



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

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# Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 019**

**PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT**

Tuesday, February 23, 2021

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Chair: Mr. Bob Bratina





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• (1100)  
[English]

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

We begin with acknowledging that in Ottawa we would be meeting on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people. My particular location is in Anishinabe, Haudenosaunee and *Chononton* or Neutral first nations territory, historically.

I see that Ms. Zann has joined us.

Do you want to do a quick voice check?

**Ms. Lenore Zann (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.):** Sure.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Naaman Sugrue):** Sure, we'll do that.

**Ms. Lenore Zann:** Thank you.

Look to the Rose that blows about us—"Lo,  
Laughing," she says, "into the World I blow:  
At once the silken Tassel of my Purse  
Tear, and its Treasure on the Garden throw."

**The Clerk:** Thank you, Ms. Zann.

Mr. Chair, we can continue.

**The Chair:** Thanks, Lenore. Thank you for that.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we're studying food security in northern communities.

To ensure an orderly meeting.... We've had some good discussion with our guests—and members of the committee will know—about listening and speaking in the official language of their choice. There's a selector on the interpretation button in the bottom centre of your screen. Make sure that your video is always turned on and speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

If we have translation issues because of technical problems.... All of our guests should have written submissions before us. We have this issue even with committee members, where the audio drops out completely. To ensure that the meeting can continue, we have to be able to do the translated part of our committee meeting; otherwise it is not an official meeting.

That being said, we have six minutes for each of our guests to open with.

I'm going to start with Mayor Randy Jones of Gros-Mécatina, Quebec.

Mayor Jones, you have six minutes. Please go ahead.

**Mr. Randy Jones (Mayor, Municipality of Gros-Mécatina):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, most of all, for the invitation. It's not often that the people of our isolated communities, from Kegaska to Blanc-Sablon, get the opportunity to speak to such a distinguished panel and to get our point across that we do occupy the territory and it is very hard, especially with this pandemic.

We've been dealt a double whammy. We are isolated; on top of that, we have to isolate; and on top of that, we have a curfew. Then, to make matters worse, this winter forgot to come to us. The ice is not good. Our time to travel between communities is in the winter-time, when people get a chance to visit their loved ones, but the ice is just not good enough yet. The trails have been worked at but are still not possible to open. There have been people who have gone through the ice, who have broken through.

We've been having quite a battle to get fresh food produce with the nutrition north program. What I'm going to be asking for, if you people have a chance to look at nutrition north, is that it be more adapted to the realities of our region. I sent out an invitation yesterday to all my fellow mayors, and every one of them responded, and all the stores. It was basically unanimous.

With our travel in the summertime and the fall, and right up until normally the first week of February, we have a boat that travels down the coast, the *Bella Desgagné*, but it broke down and it threw a bad wrench into the gears of operating on the coast. We've seen the Innu from Unamen Shipu de La Romaine even have to charter planes to bring in diapers and milk and food for the babies. That was not under the nutrition north program at the time. It is now.

We have the most devitalized municipalities in the province of Quebec. We have an aging population. A few weeks ago, we were informed that the Innu of Pakua Shipu, which is next door to me, and Unamen Shipu have a nutritionist who organized food that they would get, in order to make sure they were eating properly and that at least certain meals were completely healthy food.

I spoke to my fellow mayors about it, and this is what we wonder: Is it possible, through nutrition north, that we do the same for our senior citizens down here? They're living on a fixed income that's way below what it costs to live anywhere else, and the cost is more to live here. When we have the store telling us that we should speak to the government to ask them if they could help, because the seniors are not buying much of their produce.... Just to give you an example, in the summertime, a basket of strawberries costs us about \$3. Last week, they were \$11.98 a basket. Yesterday, there was produce brought in and raspberries were going for \$10.29.

• (1105)

This, to me, has to stop.

There is a cost of keeping people in isolation and to have people occupy the territory. That's what we've been doing. Our main industry is fishing, but the villages are isolated from each other. It's only in the wintertime that we get a chance to travel. Now, this year that's not even there, with climate change. We don't have any big industries that cause the problem with climate change, but we're the first ones to notice it.

I don't know how many minutes I have left. I guess I've gone over my six minutes, but basically what I wanted to tell you is, if it's possible, to adjust nutrition north so that it's not too big of a bureaucracy.

And the other thing that the stores have been asking for.... There are a couple of companies that are earmarked to order from; however, only one store per community can get it. That's not fair. That's—

• (1110)

**The Chair:** Randy, I'm sorry to interrupt. Just to keep things on time, all of those points may come up again in the round of questioning, but we need to get all of our guests in for their statements, and then get to the questions. I'm sure we'll get that covered, and if we don't, we'll talk about that later. Thank you for that.

Now we have the director of public health from the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services, Marie Rochette.

Please go ahead for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marie Rochette (Director of Public Health, Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members, for inviting me to be part of this study on food security in northern communities.

Last December, Adamie Delisle Alaku, one of the vice presidents of the Makivik Corporation, had the opportunity to give you some information on the beautiful region of Nunavik and on the challenges resulting from its remoteness. I won't repeat the information that he provided during that presentation.

I want to talk about the Parnasimautik report, which was prepared following an extensive consultation with Nunavik Inuit in 2013. The report referred to growing concerns about food insecurity, which affects an alarming proportion of the population; the decline of certain animal species; and climate change. The report emphasized the key role played by the land's resources in the region's

food, way of life and economy. It reiterated the need to protect the land and its resources to ensure food security.

These concerns and aspirations aren't new. Local and regional organizations have been focusing their efforts on these issues for several decades. Nevertheless, food insecurity remains very high in the region.

I'll provide some preliminary data from the 2017 Quanuilirpitaa survey. The data is preliminary because the final report should be released in summer 2021.

The survey repeated a question that had been asked in the previous survey in 2004. Participants were asked whether they had experienced, in the month prior to the survey, a period in which there wasn't enough to eat in their home. Almost 34% of Inuit reported that this situation had occurred in 2017. In comparison, the figure was 24% in 2004. The situation doesn't seem to have improved over time.

To explore the issue further, in 2017, a scale with different questions was used to try to better define the proportion of Nunavimut considered food insecure. If we include individuals who experienced mild food insecurity, over three-quarters of Nunavimut reported that they experienced food insecurity in the previous year. The concern is that this proportion is higher among youth. The rate is 87% among youth aged 16 to 19. It's even higher among pregnant women, at 89%.

The Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services has been providing support to organizations for several years to help create initiatives that contribute to food security, health and well-being. This support may include professional support, funding, training, networking opportunities, toolbox-type resources or recipes, for example. Some of the initiatives involve activities run by community kitchens that use both traditional and market foods. There are activities to encourage people to make healthier food choices, such as in-store activities and nutrition activities in family homes.

Food assistance, such as food hampers and meal distribution, is being provided to people who have difficulty obtaining food. Gardening activities and greenhouse projects are currently being carried out in four Nunavik communities. There's also a growing interest in these types of projects.

Regional resources or projects are being run not only by the regional board, but also by several partners, such as the food coupon program for pregnant women and school meal and snack programs. Emergency food assistance is being provided to people who are currently in quarantine or isolation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. There's also the hunter support program, along with the community freezers found in each community.

To take these initiatives even further, a food security policy is being developed. A regional task force was created in 2015 upon the initiative of the Makivik Corporation, the Kativik Regional Government and the regional board.

● (1115)

The task force has partnered with various regional organizations in Nunavik. The task force's goal is to find short-term, medium-term and long-term solutions to improve the accessibility and availability of nutritious food. Four engagement sessions were held in 2017 and 2018. Over 150 people from all the Nunavik communities took part in these sessions. The following topics were discussed: access to traditional foods; promotion of healthy eating; accessibility and availability of nutritious market foods; and local production and processing.

With these topics in mind, the following issues were identified as priorities for policy: improving access to traditional foods; improving the accessibility, quality and availability of nutritious market foods; supporting the development of knowledge and skills; and promoting community partnership, engagement and decision-making.

The next step is to develop the policy. I must admit that the COVID-19 pandemic has unfortunately put a halt to this initiative. We hope to be able to start work again soon. We must then prepare a five-year action plan and secure the commitment of all stakeholders at the local, regional, provincial or federal level.

I'll conclude by saying that the vision, which is supported by the policy and the stakeholders contributing to it, consists of a food system that includes both traditional and non-traditional foods. The system will be rooted in the land, local resources, and Inuit culture and values.

Thank you for your attention.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thanks, Madame Rochette.

We now have the chief network services officer from Food Banks Canada, Kirstin Beardsley.

Please go ahead, Ms. Beardsley, for six minutes.

**Ms. Kirstin Beardsley (Chief Network Services Officer, Food Banks Canada):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members, for giving me the opportunity to speak today.

I'm going to speak specifically to the Food Banks Canada experience right now.

As you know, food insecurity exists in every community across this country. Prior to the pandemic, there were over one million visits to food banks in Canada every single month, and we anticipate that this number will grow in the months and years ahead.

As you also know, food insecurity is even higher in northern communities. The stats are so hard to take. For example, 57% of households in Nunavut are food-insecure.

These crisis-level food insecurity stats are linked with crisis levels of poverty in the north. In every part of the country, food insecurity is a symptom of poverty and low income levels, but in the north, this is combined with very high costs of food, along with the logistical challenges that create limited access to food, which creates a perfect storm for food insecurity in northern regions.

Food banks are not the solution to food insecurity anywhere in Canada, but while government policy and other programs take time to enact, food banks and other community groups are there to provide much-needed support. That said, food banking in the north comes with additional challenges as well, including a lack of resources, a lack of infrastructure and a lack of personnel, not to mention the more difficult challenges of accessing food itself.

During the pandemic—with thanks to the Government of Canada and other national donors—Food Banks Canada was able to support many northern communities with food and funds to address these needs. This includes millions of dollars in funding and over 500 million pounds of healthy frozen protein for over 90 communities across the north.

This wouldn't have been possible without the commitment and help of the local community members who made the food shipments work, and I can't even tell you how much those community members are heroes in making sure the food got to the people in need. They helped find food storage, which is an issue in the north, and especially frozen food storage. They worked on distribution, finding additional partners to get distribution beyond their communities into other communities in need, and they worked to notify community members of available food.

Further, partnerships with third parties, like the Arctic Co-op and Nolinor Aviation, were critical.

All of these partnerships might provide some guidance on how we work together to provide food in the future.

I also wanted to share two quick stories from our funding.

In Chipewyan Prairie First Nation in Alberta, funds were requested not to purchase food but to support that community to clear a trail that had grown over, in order to gain access to a lake filled with fish and provide food for that community. This high-impact project will provide healthy traditional food for years to come, as well as providing jobs for the labourers who are going to clear the trail over the short term.

In Iqaluit, the food bank requested that some of the funds be used to provide gas stipends to hunters, as hunting is very expensive. Hunters then share with the community. After one hunt alone, over 100 families in the community received meat.

We encourage any proposed support going forward to be driven by local community needs and to be flexible enough to encompass solutions that don't always rely on food being shipped in from the south, including projects that increase access to country foods.

Food Banks Canada will continue to strengthen the relationships we've built prior to and during the pandemic, and is committed to continuing to offer support to these communities over the long term, but as I said previously, the long-term solutions don't lie in food banking, which cannot address the root causes of food insecurity in the north.

We believe there needs to be a multi-pronged approach, with support for communities now and long-term policy solutions, including increased social assistance rates, so that people have a higher minimum income floor and access to more money if they aren't able to work or to find work; investing in northern economic development, so that communities have access to better-paying jobs and opportunities; reassessing nutrition north through the Inuit-Crown working group and developing a federal program that finally reduces the cost of food in northern communities—because it's clear that the current approach isn't working—and increasing the investment in local food solutions such as the ones I mentioned, including increasing access to country food programs so that local communities can continue to support themselves.

• (1120)

In conclusion, the issue of northern food insecurity will not be solved by food and food alone. The federal government needs to address the systemic root causes of poverty and low income in the north, while it works to reduce the cost of food and increase access to food. Only when all of these issues are addressed will we be able to achieve our vision of a Canada where no one goes hungry.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Members of the committee, we go to questions now. Certainly, excellent testimony will lead us to a number of good inquiries.

Our first round will be six minutes. I have Mr. Vidal, Mr. Powlowski, Madame Bérubé and Ms. Blaney.

Mr. Vidal, please go ahead for six minutes.

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

I want to thank all of our witnesses for their excellent testimony today. You are contributing tremendously to our study on food insecurity.

I want to start with Mayor Jones. As a former mayor, I appreciate your passion and your heart for your people. It was obvious in your testimony. I also come from a northern and remote community. I have to admit, though, it's not nearly as remote and inaccessible as yours.

Near the end of your testimony, when the chair had to cut you off, you were talking about the barriers to the nutrition north program and the entry into that. I think you were about to give some ideas or solutions, or maybe identify what those barriers were.

Could you take a minute or two and finish those comments you were making right when you got cut off?

• (1125)

**Mr. Randy Jones:** What I've been told by most of the stores in our communities is that the problem is the bureaucracy, or the paperwork that's involved in order to get the nutrition north program. Since we just got hooked up in the last two months with high-speed Internet, this is all new for us. The people don't have the funding in order to buy the food right now.

We've been struck with the pandemic, like I said earlier. Most of the workers from our region go to Toronto, and all the highways, and that's where they're working. This was not permitted this year. We didn't have any funding to hire those people, so employment is not 100% and poverty is starting to take a hold. The people just don't have the food in order to be able to do anything.

If we had a look at nutrition north and opened it up, so that more of the local people could get access to certain things and suppliers.... There's one at the eastern end of the province, in Blanc-Sablon, and they used to go through that, but he had to give it up, because under nutrition north, they wouldn't give him access to it anymore. Maybe that could be looked at.

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** Thank you. I appreciate that. That's helpful for us.

I want to move on now to Ms. Beardsley. Honestly, Ms. Beardsley, I have about 11 questions I want to ask you in the three minutes I have left. I'll try to be quick here.

I appreciated many of your comments. I, too, have a wonderful food bank in my community.

You made a brief reference to offering some guidelines for partnerships with which you have had success. I looked on your website, and you talk about a bunch of partnerships with private companies. In your testimony, you hinted at some guidelines on what might make that successful.

Could you expand on that briefly for me?

**Ms. Kirstin Beardsley:** Absolutely. We wouldn't have been able to deliver the amount of food we delivered into northern communities without the support of, obviously, the communities themselves, but also corporate partners. Nolinor Aviation donated a flight to Iqaluit, which is a significant donation. We were able to deliver 26 pallets of fresh and healthy food into that community early in the pandemic. Arctic Co-ops has been working with us to make sure there's freezer space in the communities.

It's going to take partnerships from charitable organizations, community groups, people from those communities, as well as the corporate sector to make sure that food access is achieved. It was simply that this created best solutions for us during the pandemic, and was a key learning experience.

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** Thank you. I appreciate that.

I have one further question I want to pursue with you.

Towards the end of your testimony, you talked about some of the programs not working. I think you specifically referred to nutrition north. In much of your testimony, I appreciated the fact that you offered many solutions. It wasn't just complaints that something is not working. That's one of the things I appreciate about people.

I have about one minute left; I want to give you that time to suggest some improvements or solutions that you think would make nutrition north more effective.

**Ms. Kirstin Beardsley:** Certainly. Thank you.

I'm not an expert on nutrition north, but one of the things we've advocated for in the past is potentially expanding nutrition north to charitable and community organizations. We pay the same costs in terms of getting food into communities and we don't receive the same subsidies. That would be one suggestion.

Overall, given that the program has been in place for a number of years and food prices are stagnant and not coming down, I think it's time to do a full reassessment.

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I think I'm right near the end of my time. I'll just give back the rest of my time rather than try to squeeze one last question in.

**The Chair:** That's very thoughtful. Thank you, Gary.

Moving on, next we have Mr. Powlowski.

You have six minutes.

• (1130)

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.):** Thank you. I'm going to address my questions to Mayor Jones.

I think you live in a really fascinating part of the world. I was previously a doctor, and I specialized in going to places that were just dots on the map. Which community exactly are you from?

**Mr. Randy Jones:** I'm from La Tabatière. I'm originally from Harrington Harbour, but when I was six years old—my mom used to be a telegraph operator—we moved to Tabatière. We call it Tabatière, but it's La Tabatière.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** Okay, I'm looking at the map.

Are all the people there part Inuit and part white settler, as in Labrador? What's their background?

**Mr. Randy Jones:** I have a status. I'm a Malécite from Cacouna. My great-grandmother was a Malécite. The rest are white, with names like Jones and Gallichon and Morency. There are a lot of French names, but 90% of the communities are anglophone. We're a majority in a minority, and the majority is a minority here. We have a couple of French communities. It makes things a whole lot more complicated.

We work closely with our Innu friends. There are two Innu communities, the Montagnais de Pakua Shipi and the other in Romaine.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** Were they all originally fishing communities?

That leads to some follow-up questions: How much fishing do you still do, and do you eat your own fish that you catch?

**Mr. Randy Jones:** Yes, we do.

The main industry of our coast is.... We have 16 communities, from Kegaska to Blanc Sablon. It's a territory that's larger than most countries in Europe. Fishing is the main industry. A few years back—I think 10 years ago—our fish plant folded in our community and we lost 75 jobs. In a town where I live, 75 jobs is like 10,000 jobs in Montreal. That was really a low blow, and we've been trying to recover from it.

I like what Ms. Beardsley said, but I wish that we had those food banks. I never heard about that here. My wife and I have been taking some food and sharing it with people we know are in need. That would be wonderful if we could have access to that.

When you can afford to buy the fish, you do. The way the price of fish, crab, lobster and so forth has gone, the only way one can afford to eat that is if you poach it.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** I gather that the fishers mostly sell fish for export to other parts of Canada or to the United States, but it's not for local consumption.

**Mr. Randy Jones:** Mostly, yes, it's to the U.S., China and Japan.

There was one young fellow from here who started a fish store. Last summer was the first time that live lobster was shipped from the Quebec north shore to China, and that was an unbelievable feat.

The price has gone so high that the local people can't afford to buy the crab and lobster. Codfish is a thing of the past. We get a bit of turbot, but that's only from a certain few fishermen who will drop in when they're fishing. They mostly sell to Newfoundland.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** I'm looking at a map of where you're from, and there are a lot of little communities speckled along the coast. You mentioned ice roads and not being able to use them, but are there any communities inland? I thought all your food came from boats. Is that not true?

**Mr. Randy Jones:** No, it comes in by plane. This year, the second week of January they started transporting the food by plane. We have an airstrip—it's not an airport; it's an airstrip—and there was an accident a few years ago here. The guy from Transport Canada told me that in my community of La Tabatière, the airstrip is like an aircraft carrier. He told me that it's one of the three most dangerous airports in eastern Canada. I asked him what number and he said, "You make the decision."

We almost lost 18 women who had to go to the hospital in Blanc-Sablon for mammograms. My wife was one of them. The plane, by a matter of inches.... Had it not been for the pilot and his skill...saved us from losing 18 women in the small community. That would have been an axe in the back. I'll put it that way.

• (1135)

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** Do I still have time?

**The Chair:** No, Marcus. It's a fascinating story. I hope we'll pick up more later.

Madame Bérubé, please go ahead for six minutes.

[Translation]

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

I'm very pleased that the witnesses are here today.

Mrs. Rochette, you spoke about traditional foods during your presentation.

Why is this so important for food security?

**Mrs. Marie Rochette:** Traditional foods include all foods obtained from hunting, fishing and gathering, such as berries, seafood or plants.

We now recognize that, in general, traditional foods have a higher nutritional value than market foods. Several studies have shown that the protein and iron content of these products ensures that the people who consume them, especially pregnant women, are much less likely to suffer from anemia, a major issue in the north.

It has also been demonstrated that good fats, especially certain omega-3s, protect against cardiovascular disease. We're discovering more and more products that seem to protect health.

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but we'll have to stop for a moment.

Mr. Clerk, is there a technical issue with some microphones?

**The Clerk:** I'm not sure. I don't see any open that shouldn't be currently.

**The Chair:** The interpreter was having a problem.

I'll give you the 30 seconds back, Madame Rochette and Ms. Bérubé. Please, go ahead.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Marie Rochette:** Regarding food preferences, in the 2017 survey, we asked people what they prefer to eat. A total of 96% of the population—especially the seniors—said that they preferred to eat traditional foods only or a mix of traditional and market foods. This is very important to Inuit here.

Moreover, their connection to the land constitutes a significant part of their lives. The evidence is growing that traditional activities related to hunting, fishing and gathering are key factors in Inuit health. The transmission of cultural knowledge and land use are essential and are clearly associated with better physical, social and mental health of Nunavimut.

Not only does this contribute to the good health of Nunavimut and to their sense of identity, it may also contribute to the economy of the communities.

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** Are there still issues regarding traditional foods in the Nunavik communities and in other parts of Quebec and Canada? Are some of these issues being resolved?

• (1140)

**Mrs. Marie Rochette:** Take the example of the migratory caribou. We know that caribou populations and herds are in decline. In some communities, caribou are becoming more and more difficult to hunt and people must travel farther and farther from the communities to access hunting grounds.

Climate change is also a major concern for Inuit. Over the years, they have seen how much these changes are altering the flora and fauna. Climate change also affects access to hunting and fishing grounds. As we heard earlier, the ice is less available and is forming later. This is affecting the hunters' ability to travel when they want to go hunting and fishing.

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** You also spoke about the work on the food security policy in Nunavik.

Could you elaborate on this policy, which is currently being developed?

**Mrs. Marie Rochette:** I said earlier that one goal was to improve access to traditional foods. This means improving, for each individual, access to hunting equipment and gas, for example, to allow for travel. This also means seeing this area as a viable socio-economic sector that would create jobs. Inuit want to be able to participate in integrated wildlife management to ensure that future generations will have access to these foods.

There's also access to quality and nutritious market foods. This can be accomplished by making the transportation chain more effective and by increasing the purchasing power of families. This is quite a key factor when it comes to access to nutritious foods. A number of communities also want to produce food locally. I spoke earlier about greenhouse projects, but there could also be small animal husbandry. The food support initiatives in place could be improved.

In terms of skills development, we must maintain these skills and ensure that youth can continue to benefit from learning opportunities and traditional fishing, hunting and gathering activities. We must continue nutrition education to encourage Nunavimut to make healthy food choices. We must also work to develop the skills of local food entrepreneurs in order to train food leaders in Nunavik. Lastly, the final element concerns Nunavimut engagement.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Now we have Ms. Blaney for six minutes.

Go ahead, please.

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

I want to thank everybody for their testimony today. I have found it extremely informative.



My first question is for you, Mayor Jones. Thank you so much for being here with us today. You talked a lot about nutrition north and the need for it to be more adaptive to the needs of the people in your region. You talked a lot about seniors, young mothers, and pregnant women, for example. I'm just wondering if you would say that maybe the federal government needs to change the nutrition north program so that it becomes more of a social program benefiting all people in your community versus just providing subsidies to the grocery stores. I wonder if you have any thoughts on that.

**Mr. Randy Jones:** This was on very short notice and I didn't get a chance to do all of the consultation that should have been done. We are fighting for the survival of our people right now. This is not just a whim. We are fighting for survival, and I think that nutrition north has the capacity to help those who are isolated. We have only about 5,000 people, all told, in the 15 communities, and of that there are over one thousand Innu and they've really been taken care of.

The thing is we have to sit down. I think that nutrition north, or the people who run that program, should sit down and look at it and speak with the communities that it supplies and see what can be done to improve it—not to take it away, but to improve it.

• (1145)

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you for that. I appreciate it.

You also talked about what's happening with climate change and the fact that it doesn't feel like you've had a real winter.

Could you talk specifically about what's happening around the climate changing, the lack of ice, and food security?

**Mr. Randy Jones:** That's one of the major things that have hit us this year. You know, there's Harrington Harbour. It's an island, and up until three days ago, those people were stuck on that island and could not get to the mainland. They burn wood, and every other year they get the ice bridge that goes to the island and they get their wood [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. I saw a guy coming out with a load of wood, and he lost his komatik or sleigh, or whatever you want to call it—we call it komatik. He turned to go back and he went through the ice. That's terrible.

Then last night I had a call. My son-in-law was down between here and Saint-Augustin. He has the contract to mark the trail, and he had met up with two Innu ladies who were coming from La Romaine. He doesn't know where they went or how they passed to get to where they were, because it's not marked and there's an 11-kilometre bay they have to cross to get to Saint-Augustin. They were way inside of that. Their skidoos broke down and he had to take them to the camp and let them call on the cellphone to get somebody to come and pick them up.

We are the first to see the effects of climate change. You know, we're in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and look at what's happening here. It's the same thing with the fishery. When the fishery started to go, we raised the alarm first that there was a problem with the fishery. Lo and behold, we were right.

This climate change is hitting us full front, and it's impossible to explain and tell you the effect it's having on the people of our community. Wintertime is the time they do their chores. They cut the

wood. They go fishing, ice fishing, rabbit hunting and all that, and that's not even on the table.

This is why this program is so important, so we have nutritious food for people, especially the seniors, and we don't have to worry. That's the most cherished asset we have—the seniors—and we don't want to see anything happen to them because of this pandemic. We want them to have nutritious food to eat.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you so much.

My last question, in the little time I have, is for Ms. Beardsley. You talked about Food Banks Canada investing in harvesting local food. I'm wondering how much money went into that. Could you get that to the committee, and anything else you'd like to add?

**Ms. Kirstin Beardsley:** Yes, I can certainly get that. I don't have the exact amounts with me right now, but when we did our grant for rural and northern communities, we really drove the application by local community needs versus driving a prescriptive application. Many of the requests were for purchasing food, because that's the critical, immediate need, but there were some—like the ones I mentioned—that were more specific to accessing traditional and country foods. We would support that going forward. We're working through another grant application now to support communities.

I can get you that information.

**The Chair:** Thanks very much.

We now go to a five-minute round, starting with five minutes for Mr. Schmale, then Mr. van Koeverden, Madame Bérubé and then Ms. Blaney again, Mr. Viersen and Mr. Battiste.

Mr. Schmale, please go ahead.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC):** Thank you very much, Chair.

Hello, witnesses. Thank you very much for this great testimony. It has been very nice hearing about the contributions you're making here and within the communities.

I'll start with the mayor. I may have missed some of it, but right off the top you were talking about some of the barriers to accessing some of these programs. I believe it was nutrition north that you were referring to. You talked about the bureaucracy involved in accessing some of the programs.

One, did I get the program right? And two, can you explain some of the bureaucratic hurdles you were talking about?

• (1150)

**Mr. Randy Jones:** This is what I've had come from some of the store owners who sent me their problems with the nutrition north program. Nutrition north is a great program, but there are things that need to be changed.

It's so far and there's so much paperwork to do that not every supplier will keep their licence in order to sell to nutrition north. On the eastern end of the province, we have two municipalities, Bonne-Espérance and Blanc-Sablon. They are connected by road, and they normally buy their produce. It comes across on the ferry from Newfoundland. There is a supplier in Blanc-Sablon, but due to the bureaucracy and so much paperwork that needs to be done, they just don't bother with it. It's too much to do.

I don't know if you understood what I said, but we are a 90% anglophone community, and that needs to be done mostly in French with all the suppliers, and some of the people just don't have the ability to do so. Some of us do speak French, but for the ones who can't, that's a problem. It's not by choice; it's a geographical error if you want to look at it that way, but we never ever knew that the rest of the province was French until we could get out and see the big centres.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** What recommendations would you give the committee to help with this problem? I have a few other questions, but maybe we can start with that.

**Mr. Randy Jones:** I think the thing that would be the most helpful is if they could meet with some of those store owners and the people, the leaders. I am also the warden of our RCM, regional county municipality, that regroups all the five mayors together. I think that would be a wonderful tool, and if we were given the time, we could tell you exactly what needs to be done.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Okay, perfect.

Maybe I'll just ask quickly about Highway 138. Maybe you can tell us a bit about that and how—I'm assuming just by the article I'm reading here—you and others believe that it could significantly help with the food insecurity issue.

**Mr. Randy Jones:** That's definite. I've devoted the last 20 years of my life to the 138. That is the only solution. The airfare.... It costs us more to travel from my community to Tête-à-la-Baleine, which is 30 kilometres away, than it does to travel from Montreal to France. I'm not kidding you; that's exactly what it is. From here to Sept-Îles, it's \$1,200 one way, \$2,400 return. We don't have that kind of money. The people don't have that. The only people you'll see travelling on the planes are people who are sent out for the hospital or for the big companies and who are working.

About Highway 138, the federal minister announced this fall, just before Christmas, \$185 million from the federal government and \$232 million from the provincial government. They're supposed to start the construction as of this year. That's not to get it all done, but that's in part. If we could get that done and probably get some of the communities linked together where there are bigger airports, then you could look at a bigger airplane to provide the service and bring in the fresh fruit and produce, and that would be picked up at the airport. It's 35 kilometres, or 50 kilometres by truck. It's not very far, but it costs a fortune.

• (1155)

**The Chair:** I'm sorry to interrupt, Mayor Jones.

We'll move along quickly to Adam van Koeverden, for five minutes.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses who are here today for all of their context, perspective and insights. It's so valuable for this committee and for everybody studying this important issue of food insecurity.

Mayor Jones, I just wanted to let you know that while you were talking, I googled Harrington Harbour. It looks like the type of place I'd love to visit one day. It's beautiful. I know it's a place fraught with challenges, but it's an amazing-looking place. I'd love to visit one day.

[*Translation*]

My first question is for Mrs. Rochette. Sorry if my French isn't very good.

Mrs. Rochette, my question concerns the interaction between

[*English*]

the land program, the provincial version of the federal program—the harvester grant—

[*Translation*]

and the harvesters support grant.

Do these programs work well together?

If not, how could we improve this area?

**Mrs. Marie Rochette:** First, thank you for the question.

I hope that my Internet connection is good enough for you to hear me, since I'm currently in Kuujuaq.

My organization isn't responsible for this program. The Kativik Regional Government is mainly responsible for the grant programs for hunters and fishers in Nunavik. I can't answer you specifically on this point.

[*English*]

**Mr. Adam van Koeverden:** If it's okay, I will continue in English.

I'm curious how the various harvester programs—and the programs that fund hunters, gatherers, fishers and traditional food suppliers—are interacting with the harvester grant. I understand the harvester grant might be available, but I would like to make sure the federal program is intersecting well with regional and provincial programs and would appreciate any insight you may have.

I was just looking at the public health website of Nunavik. You mentioned how important these programs are for the mental health and vitality of people, enabling them to live on the land. Do you have any recommendations for how this program or these programs could continue to work better or work better together?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Marie Rochette:** Some grant programs directly support hunters and aim to bring hunting and fishing products back to the communities, where they can be pooled and made available through community freezers. This component is primarily managed by the Kativik Regional Government, as I said earlier.

There's also the return to the land program. This program is managed by the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services. The goal of the program isn't necessarily for people to go hunting or fishing, but for them to go out on the land, whether it's to fish or hunt or simply to camp out and learn to live in the wilderness.

These two programs can be looked at together. However, the main goal of the return to the land program is to give seniors and youth access to the land. Otherwise, without access to snowmobiles or all-terrain vehicles, it's difficult for them to carry out these activities.

I'd say that the two programs complement each other, but that they don't have quite the same goals. One focuses mainly on supporting food security, while the other is more about providing knowledge and access to the land with a view to improving mental health.

• (1200)

[English]

**Mr. Adam van Koeverden:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thanks, Mr. van Koeverden.

We're right up to time, committee.

I'm going to permit Madame Bérubé and Ms. Blaney to ask their questions, and that will take us five minutes over. We have some important in camera business to continue with.

Madame Bérubé, please go ahead. You have two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Jones, is all the food available throughout the year, regardless of the season? Do the prices of certain foods change depending on the time of year?

**Mr. Randy Jones:** As I explained earlier, in the summer, a small basket of strawberries costs \$2.50 or \$3, but right now it costs \$12. The same is true for milk and many foods. Prices vary for most foods, but not for all.

Recently, prices have been increasing everywhere. As a result, seniors are finding it difficult to purchase healthy products. One lady called me this morning and said that what hurts her the most is that seniors can't buy fresh fruits and vegetables.

Ms. Bérubé, this is certainly an issue.

[English]

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

[Translation]

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** Mr. Jones, you said earlier that only one retailer carries nutrition north program foods. Can you elaborate on this briefly?

**Mr. Randy Jones:** The nutrition north program provides limited in-store selection compared to what arrives by boat in the summer. Most of the time, only one store is part of the program. One store is located in Baie-Comeau, in the western part of the province. There's another store in Blanc-Sablon, but not everyone can make purchases there. The store doesn't have the licence needed to stock up on products from the nutrition north program.

I think that there's room for improvement in this area—

[English]

**The Chair:** We need to leave it there.

Mayor Jones, I'm very sorry to interrupt. We're over time.

We have to go to Ms. Blaney for her two and a half minutes.

Rachel, please go ahead.

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

I'll ask just one question of two witnesses.

In your testimony, Ms. Beardsley and Ms. Rochette, you spoke about the lack of food storage infrastructure and the challenges this brings to the work you do.

Perhaps I could start with you, Ms. Beardsley. Can you talk about what recommendations you would make around this to our committee?

• (1205)

**Ms. Kirstin Beardsley:** It has been a critical challenge to find places in communities where we can store, in particular, frozen fresh food. I think it requires a recognition that there is expense. Cold chain is expensive and it requires investments and care.

I have seen the community freezers that Madame Rochette speaks of work in many communities. In larger communities, we need ongoing infrastructure and support year-round, so there are people in place who are able to maintain that. You can't just put in a walk-in cooler and walk away. You have to have people in place to maintain it, so it requires an ongoing investment to ensure the infrastructure is there.

It's been one of the most critical challenges in moving the food throughout the north.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you.

Is there anything you'd like to add, Madame Rochette?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marie Rochette:** I'd add that, in Nunavik, the issue is primarily related to transportation rather than storage space, particularly for communities located in the far north of the region. I'm talking about communities such as Akulivik and Ivujivik, which are really at the edge of the land covered by air transportation. When

temperatures are very cold, it's almost a waste of time to bring lettuce to these areas. It's a challenge to preserve this food, mainly during transportation, and to ensure that the quality is good enough when it arrives.

[*English*]

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you so much. I am done.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

Witnesses, your testimony has been outstanding. I regret my interruptions in the need to conform with the time requirements. We are all impressed, and much will be made of what you have told us in our recommendations.

Thank you so much.

This meeting is now suspended for five minutes to allow everyone to come back for the in camera portion.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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