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Chair: Michael Coteau



Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Michael Coteau (Scarborough—Woburn, Lib.)): I'd like to call the meeting to order.

Hello, everyone. Welcome to meeting number two of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

Before we continue, I'd like to ask all participants to consult the guidelines written on the back of the cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters. You'll also notice a QR code on the card, which has a link to a short video.

For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand, and for members on Zoom, please use the "raise hand" function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can, and we appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

Today, colleagues, we are meeting to discuss the future business of the committee, which studies the committee wishes to undertake and the preferred order in which they should be considered.

I will now open the floor for any motions.

Sophie Chatel (Pontiac—Kitigan Zibi, Lib.): Thank you, Chair. I would like to table a motion.

[Translation]

The motion concerns our meeting next Monday. I would like us to start this new parliamentary session on the right foot by receiving an update on one of the major issues currently affecting the agricultural and agri-food sectors. This issue concerns all aspects of tariffs. I'm thinking, for example, of the tariffs imposed by China on canola, pork and peas. We hear a great deal about this key topic. However, I would like an update.

I propose that we spend an hour with officials from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, as well as representatives from Global Affairs Canada and the Department of Finance. There have been announcements regarding programs to help our canola producers, for example. I would like witnesses to come talk about the impact of these programs.

I would like us to spend the second hour talking to stakeholders affected by tariffs. I would like to hear from them to see whether the support is actually sufficient.

That's my proposal.

Mr. Bouanani, I haven't drafted the motion yet. I'll submit it to you by the end of the meeting.

[English]

The Chair: Is there any debate? All those in favour, raise your hand.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: That passes. I'll open the floor again.

Are there any other motions?

Yes, Mr. Barlow, go ahead.

John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

We have had some good discussion within our subcommittee over the last few days, and I think we each have come up with a motion for a study that we would like to pursue. This doesn't preclude other things that may come up. Certainly, there will be some emergent issues, but I think this gives us a good template for now until the Christmas recess.

For ourselves—I know this has been submitted or passed around—this is the study that Conservatives would like to put forward:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study on the government's regulatory reform initiative in agriculture and agri-food at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and the Pest Management Regulatory Agency, with a focus on identifying where reforms can be expedited, where costs to producers and processors can be reduced without compromising health or trade, and where political leadership is required to move forward on long-standing files.

I didn't put in the motion how many days or how many meetings we would want for this—we can discuss that—but I would say up to eight. I think this is not going to be a short study. If we get it done more quickly, that's fine, but if everybody's okay with up to eight as the number, I think that's a good way to start.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to [See Minutes of Proceedings])

The Chair: Can we get an end date for the submission of witnesses?

John Barlow: Going by the clerk and the analysts, if we try to start this next Thursday, does Monday morning give you enough time? If everybody is okay with that, I would say Monday morning to have our witness lists in.

The Chair: Does anyone have any issue with that? Okay, good.

We have two down now.

Are there any other motions?

Yes, sir, Mr. Perron.

[*Translation*]

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

You'll see that we really worked well together. I had already spoken about two motions back in June. We agreed that we would make some minor changes to them.

The first motion concerns the reference price:

That, whereas:

1. The reference price used in the pork and beef sectors in Quebec and Canada is currently that of the US market, which can lead to distortions throughout the supply chain.
2. Producers, processors and retailers all deserve a fair share of the revenue.

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee convene stakeholders in the pork and beef supply chain for a minimum of three meetings to discuss how prices are set in the industry and to bring about greater transparency and study also obstacles to economic activity.

We can start with this motion. I'll move another one afterwards.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there any debate on the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. Perron.

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: I can see that we're working quite well together.

The second motion concerns investments in the agri-food sector:

That, whereas:

1. Consumer demand for locally produced or processed food has reached unprecedented levels, driven by greater attention to food safety, sustainability and the importance of supporting local economies;
2. According to the OECD, between 2011 and 2023, Canada fell from 37th to 44th place out of 47 countries in terms of capital investment in the agri-food sector; [which explains the alarm that we want to sound today]; and
3. According to a report by Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, automation and digitization in the industry must be encouraged by the government in order for it to achieve its growth objectives;

That, pursuant to section 108(2) of the Standing Orders, the committee undertake an in-depth study involving at least four meetings with stakeholders in the sector to better leverage agri-food in order to strengthen food security in the face of global instability, with a particular focus on:

Creating value within the Canadian food chain by promoting investment and innovation and reducing barriers to economic activity in Canada;

Strengthening local food production and processing, from northern and remote communities to urban centres, to reduce our environmental footprint and food cost inflation; and

Supporting local purchasing initiatives.

• (1540)

[*English*]

The Chair: Are there any questions? Is there any debate?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Are there any other motions?

Go ahead, John.

John Barlow: Thanks, Chair.

I know we talked about this as well. We would also like to table a motion inviting the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to appear before the committee just for an opportunity for us to speak to the minister.

I understand that ministers' schedules can be a little bit in flux, so I do want to be fair. Our motion would be that the committee invite the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Heath MacDonald, to appear at committee for two hours, no later than October 23, 2025, to testify on his mandate.

That gives him a little over a month to try to attend. Does that work?

The Chair: Madame Chatel, go ahead.

Sophie Chatel: Could you just repeat...? Do you have a specific date by which he has to appear?

John Barlow: I'm just saying by October 23, so it's any time between now and then.

Sophie Chatel: For two hours, is that right?

John Barlow: Yes.

Sophie Chatel: Can we have an hour with officials and an hour with the minister?

John Barlow: I would prefer two hours with the minister. I know we don't get a lot from the officials. I would prefer two hours.

Sophie Chatel: Okay.

Could I just have a moment? Could we suspend for a moment?

The Chair: We'll suspend for a couple of minutes.

• (1540)

(Pause)

• (1545)

The Chair: We're going to return to the main motion. I just want to ask something. For this Monday's meeting with the officials and stakeholders, do we have an actual list of stakeholders that have been agreed upon? Is there a list? We're going to have to get that list as soon as possible because Monday is coming pretty quickly. Can we have an agreement on when an appropriate cut-off would be?

Is tomorrow morning at 10 a.m. fair for everyone?

[*Translation*]

Sophie Chatel: Yes, absolutely.

I already have a list of the main players in the chain. I asked the department to prepare it for us. I'll send it to you and all our colleagues. I'll try to do that by the end of the day.

Does that work for you?

[*English*]

The Chair: Perfect. We have agreement on that.

We'll go back to the main motion as put forward by Mr. Barlow.

John Barlow: Thank you, Chair.

After discussions and assurance from my Liberal colleagues—

The Chair: Just a second, I have Mr. Perron.

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: Sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Barlow.

I would still like to keep the option of adding one more witness to the list by 10 a.m. tomorrow, if that works for you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Absolutely.

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: Okay. Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: The agreement was that there is a list, but that you have the right as a member to provide a name by 10 a.m. tomorrow. Please do that.

I'm sorry. Go ahead.

John Barlow: No trouble at all.

After discussions with our colleagues and some assurances from my Liberal friends that we can have the minister a second time after the estimates in November, I think it's fair that I amend my motion to read, "That the committee invite the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to appear as soon as possible for one hour to testify on his mandate."

That would be the motion. I'm trusting that the minister will appear, hopefully by the end of October, but we'll work with his schedule.

• (1550)

The Chair: Okay. In the spirit of co-operation, someone else needs to move that amendment.

Sophie Chatel: I so move.

The Chair: Is everyone in favour of the amendment?

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: Going back to the main motion, does anyone want to speak to it?

(Motion as amended agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: That passes.

I'll open the floor again. Are there any other motions?

Marianne Dandurand, did you want to say something?

[*Translation*]

Marianne Dandurand (Compton—Stanstead, Lib.): Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The industry has been working for a number of years on a grocery code of conduct. The code was partially implemented in June of this year and is set to be fully implemented starting next January.

I would like the committee to receive an update on the implementation of this code of conduct, to see where the industry stands. This is a voluntary code of conduct. The industry is currently working on this code and is being supported by the government in this process.

I would like an update on this. I sent a notice of motion requesting the following:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a short study of two meetings to receive an update on the implementation of the grocery code of conduct, its shortcomings, and to examine how it is expected to address abusive retailer practices that negatively impact producers, processors and the overall food supply chain, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises in primary agriculture, notably regarding fees, deductions and penalties imposed by large retailers, as well as its potential effects on the affordability of food for consumers; and that the committee table its report in the House ideally in December 2025, to ensure timely consideration of the code's implementation and effectiveness.

Remember that this code will come into effect in January.

The Chair: Mr. Perron, the floor is yours.

Yves Perron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Obviously, we agree with the proposal. We also care deeply about this issue.

However, I would add a nuance to the motion. The committee should carry out this study at the appropriate time. It's a sensitive matter. These are private companies. We must keep in touch with our contacts in the field and take action at the appropriate time in order to achieve the desired result.

That's my amendment.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there any discussion on the amendment?

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: Okay. We'll go back to the main motion.

Is there any discussion on the main motion?

(Motion as amended agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Are there any other items today?

Mr. Connors.

Paul Connors (Avalon, Lib.): I'd like to table a motion on the sustainable Canadian agricultural partnership agreement, which is set to expire on March 31, 2028. This is a federal-provincial-territorial agreement that addresses such things as climate change, business risk management programs, market conditions and a whole variety of issues that the sector deals with. We've heard from stakeholders across the agricultural sector who have expressed a strong interest in conducting a thorough review to enhance the effectiveness, responsiveness and overall productivity of these programs.

I move:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of at least four meetings to update previous studies of this committee on Business Risk Management (BRM) programs in Canada's agriculture sector, particularly in light of the long-term impacts of climate change, with the goal of enhancing their effectiveness, responsiveness, risk-mitigation capacity, and resilience in preparation for the next FPT agreement negotiations.

The study should also consider regional realities, the needs of small and medium-sized farms, and the federal-provincial-territorial collaboration required to ensure the delivery of effective BRM programs. In addition, the study should explore options to modernize the FPT agreement by:

incorporating more clearly defined policy outcomes (including regulatory reform, policy coherence, and timelines);

clarifying roles and responsibilities;

encouraging regional investments to support large-scale projects, such as agrotechnology parks or regional cold storage and transportation hubs.

The study should be finalized before June 2026.

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Connors.

Is there any discussion on this?

Go ahead, sir.

John Barlow: Thanks, Chair.

Thanks, Mr. Connors, for raising this.

I don't want to put my colleague Mr. Bonk on the spot, but having been a provincial MLA before this, he might have some comments. The issue with BRMs and this program is that it's a provincial-federal partnership, so any decisions—Mr. Connors, I know you know that as well—and any recommendations we make here have to be with the caveat that the provinces and territories have to agree—Quebec as well.

I don't think we need to approve our schedule from now until the end of June or for the entire four years of this government. We've already passed three or four studies that we're going to try to undertake. There will be emergent issues that arise. As I've mentioned, Mr. Bragdon might want us to look into the drought in Atlantic Canada.

Mr. Connors, you've tabled it, but could we vote on it in the new year? This doesn't come up until 2028. I don't have any issues with it per se, but I think we've scheduled ourselves pretty thick for right now. That one has some timeline to it, so I would say, table it and let's vote on it a bit later on. We've gotten ourselves through what we've already committed to.

Paul Connors: Yes. We're good with that.

The Chair: Okay. The motion has been tabled.

We'll move on to Mr. Perron on the same item.

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: The motion may be tabled. That said, Mr. Barlow raised a good point regarding areas of jurisdiction. Perhaps we missed an important detail when it comes to “clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the various levels of government.”

We could simply amend the motion to specify that this would be done in keeping with the jurisdictions and autonomy of the provinces and territories. If we added that component, the motion could be adopted without the need to specify when the committee would address it. Furthermore, I have no objection to keeping this motion for later. The committee has already adopted three motions proposing studies.

[*English*]

The Chair: The motion is still on the floor. An amendment has been made. Does anyone want to speak to the amendment?

MP Chatel.

[*Translation*]

Sophie Chatel: Could we clarify the wording of the amendment, please?

Yves Perron: I'll do that, Ms. Chatel.

Mr. Barlow raised a good point about the part referring to “clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the various levels of government.” Any changes in this area would require the agreement of the partner provinces. In this situation, jurisdictions would need to be respected.

This factor wasn't considered. Personally, I thought that we would address it when carrying out the study. However, Mr. Barlow raised a valid point.

It's common for committees to add the words “in accordance with areas of jurisdiction” to a motion. This generally goes smoothly and ensures that Quebec and the other provinces are also respected.

That's it.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Connors, go ahead.

Paul Connors: These FPTs are all individually negotiated with the provinces. There should be no problem with adding—

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: I can't hear you very well. I'm sorry.

[*English*]

Can you repeat that?

Paul Connors: All of these FPTs are individually negotiated per province.

[Translation]

Yves Perron: That's why, yes.

[English]

Paul Connors: We can just add that, yes.

The Chair: Is it a friendly amendment? Are you fine with it?

[Translation]

Yves Perron: It's still friendly.

[English]

The Chair: In the spirit of co-operation, we agree. I'm not going to take a vote on that. There's a consensus there. Is that fine with everyone?

Okay.

Sophie Chatel: Now that we have agreed on the friendly amendment, I just wanted to ask the clerk what the difference is between just tabling.... I agree with MP Barlow that we should not tie our hands with a study immediately, because a lot of things could happen between now and January. We are living in turbulent times with both the climate and trade. I agree that we shouldn't tie our hands.

If we table it and say we will study it, is it cast in stone or could we always move it? I like to plan ahead. That's the way my mind works. I like to have a plan for the whole session, but I totally want flexibility as well.

I just want to know what the difference is between tabling it and adopting it today, because there's agreement that this is an important topic, but there's also agreement that we should be flexible if something else comes up. My preference would be to adopt it today, but only to the extent there's flexibility. If there's no flexibility, then I agree with John.

• (1600)

The Chair: I'm going to let the clerk speak to this issue.

Would you like to address this?

The Clerk of the Committee (Wassim Bouanani): Mr. Connors, you have moved the motion. That's my understanding. The debate took place and there was an amendment. It is before the committee.

It's the committee's decision, if it is the pleasure of the committee, to further debate the motion and then move to a vote or just leave it as is and come back to it.

It's also possible, if you wish, to add an additional amendment and remove something from the motion, specifically the date. You have, in the motion, June 2026. If that's an issue, someone can move an amendment to remove that from the motion and leave it open.

Paul Connors: Could we move it to June 2027?

The Chair: Why don't we hear from other folks, and then we'll come back to Mr. Connors?

Mr. Barlow, go ahead.

John Barlow: My suggestion to Mr. Connors is this: You've moved it, and there's obviously a bit of concern with some of the issues with it, so why don't we leave it, and we can decide to revisit

it in the spring when we get there? In the meantime, Mr. Perron and I, or whoever, can work on some amendments so that when the time comes and we debate it again in the new year, we can amend it at that time when it's on the table to be moved.

I think you have the support of everyone here when the time comes, but I just don't feel it's.... There is some work to do on the motion, but, again, I think we're pretty full. We've booked ourselves up pretty good from now until the new year at least.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Perron, the floor is yours.

Yves Perron: I want to address two things.

First, I don't think that we should remove the June 2026 date. The partnership will be renewed in 2028. I think that the minister will be working on this soon. I think that we want to provide relevant information. We all know that corporate risk management systems no longer work and that they aren't suited to the climate change situation or to resilience in the face of it.

I would like us to adopt this motion. I don't understand why the committee isn't adopting it. We've always been clear on this point. The committee has always been the master of its own business. We could adopt it. We clearly agreed on this in the subcommittee. However, it might also be a good idea to adopt the motion during a public committee meeting.

Furthermore, it was made clear that we had other topics to propose and that, as a result, the committee would retain some flexibility in its business calendar. I don't see how adopting this resolution interferes with the flexibility of the business calendar.

I already told my colleagues that I plan to ask the committee to take another look at some issues, such as the reciprocity of standards, a topic that we studied in the previous Parliament. However, I want to do this at the appropriate time, not right now. I also want the committee to take another look at food labelling. Mr. Barlow will surely raise other issues as well, and so will Ms. Chatel and her team. As a result, the committee must decide on the flexibility of its business calendar.

I think that this motion is relevant. I'm prepared to adopt it. The motion doesn't specify when the committee will carry out the study, but it does state that the study will be done before June 2026. If the other committee members don't want to adopt it, I'll go along with them. However, I think that we should adopt it today.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Connors, what would you like to do?

Paul Connors: I think we'd like to adopt this. Let's put it to a vote to adopt it. If we have to adjust the timelines later, we can certainly adjust the timelines.

• (1605)

The Chair: Is there any more debate on the motion?

Go ahead.

John Barlow: We're voting on the amendment. Are we removing the date and the issues that Mr. Perron raised about the provincial and territorial distinction? I want to make sure we know exactly where we are.

The Chair: We're going to vote on the provincial jurisdiction amendment first.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: Okay. It was adopted.

We're back to the main motion.

Is there any debate on the main motion as amended?

John Barlow: Are we removing the date or keeping the date in there?

The Chair: He hasn't removed the date. He's left the date in there.

Steven Bonk (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): I'll make an amendment to remove the date from the motion.

The Chair: There's an amendment to remove the date.

Go ahead, Sophie.

Sophie Chatel: On the review, I understand that with the way the federal-provincial partnership is being negotiated, if we want to have a relevant impact.... My information from the department is that they will start working seriously in the summer of 2026. If we want our recommendation to have an impact, it has to be before June. After that, it will have less of an impact, just because of the timeline of the negotiation of the FPT partnership agreement.

That's the reason for the timeline.

The Chair: Are there any other speakers? There's an amendment to remove the date from the main motion. Is there anyone else who would like to speak to it?

(Amendment negatived)

The Chair: Going back to the main motion, are there any speakers to the main motion?

(Motion as amended agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Is there any more committee business? There's none. We're good.

Do I have a motion to adjourn? Is everyone in favour?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Have a good weekend, everyone.

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