are employed, directly or indirectly, by the industry. It's not just Canadian farmers who rely on our fertilizer; 12% of the world's fertilizer supply comes from Canada. As a major export industry, we supply fertilizer products to over 75 countries.

The world's population is estimated to grow by two billion people by 2050. Global agriculture production will need to increase by 60% to 70% in order to feed all these people. This will not be possible without fertilizer. Higher yields will be necessary to meet the growing global demand for Canadian crops. This was echoed in the federal government's target of \$75 billion in agri-food exports by 2025. Geopolitical turmoil in the world—most recently, the war in Ukraine—adds to the strain on the food supply. In response to the war's impact on Russian potash supplies, our member companies in the potash sector have expanded their production, adding millions of additional tonnage to global supplies.

We are not only experts in fertilizer products but also innovation, knowledge and best practices for fertilizer use. 4R nutrient stewardship is a Canadian-developed innovation and, for more than a decade, we have worked with farmers, industry, the research community, governments and conservation groups to implement these best management practices, in order to optimize nutrient uptake and crop production while reducing environmental costs.

We have worked hard to become the global standard, including partnering with the Co-operative Development Foundation of Canada to deliver the 4R solution project in Africa for the last three years. The concept is simple: Apply the right source of nutrient, at the right time and in the right place, and you will get the best results. Fertilizer management practices need to balance economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability. Doing this requires a fair and predictable regulatory environment that supports programs like 4R and continued innovation in the sector.

Fertilizer is a critical piece to ensure food security at home and around the world. To ensure the Canadian fertilizer industry continues to play a pivotal role in food security, we ask the government to continue to enhance collaboration with the industry. Working together is the best path forward for achieving our mutual goals. We also ask for support in raising awareness and increasing uptake in the 4Rs to help farmers optimize their fertilizer inputs for strong, healthy crops and minimize their environmental outcomes.

Our industry has worked hard to ensure farmers and growers have the critical input of fertilizer for their crops. We need a practical, consistent and predictable regulatory environment, so our members can make long-term plans and investment. Canada must be seen as a reliable trading partner, and the government must work with industry to ensure there are no disruptions to the supply chain, so our products can get to our farmer customers, who can grow hearty and healthy crops to feed the world.

Thank you for the opportunity to present to you, and for your time.

• (1235)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. King.

Colleagues, I know we have bells. By my count, we have about 25 minutes and 30 seconds, which means we will get one round of six-minute questions. Use your time wisely.

Mr. Epp, I'm going to start with you. If you want to share, that will be your prerogative.

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, I will share with Mr. Falk.

Thank you for the excellent testimony.

I would like to begin with Mr. Saik. I share your heritage. My grandparents were born in Ukraine, as well. I would like to begin with you.

In response to the 2007-08 crop-price rises around the world, there was a debate—a food-versus-fuel debate. In your opinion, if we use the proper technologies to our limit, is that a red herring, given the food insecurity we have in part of the world today? In western Canada, we grow wheat, and the world is calling for more wheat. We also grow expanding amounts of canola for both fuel and oil. Can you make a comment on that?

I'll ask Mr. Ruest to follow up, as well.

The Chair: You're on mute, Mr. Saik. Go ahead.

Mr. Robert Saik: There's always a trade-off in agriculture, and ultimately it comes down to signals being sent by the marketplace to farmers. CPS wheat, for example, is mostly utilized for ethanol production, versus hard red spring wheat, which is mostly used for human consumption. If we want to have a higher level of human consumption, I think the signals can be sent through the marketplace fairly clearly. If the policy is that we should have more biofuel and therefore we need to produce more crops to go into the biofuel sector, that definitely is a signal that's put out to farmers through government policy.

I think you have a balance here of market signals from the world marketplace that is looking for food and an alternate signal that comes from policy that's generated around climate initiatives.

I'll leave it there.

Mr. Dave Epp: Mr. Ruest, do you have any comments?

Mr. Jean-Marc Ruest: I agree. I think the demand for grains and oilseeds to be used as fuel obviously adds a new consumption source, and that can only have an impact on price, so the market will sort out where it ought to go. Food should win. People need to eat. There would naturally be, then, an increase.... If production does not increase and you add the consumptive demand, then the price is going to increase. The solution to that is to increase production. It goes to the point that I think Mr. Saik was making: that you—

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you. I'd like to get one more question in if I can

For Fertilizer Canada, is there any risk to any of our international trading patterns if we strive for more self-sufficiency? I'm thinking particularly of phosphorus now, because we should have the capabilities for nitrogen and potassium. Do you have any comments?

Ms. Catherine King: I know that Clyde is here, but I don't think he can answer.

In terms of phosphorus, we import all our phosphorus, primarily from the U.S., and from Morocco as well.

• (1240)

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you.

Mr. Falk, go ahead.

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Epp.

Thank you to all of our witness.

Mr. Saik and Mr. Epp, like you, all four of my grandparents come from Ukraine as well, from southern Ukraine.

I would like to direct my questions to Mr. Ruest today.

Mr. Ruest, Richardson's has some assets in my riding, including their research farm in Glenlea, and you do a tremendous amount of good work there.

There were two things you mentioned in your presentation.

The first thing is that there need to be policies changed that would promote agriculture growth and increased yields. You also said that we need to grow as much as quickly and as soon as we can when it comes to food production.

You talked about impediments in policy that we have here in Canada, but you also talked about infrastructure. Where is the bottleneck in our infrastructure and where should we prioritize investments, and also about policies...? Could you address those two things?

Mr. Jean-Marc Ruest: Let me start with the infrastructure and the pinch points. Again, the rail issues that we've seen over the last number of years are chronic. There is a capacity issue in rail service. On that capacity, when we have something like forest fires and washouts, etc., those limitations literally wipe out the system for weeks or months at a time, with a very limited ability to recover quickly. I think there's an area of redundancy for excess capacity, for surge capacity that's required when we have those types of issues.

We also see the Port of Vancouver as a key port for exports, and we're seeing increased traffic coming through the port, which is a good thing. It's a sign of a healthy economy, with product needing and wanting to be exported, but we just don't have the infrastructure to match it. Second Narrows bridge is not equipped to take the number of railcars that need to pass through to load onto vessels. The Thornton passage needs to be expanded.

We need to accept the fact that a growing number of vessels will be coming in and out of the Port of Vancouver. Rather than pursuing policies that seem to try to limit the amount of vessels that are coming in or out, we need to facilitate their entry and exit.

Mr. Ted Falk: Also, to some of the policies Canada has that you see are detrimental to agriculture...?

Mr. Jean-Marc Ruest: I think some of them have been touched on previously: things like a blanket reduction of fertilizer use by 25%. Without making the connection of what that will mean with respect to agricultural output, making a connection and understanding what the purpose or objective is, which is a laudable one of being environmentally conscious and sustainable, but making sure that it is aligned—

The Chair: I'm sorry. We're going to have to leave it there, gentlemen. That's six minutes, and we are under a tight schedule.

Mr. Drouin, it's over to you.

[*Translation*]

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

I want to correct something Mr. Ruest said.

We aren't calling for a blanket reduction of fertilizers in Canada; rather, we want a reduction in the emissions attributable to fertilizer use. That is not the same thing. There are strategies that could be used in agriculture. For instance, the Fertilizer Canada representatives spoke about 4R nutrient stewardship. I think it's important to use the right words.

Mr. Ruest, I proposed that we invite representatives from Richardson International because I think your company plays a major role in exporting canola. Canada plays a major role as well. Canada produces 40% of the world's canola exports. Cooking oil is the product you often hear about. We talked a bit about market forces, but obviously, you work with farmers who supply you with the canola.

How do you see the issue of cooking oil? What role can Canada play when it comes to canola, in particular?

Mr. Jean-Marc Ruest: One of the benefits of canola is that canola oil is recognized as being very high in nutrients. That's a huge advantage. I would also say that canola oil is largely produced in an environmentally responsible way. We compared the system we use for the production of canola oil with production systems for other cooking oils, including palm oil, and we found that our system of production was much more environmentally responsible.

Canola doesn't necessarily grow well in all environments or conditions. Canada has conditions that are very conducive to growing canola, so our production capacity gives us an edge.

We've made very smart investments in developing canola production in Canada, and we have solid infrastructure. That sets us apart from our global competitors. All of that is very good news for Canada.

• (1245)

Mr. Francis Drouin: You spoke with my fellow member about the infrastructure that was needed for agricultural development. When floods like the ones in British Columbia occur, it illustrates how fragile our infrastructure is.

Are you recommending increased government investment in export infrastructure and measures to improve rail access?

Mr. Jean-Marc Ruest: Yes, that is definitely something we recommend. It's crucial to understand how important good infrastructure is, not only to meet current needs, but also to be able to seize future opportunities. That type of work is a huge undertaking, and it can't be done overnight. These projects take years, if not decades, to complete—hence the importance of getting started right away.

Mr. Francis Drouin: If I'm not mistaken, your company has been investing in your terminal facilities for five to 10 years.

Is that right?

Mr. Jean-Marc Ruest: Yes, that's right.

We nearly doubled our terminal capacity seven or so years ago. A number of our competitors with grain elevators at their Vancouver port facilities actually did the same thing. The industry has made significant investments in infrastructure.

Mr. Francis Drouin: As I understand it, your facilities have the capacity to accommodate many rail cars, but there is too much traffic in certain spots to accommodate that increase.

Is that true?

Mr. Jean-Marc Ruest: The grain elevator at our port terminal facilities in Vancouver could accommodate twice as much grain coming in by rail. We have a lot of unused capacity.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you.

[English]

My next question is for Ms. King.

We know fertilizer plays an important role in growing food. Obviously Russia and Belarus are out of the market now. Checking for next year's season, are your members readjusting their supply chains? Without naming any, have you had those conversations with some of your members?

Ms. Catherine King: I think conversations are still going on about supply and demand from our members' perspectives. I know that on the potash side, our members made an announcement on increased production. It's just on the production side of things.

Unfortunately, it's not like flipping a switch. There's a lot of complexity, so they're going to do all they can to meet the demand that's out there. We haven't had, other than those announcements, any in-depth conversations with them on where the market is looking for 2023.

Mr. Francis Drouin: We know that the availability varies when it comes to certain fertilizers out west versus out east. Out east we're missing a lot of nitrogen. Are you having conversations with some of your members about...? We're good at transportation, and obviously cost is an important factor, but do your members see that west to east travel as something that is feasible or not feasible?

Ms. Catherine King: It still remains more economical to receive product by ship in the east. I would echo the comments on infrastructure. I think Canada really needs to come up with a strategic 10-year path forward on what we're going to do for that. As these announcements come on and our members increase their production, they'll need to have the railway availability to get that product to their customers.

The Chair: We'll have to leave it there. Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

[Translation]

We now go to Mr. Perron for six minutes.

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being with us today.

I have a lot of questions, but little time, so I'm going to be quick about it.

Mr. Ruest, when it comes to increasing production and exports, you recommend we take a long-term view, not a short-term one, as is the case with an emergency relief approach. We have heard from witnesses that Canada should direct a portion of its international aid to improve countries' food self-sufficiency and local capacity.

How do you think we should balance those two aspects?

• (1250)

Mr. Jean-Marc Ruest: As you mentioned, it's all about balance. Despite our best intentions, we need to be realistic about what we can do in every region and what the most effective way is to provide those populations with the food they need.

In some places, the challenges can revolve around geography, a lack of farmland and drought. No matter how hard we try, those places will always have a limited capacity to produce certain foods, at least. That is why it's important to look at the situation when determining what is feasible and to pay attention to regions in the world with overproduction.

Science can still play a role in helping to build local production capacity, such as the identification of seed varieties that are drought-resistant or better able to withstand diseases common in certain regions.

It's a complex issue, and it requires proper analysis. It all comes down to one question: What is the most effective and efficient way of achieving the goal?

Mr. Yves Perron: Sorry, I have to stop you there, but you did a good job of answering my question. Thank you.

I want to come back to transportation, quickly.

Do you have any concrete recommendations for the committee when it comes to transportation?

You brought up rail, and we also touched on the port terminal facilities. In a previous study, we examined the challenges around farm products and containers and the lack of competition there.

Do you have any comments or recommendations on that?

Mr. Jean-Marc Ruest: As far as rail goes, the Western Grain Elevator Association and others have made a number of recommendations, so I would encourage you to take a look at those.

That said, we need to improve the level of rail performance. It may be a good idea to consider increased competition.

It's also necessary to increase infrastructure capacity for things such as bridges and tunnels. Similarly, more tracks are needed in Vancouver.

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much.

Ms. King, you talked about increasing domestic fertilizer production to be less dependent on outside sources. You said it's not magic; you can't flip a switch to adjust production levels.

Still, have you estimated what percentage of local demand we could meet within the next few years?

[English]

Ms. Catherine King: I don't have any particular forecast on that, but I think our members would look for a regulatory environment that encourages investment within the industry and that really looks at a balancing of both the economic goals and environmental goals.

I think we play a pivotal role in supplying global fertilizer. About 95% of the potash produced here is exported globally, and 40% of the nitrogen is exported to primarily the U.S. I would say that Canada helps eastern and western Canadian farmers, but you also have to look at the global context in terms of Canada being global leader in producing fertilizer.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you, Ms. King.

Mr. Saik, you said we needed to recognize the practices and technologies farmers are using, rather than make decisions about specific thresholds based on predetermined objectives.

Can you talk about that in more detail, please?

[English]

Mr. Robert Saik: These are actually qualitative and quantitative measurements. For example, you can measure whether or not a farmer soil-tests. You can document whether or not a farmer is matching his nitrogen recommendations, or balance for fertilizer recommendations, to those soil tests and recommendations. You can determine, very quickly, whether or not he's using slow-release nitrogens. You can document whether or not he's using precision agriculture.

All of those features and technologies lend themselves to a higher level of fertilizer-use efficiency. That fertilizer-use efficiency increases crop yield while simultaneously decreasing the environ-

mental footprint. Those are the things we should be measuring. Those are the things we should be rewarding farmers for.

• (1255)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Saik. We'll have to leave it there.

Thank you, Mr. Perron.

Mr. MacGregor, you have six minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll jump right into it. My first question is for Richardson International.

Last month, there was an article written by Sylvain Charlebois about the massive increase in the price of vegetable oil. He noted there were significant increases in palm oil, but canola oil is also up 55%, on average, over the the last six months, I believe. That's very good for our farmers, but it also reduces the purchasing power of the countries we're exporting to.

I have two questions.

First, Mr. Ruest, can you tell me what this has done to the state of Canada's exports, or are they still strong? Can you start off with that question, please?

Mr. Jean-Marc Ruest: The exports continue to be strong.

We have to remember that, in Canada, over the last six months or so, we've had a short crop. We've had production reduced by about 40%. We talked about the food-versus-fuel issue. A lot of our production, now, is being called for by the biofuel industry, so we're producing and exporting more canola oil than we would have been exporting canola seed. Those are the factors, really.

I think we have a very healthy export industry in canola, but there are changing dynamics at play.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

We're all very well aware of the things the government needs to do with respect to our supply chain. We have just tabled a report in the House of Commons that details many of those issues.

However, with the increase in canola prices, how are Richardson and other players in the private sector reinvesting those profits to make sure they're stepping up their side of the equation?

Mr. Jean-Marc Ruest: I don't think it's necessarily a question of exporters' profits being increased by that 50%, 60% or more that you're seeing. What we're doing is selling and buying at.... The selling price of the commodity matches, to a large extent, the purchase price we have to pay to be able to source that commodity.

It's a global market. We are competing against worldwide suppliers, as well, so our pricing has to match. It's a very competitive global marketplace, so it's not a question of seeing this increase on the store shelves and therefore...that is a direct correlation to the profits being made by the people handling that commodity.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you for that clarification.

Mr. Saik, I'd like to turn to you.

We had Oxfam in a previous panel here. They've done some great work detailing the financial costs of climate change. They noted that, over the last 20 years, we've seen an 819% increase in extreme weather-related humanitarian funding appeals, and that the economic cost of extreme weather events, just last year, was \$329 billion—a figure expected to increase as we go into the next decade. If we're talking about inflation, that's certainly one we have to keep on our radar.

In developing countries, especially in the Horn of Africa, they're now suffering from this in multiple ways. Not only are they having to tackle the effects of climate disasters but farmers are also having to deal with the loss in production. The country suffers, as a whole, because it then has reduced purchasing power.

There's been a lot of talk about using Canadian expertise. You mentioned soil health. Can you talk about some of the ways Canada can specifically step in to help those developing countries achieve more resiliency? The projection for the future does not look good, especially in the figures we've seen presented.

• (1300)

Mr. Robert Saik: I have experience working on the ground in Kenya and Nigeria. I have a stake in a farm in Uganda. The first thing we would do is subsidize soil sampling, because when you sample soils and get soil analysis done, you help small landholders understand where the constraints are in their nutrient balance in the soil.

The second thing you would do is encourage policies that encourage genetic engineering because, in many cases, the ability of

us to engineer drought-tolerant and saline-tolerant crops in many of those areas is absolutely essential. We would also encourage the utilization of technology to increase pest resistance.

You can't feed the population of tomorrow on yesterday's technology. Canada is a leader in technology adoption. I think one of our primary exports as a country should be the agricultural technology that we have in our heads.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

In the interests of time, I'll leave it there, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

Colleagues, we have just a minute or two before the bells. Let me, on behalf of all of you, thank our witnesses.

Thank you, Mr. Ruest with Richardson and Mr. Saik, appearing for himself—we certainly welcome your testimony—and Ms. King and Mr. Graham.

I apologize, Mr. Graham, that we weren't able to get you in, but Ms. King stepped in and did a great job.

Thank you so much.

Colleagues, we'll call it there. On Thursday, we are going to be studying Bill C-234. Mr. Lobb has confirmed and will be before the committee.

On Monday, the intention is to go to one two-hour panel on cannabis, as Mr. MacGregor asked. I need your witnesses, so that the clerk has them. If you haven't already sent some of your witnesses to the clerk, please do so by the end of today.

I think we'll leave it at that. We'll let everyone make sure that they're able to vote.

Thank you. The meeting is adjourned.

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