



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

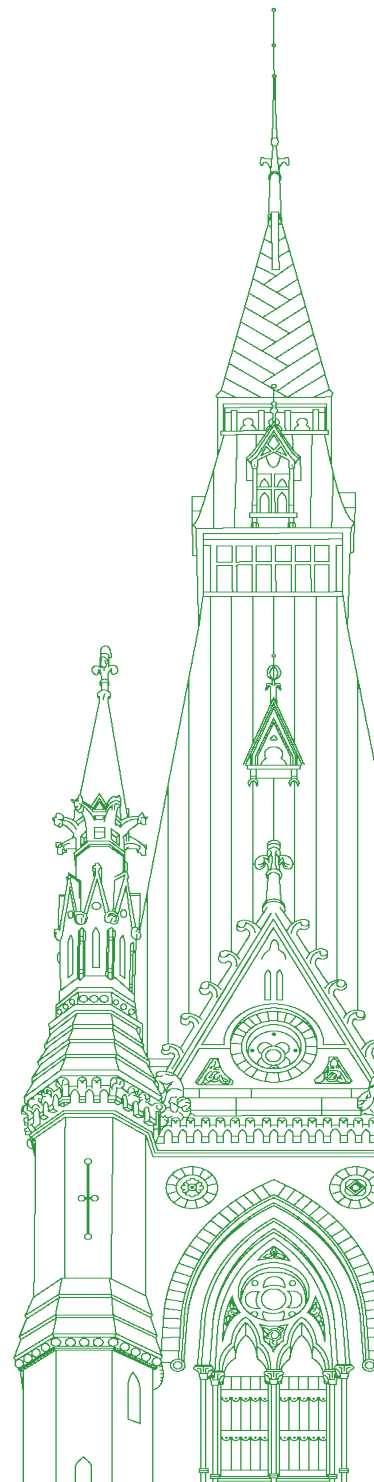
Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 010

Wednesday, April 29, 2020

Chair: Mrs. Sherry Romanado



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• (1805)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 10 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology. Pursuant to the order of reference of Saturday, April 11, the committee is meeting for the purpose of receiving evidence concerning matters relating to the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Today's meeting is taking place by video conference. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website.

Members and the witnesses, I would like to remind you to please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. When you are ready to speak, please unmute your microphone and then return to mute when you are finished speaking. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly so that the interpreters can do their great work.

As is my normal practice, I will hold up a yellow card for when you have 30 seconds left in your intervention, and I will hold up a red card for when your time for questions has expired.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses. Tonight we have the Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food; the Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages; Siddika Mithani, president, Canadian Food Inspection Agency; Chris Forbes, deputy minister for the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food; and from the Department of Industry we have Mr. Simon Kennedy, deputy minister; and Mr. Paul Thompson, associate deputy minister.

We will begin with witness testimony. Each of the witnesses will have 10 minutes to present.

Minister Joly, you have the floor for 10 minutes.

[Translation]

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning, everyone, dear members of the committee.

Good morning, Ms. Bibeau.

I'm pleased to be here today to report to the members of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology on all the work done by the Canada Economic Development team—

which includes the six regional development agencies, or RDAs—in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I'd also like to take a moment to acknowledge all the staff who work behind the scenes to make these virtual meetings possible.

Thank you for your commitment to our democracy.

[English]

Thank you also to all the members of the opposition who have been working collaboratively with the government to deal with the pandemic—to protect and save the lives of Canadians, and definitely to protect their health—while also dealing with the impact on the Canadian economy.

I know that some of you are from Alberta. Obviously, I want to send my regards, and tell you that my heart and all our hearts are with you and with all the people in Fort McMurray right now as they deal with the impacts of floods.

[Translation]

Across the country, the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a whirlwind of uncertainty and anxiety among Canadians. All of our lives have been turned upside down. Such is the case for entrepreneurs and workers in small and medium-sized enterprises. And for the tourism sector as well, including indigenous tourism, which faces unique challenges. These are very difficult times for an industry that was really on a roll.

Over the past few weeks, we've heard from a number of entrepreneurs who, although their day-to-day realities are different, are experiencing very similar situations. These people work hard, play by the rules and do whatever it takes to ensure the survival and growth of their businesses. Despite all this, they're now facing an economic tsunami that, until quite recently, would have been hard to imagine. These businesses are a source of good local jobs, and of local pride. They are nothing less than the backbone of our neighbourhoods and our regions.

We are at a turning point in the history of our country. We know that, more than ever, our decisions will ensure the success, not only of our economy, but also of our communities. That means having frank and honest conversations, like the one we'll have today and like the ones my team and I have had with thousands of individuals, business leaders, associations and entrepreneurs from all over the country since the crisis began.

Through the most extensive economic assistance program in our history, we are putting money into the pockets of Canadians who need it—like those who have lost their jobs because of COVID-19 and who have access to the Canada emergency response benefit.

What have we been hearing? That our efforts are having a tangible impact. Thanks to the Canada emergency wage subsidy, businesses can keep their workers, and rehire those they've had to lay off.

We've also put in place a number of measures for business, as Minister Ng indicated before this committee last week. However, despite the extensive social safety net that has been put in place, we're also hearing that the situation remains difficult for smaller businesses. We've listened, and we've made adjustments. We were told that the various support measures offered needed to be more flexible. This is certainly what the mayor of Montreal, Valérie Plante, told me during the conversation we had. This is what we did with the support provided by BDC, and by broadening the criteria for access to support programs, such as the wage subsidy.

• (1810)

[English]

Janet De Silva, from the Toronto Region Board of Trade, told us that their members were anxious about rent payments and were hoping government would be there for rent relief. We agreed. Within a week, we reached an agreement with all provinces and territories to implement the new Canada emergency commercial rent assistance for small businesses.

Steve McLellan, from the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, told us that the wage subsidy was a step in the right direction, but it needed to be higher, from 10% to 75%. We listened and we took action.

Bridgitte Anderson, from the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade, shared the concern of businesses on how they could keep as many people employed as possible.

Sheri Somerville, from the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce, asked us what role ACOA could play. Many people pointed toward the regional development agencies as the right tool to support local economies and businesses that were unable to get access to the support our government was putting forward.

Each time, we listened carefully and asked ourselves how we could help as many entrepreneurs and businesses as possible with measures that would assist workers. We also believe that the best way to help the people who run much-needed businesses in our communities on a day-to-day basis is through an institution they trust.

Our six federal regional economic development agencies are well positioned to help workers and businesses in this time of crisis. That's why we created the regional relief and recovery fund, which has a total budget of \$962 million. This fund will support businesses that are unable to benefit from existing programs and that play a key role in their local economy.

[Translation]

• (1815)

Specifically, this new fund will double the funding to support regional economies. We will provide \$675 million to regional economic development agencies and \$287 million to support the network of what's known in Quebec as the Sociétés d'aide au développement des collectivités, or SADCs. In the rest of Canada, they're called

[English]

community futures development corporations, or CFDCs.

[Translation]

These corporations play an essential role in our rural regions. This assistance will relieve immediate pressures, and will help local businesses pay their employees and cover their fixed costs. We need to protect our main streets and our local businesses, and that's what we're going to do with the help of these partners. The funding will be administered by the six RDAs, which are often the first point of contact at the local level.

In addition, \$15 million has been allocated for the creation of the northern business relief fund to assist northern businesses impacted by the pandemic. I have also asked all the development agencies to relax some of the criteria for their current clients, starting with a three-month moratorium on all payments due to the agencies, in order to relieve some of the financial pressure these clients are facing. I have also taken steps to speed up project approvals and asked agencies to commit unallocated funds to help those sectors most in need, including tourism.

Support was also provided to help businesses meet essential needs during the pandemic. This is the case of Bouctouche Bay Industries in New Brunswick, which took advantage of the networking of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, or ACOA, to market protective visors for Nova Scotia health care workers. There's also Groupe CTT, a specialized textile technology centre in Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec, which received funding to acquire the equipment needed to certify protective gowns for health care workers, a skill that had been relocated internationally. VIDO-Intervac, based at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, received support from our government for two facility-modernization initiatives to allow the company to develop and fast forward the production of veterinary and human-quality vaccines for domestic and commercial markets.

Tourism was one of the first sectors affected by the pandemic. You know as well as I do that tourism drives our communities—our communities—as well as regional economies across the country by creating good jobs and unique visitor experiences. The crisis has been a hard blow to the industry, and we're going to get through it together. We've introduced a number of measures, and we continue to be in constant contact with the main stakeholders in the sector, as well as with the provincial and territorial ministers, to ensure a coordinated approach and a clear understanding of regional issues.

At the start of the pandemic, our agency, Destination Canada, also partnered with research firms to study the repercussions of COVID-19 on tourism and to provide evidence on the matter. We will then be able to make better decisions.

During these difficult and uncertain times, Canadians can be confident that the government is there to support them. We remain vigilant, and we'll continue to make the necessary adjustments.

Our message to workers and businesses is clear: we're there for you with concrete support measures in all regions of the country. This also holds true for official language minority communities—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Madam Minister, your 10 minutes are up.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Okay. I just want to finish my last sentence.

The Chair: Quickly, please.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: —and we will be there for you now, in the weeks to come and as we move forward.

I'd be pleased to answer any questions you may have and to discuss this with you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Minister.

I now invite the hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau to take the floor.

You have 10 minutes, Madam Minister.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

I'll start in English and then switch to French.

Madam Chair, Minister Joly, members of the committee, it's good to join all of you today. I would like to mention that my deputy minister, Chris Forbes, is on the line, as is the president of CFIA, Siddika Mithani.

First and foremost, I want to thank Canada's farm families, our food processors and everyone who is stepping up to serve during this unprecedented crisis, including truckers, retailers, grocery store workers, community groups and food banks. Everyone is working very hard to adapt to the enormous pressures on the supply chain.

More than ever, Canadians can appreciate how essential our farmers and food processors are. They are stepping up to feed Canada in this time of need. While Canadians continue to have access to an abundance of food, we certainly recognize that many agricultural sectors are impacted by COVID-19. For example, some processing plants have temporarily closed or have slowed down operations. There are concerns of not having enough labour on farms and in processing plants. The closure of restaurants and food services has resulted in surplus production for some sectors.

I care deeply about the well-being of our farmers and food production workers and I understand how stressful this period is for them. Our team is working around the clock to respond to the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak on our food sector. We understand that each sector of agriculture has specific needs and is impacted differently. I want to assure producers that we are actively exploring additional measures to support them.

I appreciate this opportunity to share our actions to date to support our farmers and food processors, and to help ensure that Canadians continue to have uninterrupted access to food.

As you know, meat processing plants across the country have been significantly impacted by COVID-19, with some forced to temporarily close. This has a domino effect on ranchers, and increasing costs for cattle and hog producers, as they need to keep their animals longer on farms while prices are changing rapidly. I know that some producers are now forced to humanely cull some of their animals, which is a hard decision they make only as a last resort.

To address the current challenges, our government is working directly with industry working groups to look at ways for farmers to manage their production during this volatile period. We are connecting with provincial and local health authorities to provide the best-informed advice to employers on what measures they can take to protect their employees' health, including in the agriculture and agri-food sector.

As well, the Prime Minister has announced \$20 million to help the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, CFIA, to hire, train and equip additional staff. This also means more capacity to accommodate overtime and extra shifts to meet any changes in processing capacity. This funding also supports the sharing of inspection resources between provincially and federally inspected processing facilities. We are doing it already in Alberta.

● (1820)

[Translation]

Before the pandemic, the food sector was already challenged by significant labour shortages. The horticulture sector depends greatly on temporary foreign workers for planting and harvesting fruits and vegetables. To protect the health of Canadians and the workers, and to help ensure the strength and reliability of our food supply chain, the government acted quickly to exempt seasonal farm workers from travel restrictions, while mandating strict protocols for pre-screening and 14-day isolation upon their arrival. And we invested \$50 million, or \$1,500 per worker, to help employers cover the costs of implementing these health measures. At the same time, we are reaching out to all Canadians who have lost their jobs due to COVID-19 to consider the many opportunities to work in our agri-food industry.

We are offering incentives to help students find jobs this summer—including in agriculture—and we have increased the wage subsidy under the Canada summer jobs program to 100%.

We have also launched a jobs portal and social media campaign urging Canadians to step up to the plate and feed their fellow Canadians during this crisis.

Our government has announced a range of financial tools to help farmers and food processors have access to financing and to manage cash flow challenges related to COVID-19.

We have allocated up to \$5 billion in new lending capacity to Farm Credit Canada to help farmers and agri-businesses keep their businesses strong during the pandemic and to help with their cash flow. This has already allowed thousands of producers to defer over \$2.5 billion in loans.

We have also extended the payment deadline by six months for eligible farmers who have borrowed money through the advance payment program, totalling \$173 million targeted towards the grains and cattle sector in particular. Producers also continue to have access to a comprehensive suite of business risk management programs to help them manage significant financial impacts and risks beyond their control.

We have extended the enrolment deadline for the AgriStability program to July 3, to help more farmers manage the impact of current market disruptions, increased expenses and current production challenges.

I am talking regularly with my provincial and territorial counterparts to ensure we have the support in place to address immediate challenges.

Our government's stimulus package for Canadians and businesses includes key measures to help our agri-businesses, including access to \$40,000 interest-free loans, with 25%, or up to \$10,000 forgivable, subject to certain conditions; deferment of income tax payments, as well as GST/HST and customs duties; and a wage subsidy for employees. Businesses that aren't eligible for other federal COVID-19 measures have access to additional financial support through Canada's regional development agencies, as Minister Joly mentioned.

International trade is vital to our food supply, and it is the lifeblood of our industry and our economy. We are working hard to keep our agricultural products moving around the world so that safe, affordable and nutritious food is available and accessible to Canadians and people everywhere.

Last week, I participated in an extraordinary virtual meeting with the G20 agriculture ministers to share our responses and experiences, and to enhance global co-operation.

As well, Canada and 23 WTO members signed a joint statement to reinforce international co-operation on trade in agricultural and agri-food products. This will help to promote food security, nutrition and the health of people around the world.

I also had calls with Sonny Perdue, the United States secretary for agriculture, and Victor Villalobos, Mexico's secretary for agriculture. We recognized that collaboration and trade are essential to food security across our continent, and we underscored our shared commitment to the continued flow of food and agriculture trade.

Lastly, food banks and community food organizations have been stepping up in a big way during this crisis, while being forced to adapt. They have to find new volunteers, minimize interpersonal contact, and offer home deliveries. The government acted quickly and dedicated \$100 million under the Food Policy for Canada, in support of food banks and other organizations on the front lines. Organizations can use the funding to purchase, obtain and distribute food, hire temporary help to fill volunteer shortages, and implement biosecurity measures, such as the purchase of personal protective equipment.

Madam Chair, my sincere thanks. I know these are challenging times, and our heartfelt thank you goes out to everyone in the agri-food sector. I continue to work with the sector, and provinces and territories so we can respond quickly and effectively as this situation continues to evolve. Step by step, we are giving our farmers and food processors the tools they need to continue their vital work. We will be there to support them through this difficult period.

Thank you.

● (1825)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Minister.

Now we will go to the six-minute rounds.

Our first MP is John Barlow.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you, Ministers, for being here.

Minister Bibeau, I'm glad that you have identified many of the problems facing agriculture, but the issue here is you have not come forward with any initiatives that actually resolve the problems you have identified. You talk about Farm Credit Canada and the \$5 billion that was actually a campaign promise in 2019, which is not an unprecedented response to a critical issue right now. It only applies to those producers who are actually Farm Credit Canada clients, so about 75% of producers don't benefit from that at all.

You keep saying that they just need to get the emergency business account, some \$40,000, which is woefully inadequate. Just as an example, Minister, do you know how much it costs to feed hogs, cattle or poultry in one day?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: I am well aware that \$40,000 is not a significant amount for large agricultural companies, because it can easily be spent in a week. However, you mentioned the loans, \$5 billion in total, that are available through Farm Credit Canada. Agricultural companies, like those in all sectors, also have access to very favourable loan products provided by all the commercial banks across the country.

[English]

Mr. John Barlow: Minister, most agricultural producers do not qualify for any of these programs.

Let me use an example. One poor producer in my riding, Arnold Beusekom, has about 1600 hogs he puts through his farm per month, and he's already lost more than \$200,000 since COVID started. His feed bill in one month is almost \$300,000. I have feed-lot alley in southern Alberta, and their costs on feed for the month of May alone are more than \$2 million. The emergency business account program does not work. They cannot qualify for the wage subsidy.

What programs, if any, are you going to be announcing in the near future to address this critical situation within the hog, cattle and poultry industry?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Thank you for your question, Mr. Barlow.

We already have an entire range of risk management programs. I agree with you that this situation is particularly critical and that producers are looking for additional assistance. However, a number of programs are accessible right now.

Let me give AgriInvest as an example. You may tell me that, again, the average in the accounts of hog producers is \$30,000, and, for a large producer, that is enough for perhaps one week. But it is something.

Then, AgriStability is designed precisely to assist producers experiencing major income losses. They can also apply for an advance payment under the program.

Let me reassure you by saying that, since last summer, I have been working very actively with my provincial partners to improve the range of risk management programs, especially AgriStability.

There is also AgriRecovery. This is a very effective mechanism that I am discussing very actively at the moment with my provincial partners. The program is designed precisely to provide assistance in critical situations. Generally, these are natural disasters, but we consider that the COVID-19 pandemic is an exceptional situation...

• (1830)

[English]

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you, Minister.

Is it okay if I get to my next question before I run out of time?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: ...and that the program could help farmers in that sense.

[English]

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you.

Basically you're saying the programs that exist are all that agriculture is going to get, even though we know the vast majority of agriculture does not subscribe to those programs.

Right now, processing capacity is at a critical stage within Canada. Cargill is going to try to reopen on a limited basis on Monday and JBS in Brooks is hanging on by a thread, meaning about 70% of our cattle processing is at risk. With 22 plants now closed in the United States, the issue is even more critical in Ontario and eastern Canada. Have you seriously considered programs like the set-aside program or an enhancement to the livestock price insurance program as ways to address cattle and pork processing?

You really have two choices here: Either you do something to ensure that the processing plants can remain open, or you do something for the producers themselves, because they are going to have to start euthanizing animals, which none of us wants to see when we're on the verge of a food crisis.

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: The situation is particularly difficult at the moment in the food processing sector. As you just said, the Cargill plant had to shut its doors for several days, but it is going to reopen on Monday. That is good news.

I can assure you that I am working actively with my provincial partners to establish programs designed to respond to the needs of both farmers and processors.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Minister.

[English]

Our next round of questions goes to MP Ehsassi.

You have six minutes.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the ministers for appearing before our committee today. I'm very grateful that you have taken the time. I will start off with Minister Bibeau.

Minister, you have made it abundantly clear that these are very challenging times for our farmers. You've also touched on how incredibly important it is that there be federal and provincial co-operation.

One program, the business risk management program, allows our farmers to mitigate and manage risk. As I understand it, it's a cost-sharing program between the federal and provincial levels of government. Could you explain to us whether there has been co-operation between the different levels of government and how you have experienced that?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: The business risk management program actually includes different programs. The one we hear the most about is AgriStability. This program is designed to support farmers when they face an important decrease in their revenues. They can also ask for an advance payment.

I would say that the program we are discussing the most right now with different provinces is AgriRecovery. We are having ongoing conversations. Depending on the province, the reality is not exactly the same. The levels of challenges for the different sectors are not necessarily the same, either. I would say this is one option on the table.

There are many others, such as the set-aside program for the beef sector that has been mentioned earlier. We are really at the point right now that these discussions are advancing well.

• (1835)

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you for that.

Another sector that's truly on everyone's mind these days is the meat processing sector. Obviously, food security is something we take very seriously.

As I understand it, there is a division of responsibilities again between the federal and provincial levels of government. As I understand it, provincial inspectors can certify meat that is only for intraprovincial use. The federal government is responsible for inspecting meat that is going to other parts of the country. Have we worked something out collaboratively with the provinces to ensure that we can work seamlessly?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Yes. I can tell you that with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency we are working really hard to make sure we will be able to offer all the services to the food processors, amongst others.

We have a pretty good collaboration with the provinces. It started with Alberta. We have an agreement with them. We are training their inspectors to have the possibility to share the resources. If we face a food shortage in one province or one territory, then in such a particular circumstance CFIA is absolutely open to allow some movement between provinces and territories, even if there has been an inspection under a provincial authority and not a federal authority.

The president might correct me if I'm wrong, but I think this is an agreement we have already started between the Northwest Territories and Alberta.

Siddika, could you just confirm or complement?

Dr. Siddika Mithani (President, Canadian Food Inspection Agency): Madam Minister, you are absolutely right. We are working on an agreement with provinces to look at interprovincial trade.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Thank you.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Perhaps I could turn to Minister Joly.

Minister, you touched on the fact that you have taken the initiative to invest \$962 million into regional development agencies. The money is meant to assist businesses that cannot avail themselves of other programs. Could you kindly unpack that for us so we're all

more familiar with what these agencies are doing and how they're assisting?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you, Ali. It's a pleasure to see you virtually and to answer questions.

First and foremost, what we're saying to entrepreneurs across this country is, the first thing they should be doing is to go to see their bank. If that's not working, definitely the BDC is there to help. Obviously, there is the \$40,000 CEBA, of which \$10,000 is forgivable, and there is also the wage subsidy. The good news is that businesses can register for it since Monday. As of this morning, there were 50,000 businesses that had used the wage subsidy.

I think the chair is indicating that I don't have enough time, but I can answer other questions regarding the \$962 million.

Thank you, Ali.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

For our next six-minute round, we have Sébastien Lemire.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first question will basically be about the same subject, so that the minister can finish her remarks.

My concern is a simple one and deals with very small businesses. A number of those businesses are general partnerships, or ones that pay salaries in the form of dividends. They are also falling through the cracks of the programs that have been announced because they are not eligible for them. At least, it is difficult to find the right fund that can assist them. This is particularly the reality with producers where I live. I will come back to that later.

I was pleased to see the announcement of a measure designed to meet the needs of very small companies. You talked about that fund, which is intended to help rural communities by providing them with access to capital. However, it was mentioned in a news release on April 17, 2020. More than 12 days later, we are still waiting for the details. How will it work? What will be the eligibility criteria?

The advantage for people in going through the SADC network, is that those organizations are in direct contact with the entrepreneurs who need their assistance. It allows them to obtain more flexible support that is better tailored to their reality.

However, they are asking me the same question: when will the flexible assistance measures be available for them?

• (1840)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you for your question, Mr. Lemire.

We have often had the opportunity to discuss things together in recent weeks, and, of course, I have heard the arguments in favour of increasing the funding for the SADCs in Quebec. I know that my colleague Marie-Claude Bibeau has also been working very hard on the issue. We were all in favour of increasing funding to the SADCs.

Quite clearly, the objective of the SADCs is to be present in rural communities and to help entrepreneurs and businesses that need access to liquidity and funding. So we are going to increase their funding in a major way. I have had the opportunity to speak with H  l  ne Deslauriers, the president of the SADCs, and she is very happy with the new funding.

Essentially, these will be loans that come with conditions similar to the ones in bank financing, which is to say a loan of \$40,000 plus salary subsidies. However, we really wanted to cover the companies that have difficulty meeting the eligibility criteria. We have therefore hugely expanded the social net. Now, we are tightening the mesh in the net so that no one is excluded. That's our objective. Money that can be sent to the companies will be available very soon.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Could we on this parliamentary committee not have a little hint as to the date when that money will be available? Just between us?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: The little hint, my dear colleague, is that it will be available very soon.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I would like to expand on this issue by talking about agriculture. I am from a rather rural constituency and I have been in contact with the producers in my region. I asked them how we could help them and what kind of requests they might make, especially with regard to agricultural work.

There was an announcement about Canada Summer Jobs that said that 100% of salaries would be subsidized and that there would be a new period during which employers could make their intentions and their needs known, in terms of hiring students. However, with no increase to the program budget, that just creates new needs. As MPs, we were not able to answer the farmers' questions. More than 60 or so producers in my region, which is almost 15% of them, replied and told me about their major need for labour. Unfortunately, because of the size of those companies in the region, the assistance provided by the current programs is not enough.

So there are questions about the assistance programs in terms of labour. Could there be a program like Canada Summer Jobs, but designed more for student jobs in agriculture? How could we improve the temporary foreign workers program, especially in the regions? How could we make sure that we meet the labour needs of farmers? Is there a solution that would allow salaries to be subsidized so that seasonal workers can maintain their connections, in terms of employment and loyalty?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Thank you for your questions.

We have been heavily reliant on temporary foreign workers for years. We have to face a particular challenge at the moment, because we know that there will be fewer of those workers. In April, for example, we brought in 11,000 of them whereas we were expecting 13,000. So things were fine in April, but the challenge is greater for the coming months. Today, we received excellent news about the workers from Guatemala, who will be able to obtain their visas when they arrive in Montreal. That is encouraging, because it makes our task a lot easier. The company called FERME Québec was certainly very happy, delighted, with the change we have made in our procedures.

We want to encourage Canadians, students included, to work in agriculture more. That is why we have established a new platform called Step up to the Plate; it will allow people with an interest in agriculture to find access to various employment portals.

As for summer jobs, the constituency I represent, which contains 36 municipalities, is experiencing much the same situation. So I fully understand what you are saying. We are very interested in this. This exercise is going to allow us to get a better understanding of the expectations or needs, and of the employment possibilities for our young people. Later, we will see what we can do if that is confirmed, as we are sensing in regions like mine...

The internships...

- (1845)

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Madam Minister, allow me to interrupt you.

Will the government be announcing a complementary program for jobs in agriculture this summer?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Let me remind you that we have announced a transfer of federal funds to the provinces, so that the Government of Quebec, for example, can use a part of those funds for the wage top-up of \$4 an hour for essential workers and agricultural workers.

The Chair: Madam Minister, your time is up.

[English]

Our next speaker is MP Brian Masse.

You have six minutes.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Madam Ministers, for being here.

Minister Joly, my question is similar to the one with regard to the Business Development Bank of Canada. I'm glad you raised it, as it is your department's responsibility.

Recently the department offered loans under the government's liquidity programs at prime minus 1.75%, but quietly raised their rates this week to prime only, effective May 1, and took the 1.75% reduction reference off their website.

Are you aware the BDC is raising its rates for small businesses in Canada during the crisis? Did you approve of this decision?

Hon. Melanie Joly: I didn't want to say the BDC was under my purview. It is not. This is not what I said. Maybe the translation was an issue. It is under the purview of my colleague, Mary Ng.

What I said is that if businesses are falling through the cracks and are not able to have access to the BDC, they can then turn to their regional development agency, which includes in your neck of the woods, Brian, FedDev. Definitely, there's funding for them there.

That would be my answer.

Mr. Brian Masse: We do have that, but how do you feel about getting more businesses coming to your programs? Who should they call then?

For example, I have a business in my riding, Morton Wholesale, which does food distribution. They compete against American giants with regard to food services in southern Ontario. The BDC program is not favourable, nor are the ones that you've offered. Who do they contact specifically to get some assistance?

Also, how do you feel about the rates being raised by the BDC on the small businesses you're trying to help?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Definitely, they should contact their bank. That's always the first thing.

Regarding the BDC, it's the first time that I've heard that. Thank you for raising that. I'll definitely follow up with Minister Ng on that question. We know that we have to be there for businesses. There's a cash crunch right now. The burn rate of businesses is very high because fixed costs are high. We are trying to address that through the wage subsidy, through rent relief. Definitely we need to make sure that credit is available and available fast.

By the way, Brian, I just wanted to mention that I had a chance to talk with the mayor of Windsor, Drew Dilkens—

Mr. Brian Masse: I have limited time.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: —and he actually mentioned the importance of having liquidity very fast for all businesses.

Mr. Brian Masse: I appreciate that. I don't mean to cut you off, but I have limited time here.

Again, who do they contact in the development agency? Who is your point person for those that fail the bank programs?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: They go to the Canada.ca website, under the regional development agency, or the FedDev—

Mr. Brian Masse: Do we not have a specific person down here?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I don't know that person personally.

I know my deputy minister in charge of FedDev is James Meddings, and he's based out of Kitchener-Waterloo, not out of Windsor, but it's coming.

Mr. Brian Masse: That's okay. That's all good. I just need to follow up on that.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We'll find the name and send it to you.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you very much. I do appreciate it, and I do appreciate you making local contact here.

One thing that has happened in the tourism sector this year is that the Canada summer jobs program was changed, with the result that we have fewer net jobs for students and fewer net placements. The funding wasn't increased. What happened is that the payment went

up to 100%. For ridings such as mine, for every job we have under this placement, we are denied four others because the need is that high.

What do I say to those tourism industries that are now asking for Canada summer jobs, when actually, under COVID-19, we will have fewer students getting jobs and fewer placements that get jobs?

● (1850)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Well, there are different things. Canada summer jobs are very important and we've increased the number of Canada summer jobs. If there are more specific questions, obviously Carla Qualtrough, the minister in charge of the program, could answer your questions.

What we've done, though, for the tourism sector is, first and foremost, engage with them, because they've been hard hit. I agree with you that the tourism sector in your city has been hard hit. They're the canary in the coal mine. They were the first hit and they'll be impacted also in the future. Therefore, we're working to make sure that the Canada emergency business account, the wage subsidy, rent relief, all the measures we're coming up with, are targeted for the tourism sector.

Mr. Brian Masse: Okay.

Can you follow up on this, in particular for the tourism sector? They rely on Canada summer jobs and they actually prefer that program, but because of the terms and conditions of the program changing to cover 100%, we actually have fewer placement hours because we're picking up more of the costs. I'm hoping the government tops that up, and then you would not have a reduction of students and placements.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Brian, I'm convinced you'll be able to talk to Carla Qualtrough about it, but I'll also follow up on it. We can work together.

Mr. Brian Masse: I appreciate that. We just need a champion for tourism, because it's really important.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: You do have it.

Mr. Brian Masse: Okay, thank you.

With that, I know I have a brief amount of time, but I'm going to turn to something I brought up last time: single-event sports betting.

That law needs to be changed, or \$8 billion to \$10 billion will be lost to organized crime and offshore when this pandemic concludes and a move back to single-event sports betting takes place. Will the government change this law?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I know you submitted a private member's bill in the last Parliament about that. We had the chance to talk about it after my last INDU committee appearance, and I had the chance to talk to the Minister of Justice. I look forward to continuing conversations. Meanwhile, with the tourism sector being so hard hit, we have lots to do also to help the tourism sector.

Mr. Brian Masse: It's one line in the Criminal Code.

Thank you, Madam Minister.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We now move to MP Dreeshen for five minutes.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Madam Ministers, thank you so much for being here.

Minister Bibeau, last week a spokesperson for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada told the CBC that the federal government is developing a new aid package for the ag sector, with an announcement expected extremely soon.

We recognize that we have situations where animal health is becoming a problem. We've seen the things that have happened in nurseries, where there are problems getting bedding plants out in the springtime. We have also seen massive investments in such things as tulips, and so on, and people are having to hang onto these things. Of course, grain farmers, especially out in our neck of the woods, are still trying to finish off last year's crop before they start putting in this year's crop.

Farmers need some assurances that they can plant their crops this spring or send their livestock to market and that the COVID-type stressors have been recognized and are being compensated for. They can't wait for things to roll out at normal government speed.

Really, the key thing is this: Can you tell farmers today that this so-called new aid package that was announced is going to come here in the next two weeks and that it's going to have some meaningful measures to assist this vital sector of the economy?

In addition to that, as far as business risk management is concerned, we know that AgriRecovery is something that might be considered, but is the federal government going to be taking the lion's share of that cost?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Thank you, Mr. Dreeshen.

I can tell you that we are working very hard to bring additional measures to support the different sectors of agriculture. You mentioned the meat sector, and along with fruits and vegetables, these are very important and facing very important challenges right now.

It's a bit too soon for me to make any announcements. We still have different options on the table. We have these discussions with the provinces. I would say that, for today, I want to tell the farmers that, yes, we have their backs. We'll be there. They already have ac-

cess to the business risk management.... I know they are not perfect and we're working with the provinces to improve them. But still—

• (1855)

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: That's great to know, but, as I said, the other point is when it comes down to the decision as to who ends up paying for this, a great commitment by the federal government is going to be required because it's shared between the provinces and the federal government.

On April 16, you noted that the government is examining efforts to get unemployed or underemployed Canadians into jobs on farms, given the pending labour shortages and the fact that many of the temporary foreign workers who would normally come here will likely have trouble doing so because of global travel restrictions. You just mentioned Guatemala a moment ago.

As you know, the planting season is already here, so within the next two weeks, are farmers going to see any tangible initiatives or programs to go along with that commitment of April 16?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Yes. As I said, we're working very hard to get as many temporary foreign workers as we can and it's moving in the right direction. It's encouraging but it still won't be enough. This is why we have put in place the step up to the plate portal, to encourage people to find jobs in the sector.

Once again, it's too soon for me to announce anything, but I'll just remind you that we have transferred from the federal to the provincial...for them to put in place measures to incentivize people to work in essential services, including the ag sector.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Thank you.

On the issue with processing plants shipping products and so on, we have situations here where, a week before this happened, cows would have been \$1,400 and are now \$700. We have situations where people are having to bring cattle back from the auction markets because they can't get bids. These problems are happening.

I just hope we don't talk about the \$40,000 as being one of those main issues because it certainly is not something that is going to work. Of course, we have to make sure that we find animals that aren't being processed and that we have an opportunity to make sure that everyone is whole.

Thank you so much.

The Chair: Unfortunately, that is all your time, MP Dreeshen.

We now move to MP Jowhari.

You have five minutes.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to welcome both ministers to our committee. Let's start with the question that my colleague asked.

Minister Joly, you are going to embark on the packaging...the \$962 million. I have specific questions. What financial services or supports are available on top of the rent assistance and wage subsidy coming through these two programs? How are they distributed by region, and how do you make that decision?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you, Majid. It's great to see you virtually.

The \$962 million is great news. Usually, when you look at the budget for the regional development agencies, it's \$1.3 billion. We're pretty close to doubling the budget. Usually the RDAs are there in times of...for the recovery, to really help in terms of stimulus. It is the first time that we're really using them to stabilize an economic situation.

It's \$962 million, which is divided into \$675 million for the RDAs themselves, and the RDAs administer a fund that goes to the community futures organizations. In some places in the country they're called CFDCs. In Quebec it's called SADC. That's why Sébastien Lemire was asking me questions about that. That's \$287 million.

For that part of the \$287 million, it's really for rural places, rural communities that sometimes don't have access to a bank. They don't have a bank, or the next financial institution is 100 kilometres away. The SADC and the community futures organizations are there to support the local gas station, the local hair salon or the local restaurant. They provide loans for smaller amounts that are key for rural communities.

For the RDAs in general, well, what we're telling Canadians is, if they don't have access to the wage subsidy, if they don't have access to the rent relief, if they don't have access to the CEBA—the \$40,000—if they don't have access to the indigenous business funding, well, they should come and see us. They should go to Fed-Dev in southern Ontario, FedNor in northern Ontario, CED in Quebec, ACOA in Atlantic Canada, WD in western Canada or CanNor in the great north, and we can help out through loans. Basically, we'll be taking a bit more risk than the banks can take because we know that we have to help our businesses and protect, quite frankly, our main streets all across the country.

• (1900)

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Would they be the same programs but offered through the regional development agencies? They would be able to get wage subsidies. They would be able to get rent. They would be able to get access to cash. They would be able to get some money for working capital, but it just—

Go ahead.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: The idea is to make sure that they're interest-free loans to businesses. That's the idea. The details will be unveiled very soon.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Okay.

How is the distribution to the six RDAs working? Is there a region that's harder hit and is going to get more of this fund? How do you make that decision?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Well, we know that the west has been very hard hit. I know many MPs here representing Alberta and Saskatchewan have gone through a double whammy, a double challenge, which is the drop in oil prices and also, meanwhile, COVID-19. We're seeing it even with Fort McMurray right now going through floods.

We're here to help. Definitely this will be taken into consideration when we announce the different details. Since we're nearly doubling the budget of all the RDAs, there will be substantial increases all across the country.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you, Minister. I look forward to the detail. As we were digging in to prepare for this committee, there was very little detail. Thank you for at least shedding some light. I look forward to the detail coming.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you, Majid.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our next round of questions goes to MP Tracy Gray.

You have five minutes.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister Joly, here in my riding of Kelowna—Lake Country, tourism is a big part of our economy, with many jobs depending on this industry. Do you have a plan for tourism businesses once the economy begins to reopen?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you, Tracy. It's a very good question. Those are exactly the types of discussions I'm having with people in Kelowna and all across the country who are part of the tourism sector.

I would tell you right now that we're still in the stabilization phase. The tourism sector has been, as I said, the first hit because of the impact of Chinese tourism at the beginning of the pandemic. It's been the canary in the coal mine, and it will be impacted even later, so we want to make sure that the existing measures can apply. It's definitely part of what we have in mind for the recovery.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Minister, for this plan that you're putting together, what date will you be disclosing this plan you're working on?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I didn't mention a definite plan. I think—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Are you not working on a plan for tourism?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: That's not what I said. I said that I'm having conversations and we're really making sure that the existing measures can apply.

What I can also tell you is that I had a conversation, and I don't think it's public, with the G20 ministers of tourism last Friday. Tourism is down by 45% as of now internationally, and we think that at the end of summer it will be down by 70%, so this is definitely an industry that is deeply affected. We'll have to make sure that we take that into account when we're talking about recovery.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you, Minister. It would be really great to know if you're working on a plan, especially with tourism. Ensuring that the government does its job to make sure that the provinces have enough ventilators, PPE and testing kits, so that they can have accurate information and so that businesses can better prepare as we reopen our economy will be very important.

Minister—

• (1905)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: If you have ideas for a plan, please feel free. It would be great to have a conversation about it and to hear your ideas would be important.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: As you've said, you've been speaking to a lot of people in the tourism industry. I've seen lots of correspondence forwarded from many people in the industry, so I'm sure you've had lots of communication as well.

Minister Joly, I want to let you know about a specific example where your measures for tourism operators are really falling through the cracks. In my riding, Pedego electric bike rental in Oyama, owned by Sheila and Murray Fraser, and A Vista Villa, which is a beautiful bed and breakfast in Kelowna owned by Sherry Cote, have something in common: They rely on tourism. They've recently invested in capital expenditures and they're both not eligible for the Canada emergency business loan because they did not have \$20,000 in payroll last year. They pay themselves, but they're not part of a payroll system.

We know that your government is well aware of this. I questioned the Minister of Small Business last week on this. As the minister responsible for tourism, are you going to fix this requirement?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I think you could tell Sherry and your other constituents to have a conversation with Western Economic Diversification in Kelowna. I think it's worth it. That's why we came up

with funding, and I think this could definitely be another tool in their tool box as they're trying to find—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: What I'm hearing you say, if I'm hearing you correctly, is that your government is not looking at amending this. You're looking at them applying for a different program other than this. They won't be able to apply for this particular program.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Tracy, I don't think there's an issue with translation.

What I am telling you is that it would be great for them to have access to another option, and of course, they can have a conversation with WD. Being the member for Kelowna, having at heart the interests of your constituents, I think providing that information to them will help them, because people are going through anxious times and we're here to calm their anxieties.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Great, thank you for that information.

I have a couple of questions for Minister Bibeau, if I may.

Under the regulatory reconciliation and co-operation table work plan set out by the Canadian Free Trade Agreement, the federal-provincial standardization of food and meat inspection regarding abattoirs is due to be completed in 2020. One of the concerns raised in the table is the high cost and the amount of time it takes to register a meat processing abattoir federally so that it can export inter-provincially. Can you confirm if this specific issue has been resolved?

The Chair: Unfortunately, MP Gray, that's all the time we have.

The next round of questions goes to MP Lambropoulos.

You have five minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Good evening.

First, I would like to thank Minister Bibeau and Minister Joly for joining us this evening to answer our questions.

My first question goes to Minister Bibeau.

A number of people in my constituency are not able to take advantage of the Canada emergency response benefit and the programs that the government has established. These are vulnerable people and they need help with food. Moisson Montréal and a number of food banks in my constituency are trying to provide food to the most vulnerable.

Can you tell us which programs or measures your department has established to provide food aid?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Yes, food banks have been particularly affected by the arrival of COVID-19. In addition to having to face an increased demand, they have lost a lot of volunteers, because they are often seniors.

We have established a fund of \$100 million. Of the \$70 million spent to date, \$50 million has been turned over to the Food Banks Canada network. In Quebec, the money has mainly gone to the Food Banks of Québec, Second Harvest, Community Food Centres Canada and the Salvation Army.

We want to make sure that all regions are covered first. It is possible that a smaller organization may not yet be affiliated to one or other of those main partners. If the community in which it is located is already helped by one of those partners, however, we will recommend that it try to become associated with that partner. However, if we see that a community is not receiving assistance because of its location or its culture, we are going to make a particular effort to find an additional partner.

● (1910)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much.

Another major issue is protecting our workers in meat processing plants. Since an outbreak of COVID-19 can affect our food quality and Canadians' health, what measures has the government put in place to protect these workers?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: You are right to say that there are issues in some plants because the nature of these jobs puts workers very close to each other. In the beginning, before all the protective measures could be implemented, there was some contamination, yes.

Here is how it works in processing plants. It is the employer's responsibility to implement good protective measures, as recommended by the local public health agency, which is often a provincial entity. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is only responsible for food safety. These three partners will obviously work together and share all the information required. We want to ensure that our inspectors at the agency are well protected and that they work in a safe environment.

Through various Canadian partnerships and funding to the provinces, initiatives have been launched to provide financial assistance to businesses so they can implement these measures to protect their workers.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much.

My last question is for you, Ms. Joly. As you have said, Madam Minister, tourism is...

I'm told my time is up, I am sorry.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I will be happy to answer your questions later, Ms. Lambropoulos.

The Chair: Mr. Perron, you now have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Good evening, everyone.

I'd like to thank the witnesses and the ministers for being here.

Not surprisingly, I am going to address Minister Bibeau once again.

Ms. Bibeau, I want to come back to the ratification of the Canada-US-Mexico Agreement, or CUSMA. Today, dairy producers and processors issued a news release reminding us that they had received a formal promise that CUSMA would not come into force before August 1. However, a few days ago we all learned that it will take effect on July 1.

The producers are anticipating significant losses. Once again the dairy industry is being sacrificed repeatedly, and we could have waited a few days before ratifying the agreement. I am telling you this because I want to talk about compensation. An initial instalment was made to dairy producers. In general, however, promises are made, commitments are made, but the producers have not seen the money they were promised.

In the current context and with the motion we passed on March 13, you now have the opportunity to release funds and provide compensation for 2020 and 2021 to supply-managed sectors that were sacrificed in trade agreements. Do you intend to do that?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Thank you for your suggestion.

You know that the dairy sector is of particular concern to me because there are hundreds of dairy farmers in my riding. You also know how the free trade agreement with the United States is a much broader trade issue. This agreement allows us to stabilize and revitalize the entire trade partnership with the United States and ensure that our food supply chains with the United States are maintained. We can see how important that is right now.

On the subject of compensation, the commitment to the dairy sector is clear. The first payment has been made. You will understand that we are devoting all our energy to the hardest-hit sectors. We have a firm commitment to poultry and egg producers. We will come back to that when we get our heads above water and we have been able to help the sectors that are hardest hit.

● (1915)

Mr. Yves Perron: Based on your answer, it is not at all part of the plan. I would point out, Minister, that this is a golden opportunity to inject money into a sector that is suffering greatly from the COVID-19 crisis. Any way to inject money is a good way. There is a lot of talk about providing loans.

The Chair: I am sorry, sir. Your time is up.

Mr. Yves Perron: Two and a half minutes is not very long. I am just going to finish up.

We must not increase debt, but we must invest in farms.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

Our next round of questions goes to MP Masse.

You have two and half minutes.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you.

My question to the Minister of Agriculture relates to natural disaster as one of the categorizations for assistance. Is that being considered for a declaration for assistance, and what are the steps before that takes place?

The AgriRecovery program can be triggered to be more agile and responsive if the use of natural disaster is declared. Have you considered that, and if not, why not?

What would be the threshold that would then trigger that into action?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Yes, that is something we are considering seriously right now. However, as maybe you know, AgriRecovery has to be requested by the province and then we will be pleased to respond.

I can tell you that we are having this type of conversation right now with many provinces.

Mr. Brian Masse: I know some provinces have requested that. Is there a timeline within which you think you will have these discussions with the provinces and then get a response out?

What's the anticipation of the government's threshold before the full decision is made, either by yourself or with cabinet to trigger that action?

Is there any waiting for another province, not to act right now? Are you waiting for a decision from one of them?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: I would say it's both of the above. These are different options. We can proceed individually or with a group of provinces. That is what is under discussion right now.

Mr. Brian Masse: Okay.

I know my colleague Alistair MacGregor had moved a motion for a short study, before the COVID pandemic, and the committee committed two days for that study. Is there any intent to follow up?

It mostly related to, once again, provincial relationships. If the committee is not able to do that work, will you still follow the spirit of that motion that was passed in the committee?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: I will be happy to participate if I am invited to the committee or to follow up in different ways, but I will wait for their call. I don't want to intervene without being invited.

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Ministers, thank you both.

The Chair: Our next round of questions goes to MP Patzer.

You have five minutes.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My questions will be for Minister Bibeau.

Last week I asked the Deputy Minister of Industry, who is here again today, about securing the domestic supply chain, especially for food. He said they were working together with your department on the issue and recommended that we hear from you.

First, what shortages are we dealing with in our supply chain, and how exactly have you been working on securing our supply chain?

• (1920)

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: You must have noticed that we were very careful to avoid any type of disruption at the border. It was very important to keep our borders open, especially with the United States but also internationally and within Canada, throughout the provinces. This was the first step, and it's going well because all the partners agree that it's very important.

Regarding the measures we're putting in place, the first ones were those that could support the greater number of businesses in general, and now we are looking at more specific measures to support the sector. The temporary foreign worker support was a very important one.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Thank you.

In your conversations with the provinces, then, have you been talking about having provincial inspections? Will provincially approved meat-processing plants be allowed to trade across provincial borders?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: That's a discussion that has been started at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and later you might want to ask further questions of their president.

That is something we are open to in these special circumstances. If it's needed, if it's a way to avoid any type of food shortage in a region, it is definitely something we are open to.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Thank you.

We're waiting to see a plan from you for securing Canada's food supply chain. In the House today you said that you were taking seriously the Canadian Federation of Agriculture's emergency preparedness plan for agri-food.

Is there anything about that plan that is holding you back from implementing it?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: We still have many different options on the table and we are having serious discussions about which one of these mechanisms would be the most appropriate to complement the business risk management programs that we already have in place.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Thank you for mentioning the business risk management programs. I'm just going to read a quote here that I got from some of our industry partners. It says:

I would also emphasize that the current funding programs announced in CERB, wage subsidies, loan programs or otherwise are almost entirely unusable by our industry. Furthermore, the existing suite of business risk management programs come nowhere near being able to address the current challenges we are facing.

You also said earlier that it was too soon to make any announcements about any changes or anything going on here, so I wonder what the holdup is.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: I'm saying that the business risk management programs—there are many—can help at a certain level, but I agree that they need more. The situation is exceptional and that is why we are trying to identify very well where the gaps are.

I would say, as a first step, let's apply to AgriStability, and we have extended the application date to July 3. Let's use AgriInvest, which is a very quick way to get \$10,000 a year.

As I said, we're moving in the right direction with many provinces with regard to AgriRecovery, but there's more on the table and I look forward to being able to share more with you.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Grain and oilseed producers are reaching out to me. They say they've applied for loans through the Canola Growers, but they were hit with a four- to six-week delay in processing their applications. Now they are strapped for cash to try to get the seed into the ground for this year's growing season.

Do you have any measures or any plans to actually help producers who are behind in trying to get financing to get their crop in the ground this year?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: They have access to the advance payments program as well, and all the measures that we have announced through Farm Credit Canada, as well as through any other banks that are available for businesses. We have put these measures in place to give them access to cash flow.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: I have one more quick question: Will you guarantee loans through the major banks, as you have through FCC?

We heard earlier that 75% of producers can't use FCC.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: They can access loans through their regular commercial bank.

The Chair: Thank you so much. That's all your time.

The next round of questions goes to MP Terry Duguid.

You have five minutes.

• (1925)

Mr. Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair; and thanks to the two ministers for being with us today.

My questions are for Minister Joly.

Minister, I have the great privilege of serving as the chair of the northern and prairie caucus on the government side. I've become even more aware during this health crisis that the cost of doing business in the territories is very different from doing business south of the 60th parallel. I think you know some of these challenges: shorter seasons, higher costs and challenging weather. I wonder if you could share with us just how the government has adapted some of our COVID-19 support measures to the unique conditions in our north.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: There's definitely a specific issue with the territories. We know, for example, that Nunavut has no COVID-19 cases, but we need to make sure that we protect the integrity of its public health system, because having COVID-19 cases would be really damaging for communities out there.

We need to have an approach that is different from those of other regions. I had the chance to talk with Premier Silver in Yukon. I've talked to all my counterparts, including Ranj Pillai from Yukon, Katrina from the Northwest Territories and David from Nunavut. We came up with a solution to help the businesses in the north that are facing really high costs, as you were saying. First and foremost, there is \$15 million to help cover these fixed costs.

There's that, plus the new funding that is coming to CanNor and also the fact that we've said to our existing clients, businesses that have interest-free loans with CanNor, that there are deferred payments for them for the next three months, so there is a lot of flexibility for them. This is what we've done for the three territories.

Mr. Terry Duguid: Minister, you've mentioned the almost \$1 billion for our regional development agencies, which is very good news, we hope and we think, for Western Economic Diversification, which has always been there in western Canada to support us in our time of need.

I know that you have been on dozens and dozens of Zoom calls—because I've been on some of them—with business associations and organizations in the west. I wonder if you could offer some reflections on the unique challenges in western Canada and how WD will address those. We in the west are certainly hoping that WD takes account of those special needs, and maybe you could offer just a few words on its role in the recovery.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes. There are different things. As you mentioned, we had the chance to do many Zoom calls with the chambers of commerce in Calgary and Edmonton, which decided to collaborate to have a Zoom call together, then with all the Alberta chambers of commerce and with all the Saskatchewan chambers of commerce, and then with the Regina Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce, the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce and the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce. Also in B.C., it was the same, with the Surrey and Vancouver boards of trade. We had really a lot of good conversations.

At the beginning, our wage subsidy was only at 10% and people and businesses were telling us that they couldn't survive if we as a government didn't increase the subsidy approach. That's why, through these conversations, basically we decided to change our approach and go to a 75% wage subsidy. They also called us on rent relief, and within a week we were able to talk to premiers and get a deal and a solution, and the rent relief program will be starting in mid-May.

As I mentioned a bit earlier on a question that was asked by a colleague, we definitely know that there's an issue in the west because of the impact, particularly in Alberta and Saskatchewan. I know, Terry, that you're from Manitoba, but it's more in Saskatchewan and Alberta that this is happening, because of the drop in oil prices. We came up with a new approach for orphan wells. We've worked with Premier Kenney, Premier Moe and also with Premier Pallister to make sure that we could send them money to support orphan wells.

We're trying to be as specific as possible, as we know that people in the west are going through very difficult times.

• (1930)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Our next round of questions goes to MP Rempel Garner.

You have five minutes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

That's actually a great bridge into my line of questions.

My questions are directed to Minister Joly. The amount of funding that Canadian companies typically invest in clean technology on an annual basis is about \$1.4 billion. Can the minister tell the committee whether she knows what percentage of that is invested by oil and gas companies.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I'm not the minister in charge of energy, but I can definitely forward that question to my colleague, Seamus O'Regan.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Well, it's actually a pretty important question for a minister who's in charge of Western Diversification, because the clean-tech sector is a big part of that diversification.

I'm just wondering whether you'd want to hazard a guess, given that you're the minister in charge of that, on what percentage of \$1.4 billion the oil and gas sector spends on clean tech.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Well, you've been the minister in charge of WD, so you know that ministers don't hazard guesses. What you also know is that WD is definitely there to diversify the economy, and we're there to support the clean-tech sector and definitely will be there to support more funding through IRAP and also through WD.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: It's actually 75%. Seventy-five per cent of Canadian corporate expenditures on clean tech come from the oil and gas sector. Have you done any analysis on how much that's going to decrease by this year, given the devastation to the energy sector?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Well, we know that the energy sector is devastated, and I hear you, Michelle. I know this is tough for the people you represent in your neck of the woods—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: You know, I'm really—

Hon. Mélanie Joly: —in Calgary—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: —[Inaudible—Editor] with the platitudes on that particular issue, so forgive me if I don't want to hear it.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I'm sorry, Michelle. I can't hear you well. What did you say?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: The point I'm trying to make is that—

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I'm sorry. The line is choppy.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: The point I'm trying to make is that 75% of clean-tech investments in Canada come from the oil and gas sector, and that's about to significantly drop, given the crisis that the energy sector has.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I'm sorry, Madam Chair, but I can't hear her very well.

The Chair: One moment, please. I'll pause the clock, Madame Rempel Garner. We're going to check the connection.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: That's convenient.

A voice: Okay?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Yes. Thank you.

The reality is, that's a big hole in diversification efforts. Your colleague Catherine McKenna posted a tweet recently that talked about the COVID-19 recovery and said that recovery efforts should be focused on “meaningful jobs”.

Would you characterize the jobs in the energy sector for, let's say, rig workers, chemical engineers and people who are responsible for oil and gas developments, as meaningful jobs?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I think all jobs are meaningful in the country, and I think we're really in an adventure right now, like a mission, to save all jobs.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Then why have you not provided any meaningful support to the energy sector in terms of, for example, some of the main issues that the energy sector has been bringing up, issues like government-backed access to credit or anything? The energy sector itself has said that the orphan well program is not going to do anything, so how can you make that assertion, claim to be the minister for WD and then support a government that has done nothing to support the energy sector?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Well, the WD idea is to make sure that there's greater diversification, so we want to make sure that we increase the funding of WD and support businesses that are going through a cash crunch right now.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Have you, as the minister—

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I'll just finish my answer.

As well, I think we need to work with the oil and gas sector and with Premier Kenney and Premier Moe, and that's exactly why we came up with this new funding.

You were saying that there was no credit and no support to the oil and gas sector. I want to correct you, because that's false. We just came up with a new support to help them—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Well, everybody in Alberta knows—

Hon. Mélanie Joly: —have access to credit.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: —that what you've provided, as every industry report has said, is not enough. So here you are as the minister of WD. You don't even know how much the oil and gas sector provides for clean technology.

I'm just going to ask you. Are you, as minister of WD, pressuring Minister Momeau to come good on his promise of over a month ago to provide adequate support for the energy sector and the workers in Alberta?

• (1935)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Well, I'm always there to defend the interests of all Canadians, making sure that we are there to support the economy and the environment, and I'm there also to support, through WD, the people who are facing real challenges in the west. People in Alberta know that WD is there for them, and I had a good conversation—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Thank you. That didn't answer my question.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: —even with the CEO of the Stampede yesterday, and if you want to have more information, I would be pleased to have a conversation.

The Chair: Unfortunately, Madam Minister, that's all the time we have.

[Translation]

For the next round of questions, we go first to Sébastien Lemire.

Mr. Lemire, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Madam Chair, correct me if I am wrong, but I believe a Liberal member has the right to speak.

The Chair: I am sorry, I couldn't hear you, Mr. Lemire.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I think it is the Liberals' turn. However, I would have had enough to say to fill five minutes.

The Chair: Please forgive me. Thank you, Mr. Lemire.

[English]

The next question is for Mr. Longfield. You have five minutes.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Thank you so much for giving me my five minutes. In that spirit of co-operation I'm sharing my time with Paul Manly from the Green Party, and I'll be splitting that down the middle. It's very important that we have as many different voices at the table as we can.

Minister Joly, that was a staggering number of western people you spoke of through the chamber of commerce network. I know you've been working across party lines and with different organizations.

You've mentioned the regional relief and recovery fund. I've been working with our local municipality, which has also been hit hard. There have been 600 layoffs in the city of Guelph. We're looking at our recovery programs going forward. How do we know what parts of the Guelph economy are working well? How do we engage the not-for-profits like the chamber of commerce network, like the business improvement areas in the downtowns to help the Main Street businesses?

Could you maybe comment on how not-for-profits can access this regional relief and recovery fund?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I wanted to complete my answer to Brian a bit earlier. Businesses can have access to the wage subsidy if they don't have access to the CEBA, but not-for-profits are going through more difficult challenges.

We've adapted the wage subsidy, but for economic development types of organizations such as chambers of commerce and also for BIAs, which are so important to protect our different Main Streets, we're looking to partner with them through the new funding I'll be announcing.

Also, we very much know that certain regional development agencies are not really present in big cities. We're trying to see how we can do third party organization partnerships to make sure we can get to businesses by providing funding to them.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you.

I know we've talked about recovery plans and the timing. We're also working with regional tourism offices in the provinces and territories. Everybody has to work together, so thank you for that.

Minister Bibeau, I've been working with Cargill in Guelph and also with one of the Conservative members north of us who is in the Huron—Grey—Owen Sound area, which has a lot of cattle farmers. Trying to get cattle to market is becoming a lot more expensive, but we also have to protect the producers with PPEs and other protections. We need to take a coordinated approach.

I see I'm at the end of my time. I'll leave that as a comment for the minister if she wants to work that into a future answer. I'll move over to Mr. Manly. Thank you.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Thank you very much for sharing your time, MP Longfield. I really appreciate that.

Minister Bibeau, I have a quick question about the regulations for abattoirs and meat-processing plants. When they were changed by the previous Conservative government, they were really meant for large corporations. Small companies that did meat-processing on Vancouver Island shut down because a 10,000-foot abattoir had to have a separate washroom and an office for the meat inspector. Spending \$200,000 on a small abattoir wasn't feasible for them.

I'm wondering whether you would consider changes to the regulations to allow for more small regional operations, to make it more effective for them to do that.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Smaller operations, regional operations, would fall under the provincial regulations or authorities. Maybe this is a question that can be answered further by the president of CFIA afterwards. If we have time, maybe I can turn now to the president to complete my answer.

• (1940)

Mr. Paul Manly: The other quick question I have is about the local food infrastructure fund. I understand that's been put on hold during this crisis. I think the money from that was reallocated towards food banks, but a number of organizations here are trying to ramp up food production on Vancouver Island, where we only produce 3% to 5% of the food we consume. I'm just wondering whether that program will be brought back soon, whether than funding will be available.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: I want to reassure you that, out of this \$100 million that I have announced for the food banks, \$75 million was new money; \$25 million was reallocation. The program hasn't been put on ice. We might go forward with a second call for proposals, but for those who got money in the first round we can look at being more flexible if they want to change the purpose of their request to face COVID-19.

Mr. Paul Manly: Okay. Thank you very much.

[Translation]

The Chair: Your time is up. We now go to Mr. Lemire.

Mr. Lemire, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think we have to face the facts: Canadians having access to high-speed Internet service, to broadband Internet service, is a very significant issue, and tonight's meeting proves it.

I would like to ask questions about concrete assistance for people who pay themselves salaries in the form of dividends. I would also like to ask a question about the Canada summer jobs program.

Are we all aware that compensation for businesses is increasing from 50% to 100%, from the same envelope? In the end, jobs have been cut, many of them in agriculture. Have you thought about creating a summer jobs program in agriculture? A program of that kind would have to be flexible throughout the year, which would make it possible to mitigate the sad consequences of the measure.

Since my colleague Yves Perron is quite dissatisfied with the answers he has received throughout the day, I will give him a chance to ask a question.

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

Actually, I want to make an appeal from the heart.

I am quite surprised to see that the door seems to be closed on compensation. Yet, it is easy to pay out the amounts. The amounts are set, and they are not new expenses. Negotiations in this regard are over. We would be putting money on the ground, in a sector that is very much affected.

I would like to say this to the ministers, especially Ms. Bibeau: the existing programs are not working. In fact, only 30% of people are benefiting from the AgriStability program. There needs to be a special fund, an emergency measure.

We want an announcement now; at the very least, we would like to know the date. When are you going to make an announcement for the farming community?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Your question has several parts.

I have to say that, in terms of compensation, the door is not closed. All of our teams are overloaded with work related to emergency programs for the hardest-hit sectors. Our commitment still stands.

As far as the risk management programs are concerned, it is not true that they do not work. However, they are not generous enough. The Conservatives cut \$400 million from these programs, at a time when everything was going well. Now we have to come to an agreement with the provinces to get things back in order. The risk management initiative is not only a provincial program.

To answer Mr. Lemire's question about summer jobs programs, I will say this. I too represent a riding with 36 municipalities. The number of jobs has not changed, actually. The budget has been increased, but 70,000 jobs are available through this program. Personally, what I've noticed is that the number of weeks has increased. That is what the department proposed. This makes it look like there are slightly fewer jobs available in our ridings. If you wish, you can certainly discuss this with the department.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Minister.

[English]

The last round of questions goes to MP Masse.

You have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll go back to Minister Joly.

With regard to tourism and the funding we've allocated for advertising internationally, as you know, in Canada, the CTC has moved to more international visitation models over the last number of years. Is there a reconsideration of those advertising and other types of dollars being focused inside the nation, given the fact that we will have a higher degree of complication with regard to international destinations, visitations and so forth?

Has the government given that any thought to date? What can local tourism associations, like the one in Windsor-Essex County, expect in terms of support to perhaps do more focused domestic and provincial tourism initiatives? People won't travelling in the short term. Quite frankly, I think patterns may have already changed for the medium and the long term.

• (1945)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Brian, I know been you've elected for a long time, but it has not been called the CTC for a long time now.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Mélanie Joly: It hasn't been called the Canadian Tourism Commission since the Vancouver Olympics. It's called "Destination Canada".

Mr. Brian Masse: There you go. Fair enough.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes, I hear your question.

We stopped doing any international campaigns at the beginning of the pandemic. One of the first things I did in February was to create FPT minister of tourism weekly calls. I've been talking with Lisa MacLeod every week, and we're all trying to coordinate.

Yes, we're thinking of national campaigns, but before talking about national campaigns, I would say that we'll be there to support local tourism—

Mr. Brian Masse: Yes, that's what I meant.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: —and then eventually the regional, national and international. Saskatchewan is reopening right now. Its provincial parks are reopening. We're not there in Ontario. We want to work with provinces to support them.

Mr. Brian Masse: So really quickly, the money can then be reallocated and not taken away. I wanted to focus on the local and regional, obviously.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes.

Last year, when I was the Minister of Tourism, I refocused Destination Canada a bit more on national, not only international, efforts. A lot of tourism was mainly in the three big cities, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, and I wanted to make sure there were more supports to regions because the tourism sector is so important in regional economies, and we need to be there to support them.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Minister.

That completes our third round. We have about 12 minutes remaining. We can start a fourth round, if that's okay with folks. I don't know who would be next on the list. We have a five-minute round for the Conservatives.

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Madam Chair, are you confirming to me that you are now continuing with the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the president of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency? We were supposed to leave the meeting at 7:30 p.m., but it went on a little longer. I am going to let you finish the meeting with our colleagues.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Minister. We are very grateful for your time.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I am grateful to you too.

Ms. Romanado, thank you for the work you are doing.

I know it is late for some people and earlier for others. Thank you all for taking the time to attend this meeting. It's been a pleasure to see you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Mr. Dreeschen, you have five minutes.

Mr. Earl Dreeschen: Thank you very much.

There are some great opportunities for Canada to grow our value-added food sector. This is going to require a new approach from CFIA. In particular the agency needs to ensure that regulations don't weigh down performance, productivity and growth. More than that, Canada's regulatory approach should work to stimulate some nimbleness and innovation and this should be acting as a catalyst for new value-added products.

Of course, when we look at what is happening right now as far as the concerns we have in the agriculture community, this is an important time for CFIA to commit to some changes in certain regulatory systems so we can find these efficiencies that are so important.

Will CFIA be using this time of great change to search for new approaches, to move forward with a new approach to regulations that will put innovation first while still safeguarding the health and safety of Canadians?

Is CFIA using this time to search for ways to ensure that firms in Canada's agri-food sector are not constantly being stymied by a "tons of feathers" regulatory approach whereby hundreds of regulations stop them in their tracks and make us less competitive on the world market?

● (1950)

Dr. Siddika Mithani: Thank you for the issues you have identified around the regulations and CFIA. CFIA is not only taking the opportunity right now to look at regulations, but has been doing so over the last year or so, as we have looked at regulatory modernization.

If you go back to the regulatory modernization and some of the information out there, we have looked at regulatory review, the burdens, obstacles around regulations and how we will move forward. We have worked with industry, but we have also worked with provinces to look at how we reconcile some of the issues around regulations to ensure CFIA's mandate is being fulfilled.

So yes, we will be looking at regulatory modernization. We'll make sure that our regulations are nimble. In order to have nimble regs, we will need to speak to industry and work with them.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Believe me, I think industry is ready for that.

Speaking of some of the issues, will you still be submitting negligible risk status for BSE on time, regardless of COVID?

This is an extremely important issue, because it's the only way we can expand our processing.

Dr. Siddika Mithani: Yes, the BSE submission is still a top priority, despite the COVID-19 crisis.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: We seem to be going a lot faster when we have the departmental people here.

We're seeing processing plant closures all over the country due to COVID-19, meaning that plants are unable to get animals processed. The Health of Animals Act allows for compensation for farmers in the event of a depopulation due to animal disease.

What steps is the CFIA taking to ensure that it could potentially allow for these circumstances as well? As we know, the current BRM programs won't be effective for poultry, beef and pork producers.

Dr. Siddika Mithani: The Health of Animals Act and regulations are really focused on disease only. What we are talking about in this certain circumstance is an issue where this is humane slaughter, so I would say that I'd like to defer to my colleague, Chris Forbes. Maybe he can shed some light on this.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Certainly, and I'm sure Chris can talk about the nimbleness that might be important here.

Mr. Chris Forbes (Deputy Minister, Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food): Thank you, Mr. Dreeshen, and thanks, Siddika.

We certainly are looking with provincial colleagues at how we might use programs like the AgriRecovery program, which is for extraordinary costs. Depopulation or extended feeding of animals could certainly be the kinds of costs that would be covered under a program like AgriRecovery. I think the minister talked a bit about that earlier.

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy Minister. That's all the time we have. We will now go to MP Longfield.

You have five minutes.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you. I'll be splitting my time with Ali Ehsassi.

I have a follow-up question on the theme I had started at the end of my last question, which was around the support for the producers. We know that we have to protect animal health on the producer side, and for the beef farmers in particular, but we also have to protect human health on the processor side.

I've spoken with Cargill in Guelph. We've talked about the situation in High River and the need for PPE for staff and all the different things the business itself is doing to ensure the health and safety of its employees, yet the employees are still nervous about coming into work and whether they will go home with an illness that they didn't leave home with.

Could you comment on how we're working with Health Canada to ensure the health of the people working in the processing plants?

Mr. Chris Forbes: We're in pretty regular contact first of all with the industry, and in particular in this case with the Meat Council and others, to talk about some of the challenges and to make sure that those are well understood, and the sector has been I think quite effective in terms of responding to keep employees safe. I think they've done really a fantastic job in the plants.

Also, we have engaged the Public Health Agency and Health Canada, and provincial public health officials have been quite involved with individual plants. I think the system, that kind of collaboration of bringing people together, has actually worked quite well.

The last thing I'll mention is that the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety and the Public Health Agency of Canada do have guidance out, which I think can be quite helpful for everyone.

● (1955)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Right. Thank you very much.

Mr. Ehsassi.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, MP Longfield, for sharing your time with me.

My question is for the deputy minister of agriculture. As we all recognize, these are really difficult times for people in the cattle industry and for people in the agricultural sector. Also, as we all know full well, these sectors in particular are very much integrated into the North American economy. For example, quite often in the meat industry, you'll see that cattle are grown here but head down south for further processing.

Obviously, given the high degree of integration between the two sectors, it's important that we manage to juggle challenges that arise either south of the border or in Canada itself. How concerned should we be about the level of integration between the United States and Canada for many of our food producers?

Mr. Chris Forbes: I would say first off that I think the level of integration has served us quite well. If you look at the food system overall—and the minister talked earlier on about keeping the border open—indeed you see it's an issue in the pork and beef industries, but also in many parts of our food system. When you look at the products we buy, you see they're a mix of Canadian-grown, U.S.-

grown, processed on either side, and that includes the beef sector. First and foremost I'd say we should be thankful that the borders have remained open. That strong integration has served us quite well.

That certainly does not reduce the challenges that we are facing, particularly in the meat sector across North America. It has effects. What happens in the U.S. has an effect on prices that Canadian producers will get, ranchers and hog producers in particular. I think that overall the net is a strong positive for us, both in terms of the economic side but also in terms of the food availability.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you very much. I think I'm out of time.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

With that, I would like to thank everyone for joining us this evening. Thank you again to the clerks, the analysts, the IT crew who are trying to make sure that we can stay on these calls. I want to thank the administrative staff supporting us behind the scenes to make sure that today's meeting was possible.

Stay safe everyone. We will see you tomorrow at INDU.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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