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# Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

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Chair: Michael Coteau





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Tuesday, February 10, 2026

• (1100)

[*English*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 22 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.

As usual, I'd like to ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines written on the cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio 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 that links to a short awareness video.

We need to pass the report of the subcommittee. Did everyone get a copy?

Everyone has a copy. Are there any comments?

I guess I need a motion.

Go ahead, MP Chatel.

**Sophie Chatel (Pontiac—Kitigan Zibi, Lib.):** I'm happy to move a motion to adopt the report from the subcommittee.

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

**The Chair:** Now we're going to move into camera. It'll take a few minutes to do that.

We'll take a short break of five minutes, and then we'll come back. Thank you.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

• (1100)

(Pause)

• (1155)

[*Public proceedings resume*]

**The Chair:** I'd like to call the meeting back to order.

Before we start, I want to make two announcements.

Regarding the recommendations for the beef and pork study, I'd like to set the submission deadline for Friday the 13th at 4 p.m., end of day. Are folks okay with that?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Next, the deadline for submissions to the witness list for the science in Canadian agriculture and the closure of research centres study is 4 p.m. today. That's for the secondary list. Is everyone fine with that?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Okay. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, February 10, 2026, the committee is commencing its study of science in Canadian agriculture and the closure of research centres.

I'd like to thank our witnesses for joining us and welcome them here today. They are Deputy Minister Lawrence Hanson, associate assistant deputy minister Andrew Goldstein and assistant deputy minister Alain Lagacé.

Hello and welcome back, Deputy Minister. We'll start with your five-minute presentation and then open it up for questions.

• (1200)

**Lawrence Hanson (Deputy Minister, Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss actions being taken at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada in the context of the results of the comprehensive expenditure review.

[*English*]

I am joined by Andrew Goldstein, our associate assistant deputy minister of science and technology, and Alain Lagacé, our assistant deputy minister of our corporate management branch.

The comprehensive expenditure review was undertaken to restore government spending to sustainable levels by identifying spending efficiencies and focusing on core mandates. As members will be aware, the outcomes of the review process were outlined in budget 2025.

With regard to AAFC specifically, the department was required to reduce our operational spending, programming and science footprint in order to find \$154.7 million in savings by 2028-29. To achieve these savings, we are making reductions across the entire department to reflect the objectives of the review, including finding efficiencies and directing available resources to areas with the greatest impact on core objectives.

[Translation]

In messages to departmental staff on January 22 and 23 of this year, I communicated the impacts of these decisions to our workforce and departmental activities. In the two weeks since, our focus has been on communicating directly with our own employees and our partners who will be affected by these decisions.

[English]

Although these reductions are, as I noted, taking place across the entire department, we recognize and understand that the decision to wind down some of our research facilities and research farms has been a matter of specific interest and concern.

I'd like to put these closures in a broader context.

The department has an operating budget of roughly \$800 million. Our annual expenditures associated with science and research facilities account for about \$300 million of that total. Out of that \$300 million, \$90 million is spent on corporate support, such as maintenance and utilities. This is not money that goes to science and research but rather to utilities, maintenance and other costs associated with maintaining 20 research development centres and 25 satellite centres. Not surprisingly, with the passage of time, these upkeep expenses go up and are accompanied by ongoing capital rust-out.

Faced with this reality, it was determined that it would be a much more efficient use of funds to consolidate science efforts into fewer facilities and prioritize the science efforts that are most core to the department's mandate, rather than diverting more and more resources to operational costs and upkeep over time. As a consequence, we are closing three of our 20 research and development centres—those in Quebec City, Guelph and Lacombe. We will also close four of our satellite farms—those in Scott, Indian Head, Portage la Prairie and Nappan. We are making every effort to support our affected employees through what is admittedly a challenging period.

I want to emphasize that AAFC will remain the largest agricultural science enterprise in the country, and will continue to advance strategic and high-impact science with a focus on crops and horticulture, animal production, food processing, biodiversity and environmental sustainability.

I will point out that these staffing reductions will result in a limited reduction of the actual number of research scientists working at AAFC. We estimate that the number of research scientists who will not remain in their current location or be offered an equivalent position elsewhere will be about 27. That is a little over 7% of our entire team of scientists.

I will also note that at least half of the reductions in the department, overall, are operational efficiencies, not program or science reductions.

[Translation]

We will continue to invest in science and strengthen collaborations with industry, governments, academia and other key stakeholders in Canada and around the world. We will continue to help producers protect their crops and boost their yields through the minor use pesticide program.

• (1205)

We will continue to support food processing and food safety.

[English]

We will continue to be Canada's largest agricultural research organization. With 17 research centres and with research farmland across the country, every province will continue to have at least one AAFC research centre, maintaining a strong national footprint while addressing both regional and national priorities.

As well, AAFC's commitment to science excellence and sector partnership has not changed. We will continue to work with provinces, territories, universities, colleges, producers and private sector innovators. We can pool our talents and resources to drive cutting-edge research, science and innovation, to avoid duplication with academia and the private sector, and to gear resources towards science as opposed to operational costs.

The decisions taken, difficult as they have been, do not diminish the department's commitment to supporting a growing agriculture sector through science and innovation. Rather, they ensure that resources are directed where they can have the greatest impact in that mission. In every province across Canada, we will maintain and grow our collaborations with industry, academia and international networks.

[Translation]

We will continue to look for new opportunities to leverage our shared resources, here at home and around the world. At Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, we will continue to work with producers, partners and our diverse stakeholders to chart the best way forward for the sector.

[English]

Again, I want to thank the chair for this opportunity. My colleagues and I will be happy to answer your questions.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Scheer has the floor first, for six minutes.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I am here to fight for the Indian Head research farm, a facility that employs approximately 30 people full time and many more workers during summer months or part time. There's clearly no industry group that thinks it is a good idea to shut this facility down. That has become overwhelmingly apparent.

I'd like to get right into some detailed questions.

Can you tell me what the department claims it will save by shutting down the Indian Head research farm?

**Lawrence Hanson:** Yes, I have the number.

Alain, I don't know if you have it immediately in front of you. I know I have it in another document of our operational costs. If you can just allow me one moment to bring that up....

Alain, do you have it handy?

**Alain Lagacé (Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Management Branch & Chief Financial Officer, Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food):** Yes, the total operating costs last year for Indian Head were \$3.8 million.

However, I just want to caution that there's some relocation of science. There are some costs that we will continue to incur, because, as you probably know, the divestiture of such a site will take years. That \$3.8 million is the total operating costs.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** Did you look at any kind of assessment for how potentially upgrading key pieces of equipment or infrastructure at the site could result in year-over-year savings? For example, if you replace a heating system, you don't have to repair it as often. Was any kind of assessment done at the centre to look for ways of reducing operating costs without closing down the farm?

**Lawrence Hanson:** With regard to the member's question, even if we were to reduce our operating costs at that specific site, there would still be savings to be gained from seeking to do further consolidation, including moving some of this work to Saskatoon.

I will note that there were two research scientists on site at Indian Head, and one of them will, in fact, be moving to our R and D centre in Saskatoon.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** Was that a no? There was no assessment done to see if costs could have been reduced while maintaining the overall viability of the site.

**Lawrence Hanson:** I don't think the overall viability of the site becomes a matter of—

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** If the answer is no—

**Lawrence Hanson:** —whether you can further invest. The answer is that we have decided that the greatest level of savings and efficiency could come from consolidating our efforts elsewhere.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** It says in the briefing note that some of the research will be moved to, for example, Outlook, Saskatchewan. Are you aware of the difference in soil conditions between Indian Head and Outlook, Saskatchewan?

**Lawrence Hanson:** We are aware that there are some variations in soil from place to place, but we are convinced that we can continue our science capacity even with slight variations in soil conditions.

I would also note that we fund science done by others, which can continue to be focused in specific areas.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** It's not just slight variances. We're talking about major differences in the quality of soil, the pH balance and especially the moisture. Indian Head is in a very special place in Saskatchewan. It is class one soil, and it consistently outperforms other regions on a consistent basis in terms of moisture.

The reason why that's important is that when you were doing multi-year studies on seed varieties, yields and responses to various

conditions, having that kind of stability, knowing that you won't have to worry about a drought in year three or an early frost in year five...that's the type of benefit that having a site like Indian Head has.

I have spoken to so many people. Nobody believes that you can replicate those types of conditions over multi-year periods at Outlook. Was there any kind of assessment in terms of the scientific integrity that will be lost by relocating research from Indian Head to a place like Outlook?

• (1210)

**Lawrence Hanson:** I'll ask my colleague, Andrew, if he wants to add anything, but I will say that we have sought to find these savings in a way that is most consistent with maximizing our science capacity and having it remain in place. Also, where there are specific issues, we will be continuing to work with our partners and others to do research.

Andrew, if you have anything to add, please....

**Andrew Goldstein (Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food):** Every site does offer its unique properties, but we will still maintain four different sites across Saskatchewan. We believe that can generate sufficient diversity to continue our programs.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** I only have a couple of minutes left so I have to move very quickly.

It looks like there will have to be capital investments at places like Outlook to create more storage facilities. Have you done any kind of assessment of the extra costs that you'll incur by this relocation? Because if we're talking about a savings of \$3.8 million and if you have to spend millions more just to move to another location, there is not much savings, at the end of the day, to the taxpayer.

**Lawrence Hanson:** I think this is partly a stock and flow issue. Admittedly, the potential consolidation may or may not cause some further expenditures in some sites, but that's an immediate cost, whereas operating the 20 sites we have is a year-after-year cost.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** Thank you. I only have a minute left.

It sounds like the answer is a no, that you haven't actually done an assessment on what the extra cost will be.

I'm just looking at a few quick hits of what this government has funded. There was \$8.5 million for a cricket factory that ended up going bankrupt. That came directly from AAFC—that's your department. I'm looking at \$8.2 million for gender-just, low-carbon rice in Vietnam. Can you tell me what the return on that investment to Canadian producers and Canadian taxpayers was?

I'm hearing from seed groups who are saying that it's going to take two or three years to get back up to where Indian Head is in terms of research. We're going to lose two to three years on crop varieties. They estimate—these are seed groups and grower groups—that the loss on that loss of years is \$400 million.

We're looking at \$8.2 million for gender-just, low-carbon rice, \$8.5 million to a cricket factory, \$400 million in lost economic activity, all to save purportedly \$3.8 million on a research farm.

**The Chair:** We'll stop there.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** How does this make sense to taxpayers or farmers?

**The Chair:** We'll go next to the Liberals for six minutes.

MP Dandurand, over to you.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being with us on Canada's Agriculture Day to talk about agricultural research, which I think is a fundamental part of our ability to feed people.

There is a research centre in my riding, the Sherbrooke Research and Development Centre, which is apparently going to take over some of the activities of the Quebec Research and Development Centre. However, we're hearing that there could also be some job cuts.

Mr. Hanson, I read with great interest the letter you sent us. First, it talks about refocusing activities on Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's core responsibilities.

Generally speaking, what are Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's responsibilities in the industry?

[*English*]

**Lawrence Hanson:** Some of the areas we obviously feel will be the absolute core research areas are crop production, agronomy and plant breeding, which has been the core, really, of so much of the growth in the agriculture sector. Having a key focus on animal production issues will continue to be important. There is also forage and some of the elements we do on resilience in agriculture, including working with producers on issues such as cover cropping and rotation.

Andrew, is there anything you want to add?

● (1215)

**Andrew Goldstein:** The centre in Sherbrooke in particular will be a key part of our capacity to do swine research, as well as dairy research.

[*Translation*]

**Marianne Dandurand:** Thank you.

Some of the research being done in Quebec City includes research on perennial plants. There is also a lot of research done in my region.

What will the transition of the Quebec Research and Development Centre to other research centres mean, for example, in terms of growing perennial plants?

**Lawrence Hanson:** Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

This will be a process that unfolds over time and through which we'll be working directly with our employees, some of whom will be moving or transferring as a result of this. We're trying to make sure we give ourselves the space to do this in an orderly fashion, in full contact with all our research partners and in the least disruptive way possible.

[*Translation*]

**Marianne Dandurand:** There were some questions earlier about climate, which is different across the country. I think there has always been an interest in having research centres in all regions of Canada.

How do you see the geographic distribution of research centres now? Will they continue to cover all the climates and types of crops we have in Canada as broadly as possible?

**Lawrence Hanson:** That's our intention. That is why we will continue to have centres in every province.

[*English*]

and, at the same time, have research farmland in every province of the country.

Admittedly, it is not completely possible to cover every single place in the country, but we believe we've rationalized in a way that doesn't compromise our scientific effort.

[*Translation*]

**Marianne Dandurand:** Thank you.

We're going to talk about previous governments as well. Over the past few years, there have been budget cuts and freezes at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. I think that has a cumulative, long-term effect. There were reinvestments during the last Liberal mandate. Now we're seeing cuts again.

How do you see the future of research with what has happened in recent years in terms of public research capacity? Where are we headed in the future? What is the short, medium and long-term vision for research?

**Lawrence Hanson:** I imagine that many members of the committee know that we've started the process of developing our next agreement with the provinces and territories.

[*English*]

A large percentage of our agricultural spending is actually covered under the existing SCAP agreement, and I will note that none of it was reduced in the context of the CER.

Our big focus on a go-forward basis is on that next five-year agreement that will start in 2028, which furnishes such a large part of our science expenditures. We have every expectation that, just as in the last framework, science and research spending will be a big part of that framework, and I know that's something that's supported by both the government and provincial and territorial partners.

[*Translation*]

**Marianne Dandurand:** I know this is a bit outside your mandate, but what is the state of agricultural research in the private and academic sectors in Canada compared to research in the public sector?

**Lawrence Hanson:** Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

I think that is a really important point to raise. Obviously, an effective science enterprise is not one in which public funds alone are spent. One of the things we need to be doing and talking more to the sector about is what is required to drive additional private sector investment and how we actually collaborate and coordinate with universities and colleges and others.

There's no benefit in multiple organizations spending research dollars on the same activity. It makes much more sense to rationalize and organize. So much of our science work is already done in partnership with the sector, or with the universities and so forth, and that will continue.

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

I'm going to go to the Bloc and Mr. Lemire.

● (1220)

[*Translation*]

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

First of all, I think it's important to say that the Bloc Québécois is against the cuts and that we urge you to reverse course.

That said, I found it particularly interesting to see such a symbolically powerful person as Andrew Scheer speak for the Conservative Party, especially since I agree with his arguments. He essentially argues that the acidity level of a piece of land in Saskatchewan will be different from that in other regions, hence the importance of having labs across the territory.

My region was affected when the Kapuskasing experimental farm closed in 2012. That was actually the Harper government and Gerry Ritz, who was the minister of agriculture. Alain Giguère, who at the time was the director of research for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and is now the managing director, said that local companies would be able to take the research that had been done and that they would be in the best position to be able to deliver the product afterward.

Accordingly, in the current context, I'd like to ask you a question: What products or methods have been developed in northeastern Ontario or Abitibi—Témiscamingue since the closure of the research centre?

We have a very concrete example of a centre that was closed and where we lost expertise in climate change, northern agriculture and clay-based agriculture.

Almost fifteen years later, what is the state of research in these regions? Is this example going to be replicated elsewhere?

**Lawrence Hanson:** Thank you for the questions.

[*English*]

I recognize that it is not possible to have farmland on any kind of reasonably financially sound basis in every place in the country. The key is to make sure that we can, with available resources and wisely, do as much as we can and cover as much as we can. We are convinced that we are still capable of doing that with the reductions we've made and the rationalization we're doing.

I cannot speak to specific issues or projects that have been done in Temiskaming since the changes in 2012. At this point, I do know that we continue to talk to researchers at the university about how to make sure we find good ways to work in partnership.

Go ahead, Andrew.

**Andrew Goldstein:** Just to add to that, we are maintaining our site in Normandin, which is in a northern part of Quebec and will allow us to continue to do that northern type of research to maintain the diversity of our sites—

[*Translation*]

**Sébastien Lemire:** I'll stop you there, Mr. Goldstein, because I think that's a bit of a leap. It's all well and good to be in Normandin or Lac-Saint-Jean in northern Quebec, but the reality is very different from that of Abitibi—Témiscamingue. It's 800 kilometres away. It's closer to the reality in northeastern Ontario, where the Kapuskasing centre was. That's why we must have research centres that take into account the various locations and areas of biodiversity, and why it's important to have decentralized sites.

Mr. Hanson, at our request, you took part in a meeting where we held discussions with Minister MacDonald. As it happens, we wanted to know whether, if cuts were made, that money would be invested in universities and research centres, and whether the department's intention was really to obtain the data from university research. We can't ignore the importance of science to provide the data we later transfer to farmers.

[English]

**Lawrence Hanson:** Especially as we go forward and think about our future science spending, these are all issues we will seriously consider—whether there are gaps that are emerging, or if there are key gaps that are compromising the ability to grow the sector. Again, we are not only doers of research; we are funders of research. The absence of a specific centre operated by AAFC is distinct from the idea of being willing to fund science that might be of value in that place.

[Translation]

**Sébastien Lemire:** Jérémie Letellier, who is the Montérégie regional president of the Union des producteurs agricoles, said in a letter that, according to an analysis by Farm Credit Canada, the United States invests 23 times more money in venture capital for agricultural technologies, while its population is 8.5% larger than ours.

If Canada really cared about research development, there would be corresponding conditions and investments. Most importantly, agricultural realities are very, very difficult from coast to coast. My question is this: Who is going to take care of agriculture?

I'd like to make an important clarification. Two experimental farms were linked to the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada research centre in Quebec City, the one in Normandin, in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, which we just talked about, and the one in Saint-Augustin-de-Desmaures, in the national capital. What will happen to the farms, much of whose work depends on the research centre? What will the consequences be? Will there be budget cuts for them as well?

• (1225)

**Lawrence Hanson:** I can start, and maybe my colleague Mr. Goldstein wants to add something.

[English]

In terms of investment capital and research, this is something that is extraordinarily important. Government can be part of that, for sure, but one thing we are very focused on is how to deepen the pool of investment capital in place in the agriculture and agri-food space, because that will never solely, effectively, come from government.

Andrew, I don't know whether you would like to speak to any of those specific forums.

[Translation]

**Andrew Goldstein:** We rent the land from Université Laval for the Saint-Augustin-de-Desmaures farm.

[English]

We are going to be winding down our science operations at that site.

[Translation]

**Sébastien Lemire:** I would like to ask you two questions that I would like you to answer in writing if possible.

Have you done an analysis of the impact of closing the research centres? If so, can you provide the impact analysis, in writing, to the committee?

Can you provide in writing the amounts invested in each of the research centres that were closed, and break them down between the amounts invested in research and innovation and those invested to pay administrative staff and researchers?

It would be helpful for the committee to have those distinctions to see how much is actually invested in research.

[English]

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

Next, I'll go to Mr. Calkins.

You have five minutes.

**Blaine Calkins (Ponoka—Didsbury, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

I am the member of Parliament for the riding of Ponoka—Didsbury, in which the Lacombe Research and Development Centre is located. It has been in operation for over a century—118 years of trials. Years ago, it was responsible for developing the first meat strain, the Lacombe hog, and it has done yeoman's work. It is one of the more noteworthy research and development centres Canada has under the agriculture umbrella. It's situated in Lacombe, right next to the provincial crop research station and the headquarters of the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, which serves all the agricultural financing needs for Alberta producers in the entirety of the province. It is a hub of agriculture, for sure. Land values in that area are north of \$1.5 million to \$2 million per quarter section because it is some of the most productive land Canada has to offer.

The decision by the government to close that facility looks to be anything but a good idea. I can't find a single producer group—Western Crop Innovations or any producer group—that thinks shutting down the Lacombe Research and Development Centre is an intelligent idea, or that the work can somehow continue on in Lethbridge or some other place, because Lethbridge is prairie. This is parkland soil type—two and a half feet of some of the richest black soil Canada has to offer.

Your department has had less than a 10% increase in budget since 2015, and now you're being asked to make consequential cuts at the expense of producers and agribusiness. I'm supposed to believe you're going to.... What are you going to say to the producers and everybody else in central Alberta who relies on the research and development at that centre?

Should they just accept this and lie down? Is this decision reversible, or is it set in stone?

**Lawrence Hanson:** We are not reconsidering this decision. I want to emphasize that the work that's done in Lacombe, we're looking at moving some of that—and I know you're going to talk about the region and I understand that—south to Lethbridge and to Swift Current. Swine research is being consolidated in Sherbrooke. There is, of course, the abattoir that's also in Lacombe. We do believe there are other people we can partner with at other universities to move some of this work elsewhere.

I will say that we will also recognize—

**Blaine Calkins:** Mr. Hanson, this time is mine. I'm going to continue to ask you a question.

Lakeland College is partnering with the Lacombe Research and Development Centre. Were they consulted about losing their trials?

• (1230)

**Lawrence Hanson:** I cannot speak specifically to Lakeland.

I don't know, Andrew, if you can, or if we'd have to come back.

We'd have to come back.

**Blaine Calkins:** Did you talk to the provincial agriculture minister in Alberta about the trials and the shared research going on between the provincial research station and the federal research station on cereals?

**Lawrence Hanson:** What I will say about the process done under CER, all elements of it, is that it was advice conducted under the process of cabinet confidences. We were not actively consulting in advance.

I will also say, though, that as we go forward, we'll be working with the industry, the province and all of these. There are other options going forward that don't necessarily involve keeping a physical plant and presence in one place. There are still partnership routes and funding routes available beyond that.

**Blaine Calkins:** You just upgraded the meat slab in Lacombe to biosecurity level two. Now you're closing it down. This looks like sloppy budget cutting to me, with no forward thinking about what the actual impacts will be.

How are you going to replace biosecurity level two in Lacombe?

**Lawrence Hanson:** Some of what we need to be doing here is partnering with actual research institutions that may be in a position to do some of these activities. I know that Guelph is one, but we'll look at others.

Again, I want to emphasize that our owned physical plant and operations are distinct from our ability to find other ways to fund things, where we are helping to do science but are not necessarily the custodians of the equipment and land.

**Blaine Calkins:** Are you suggesting, then, that you're just going to dispose of the buildings because you can't afford to operate the buildings? Are you suggesting that the Government of Canada should get rid of them all, including the one you're sitting in right now? This seems like a poor excuse to me, Mr. Hanson. Money is being spent right now to upgrade facilities for their scientific capability, not just general maintenance, and they're shut down. I don't understand the decision.

Am I out of time, Chair?

**The Chair:** You have 10 seconds left.

**Blaine Calkins:** Mr. Goldstein, did you fly out to Lacombe, fire the 112 workers who were there in a 20-minute speech, refuse to take questions and then leave? That's what I heard happened.

**The Chair:** We'll stop there. You can follow up afterwards.

We'll go to MP Harrison.

Thank you.

**Emma Harrison (Peterborough, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have to say it's a good day when everyone around the table agrees that we need to fight for research and innovation. As we know, we've heard from expert witnesses. We know that the number one cause of rising food costs is climate change, and we know how critical data is for our producers to be able to combat climate change and still produce the high-quality food that Canadians have come to depend on.

In that vein, do you believe the remaining research centres and farms will be able to provide the research needed for our producers when it comes to combatting climate change, given how diverse our growing regions are in Canada?

**Lawrence Hanson:** Yes, I do believe that is the case. I will also note that independent of the research and science done that is related to the environment and sustainability at our research centres, the funding that is provided through the on-farm climate action fund, OFCAF, is helping farmers and producers defray the costs of various kinds of activities that are good for the environment and good for their own operations, such as cover cropping and rotational grazing. All these things are being funded and contribute to the department's commitment to working with producers and others to promote environmental sustainability.

**Emma Harrison:** Thank you.

I have to say that in my riding office in Peterborough, I receive many emails from producers and farmers not just within my riding but also across Canada with concerns about these cuts. You spoke a little bit about the \$90 million in expenditures for maintenance. Is this the main reason for closing certain facilities? If not, what was the main driver in choosing the facilities that would be closed?

**Lawrence Hanson:** I would say that when asked to find savings, you do want to try to do it in such a way that you limit the impact on science and research. If you want to be able to spend a higher percentage of available funding on science and research and less on overhead costs, that drives you towards consolidation in fewer sites.

The decisions we made in terms of which R and D centres and which farms were made with careful consideration. We recognize that.... I don't think we had any illusions that there would not be concern about some of these, and that comes with any kind of reduction. However, it was done rationally, with care and with the recognition that we want to maximize our science spend and try to find ways in which we can partner with others so that we're not always just the doers but sometimes the funders of science.

• (1235)

**Emma Harrison:** Would you be able to speak further to whether certain aspects of this research will be done within the private sector or within our colleges and universities in Canada?

**Lawrence Hanson:** I'll see if Andrew wants to add something. I think some of it will.... Already we do a lot of partnered research with the private sector and with universities. I think that would be continued.

However, Andrew, you can add anything, if you'd like.

**Andrew Goldstein:** Partnerships are a key part of our work. We've already had discussions—and have ongoing discussions—with both our industry partners and the universities to see what interest they have in continuing the work we do.

**Emma Harrison:** What are the benefits of streamlining and focusing agricultural research? What have you heard from stakeholders about what they want the future of agricultural research to look like?

**Lawrence Hanson:** I will say that in the lead-up to this exercise, one of the things we did consistently hear from stakeholders was a concern that more money was being spent on overhead and not enough on researchers. Now, please do not take that to mean I'm saying that our stakeholders asked us to close down these centres or anything like that. They obviously did not. What they did say was that they hoped to see us maximizing the science spend and trying to reduce overhead costs.

Admittedly, this is a vehicle to do this and it is why we think—even though we know the concern that's out there regarding these reductions—that ultimately it's about asking, out of every given dollar, how much are you going to spend of that money to do science and research and how much of it are you going to spend to do things that allow you to maintain the physical presence to do science and research? By consolidating, we think we get that split better.

**Emma Harrison:** There's no time to answer this, but could you give the committee more specifics on the on-farm climate action fund at some point?

**Lawrence Hanson:** Absolutely.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Next, we'll go to Mr. Lemire for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think there's something refreshing about the positions of the various members of the committee. There is a political problem with this, which has administrative consequences. However, I think

that this is first and foremost a political decision on the part of the Liberal government.

Mr. Hanson, you indicate in the budget that you will be terminating programs that include agricultural climate solutions—living labs. I asked you what will happen to the farms, much of whose work depends on the research centre. I'll ask you the question in realer terms: Does this jeopardize the agreements signed with agricultural producers who are currently part of the living labs?

[*English*]

**Lawrence Hanson:** The member is quite right that the living labs program will be wound down, as announced in the budget. However, I will note a couple of things. The existing 14 projects under the living labs program are going to continue to the end of their natural and predetermined span. We will have all the data, information and value from those. It's really more that a second wave of the program won't continue. It was very much meant—and that's why there's a limited number of them and not at scale—to try to learn some initial lessons on various kinds of science questions. I think it fulfilled that purpose. We're allowing the projects to go to their end so that we're not leaving anyone in the lurch on those projects.

[*Translation*]

**Sébastien Lemire:** According to Public Accounts of Canada 2025, you were going to invest \$900 million in science and innovation in the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

What guarantees are there that the \$900 million you were going to invest in science, research and innovation will be maintained? Are you going to reduce the amount?

[*English*]

**Lawrence Hanson:** The reality is that there will be some key decisions made in the future about the next agriculture policy framework. Like every department, we have programs that sunset. Some are renewed. Some are renewed at a larger amount. Some are not. I can't speculate about the future.

Again, this has been very clear. This was a specific-point-in-time exercise about reductions to meet a target. We have done that, and now we're moving forward.

[*Translation*]

**Sébastien Lemire:** In a note, the Parliamentary Budget Officer indicated that he had requested the planned savings from the comprehensive expenditure review, a breakdown of the planned savings by program, as well as information on staff reductions and details on the potential impact on the level of service for 2026 to 2030.

Can you confirm that the information has been provided and send a copy to the committee, please?

• (1240)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Give a very short answer.

**Lawrence Hanson:** Thank you, Chair.

We provided the Parliamentary Budget Officer with answers to all the questions he submitted to us. I assumed this was provided to the committee as a matter of course, but we can obviously work with the committee to ensure you have it.

**The Chair:** Mr. Barlow, you have five minutes.

**John Barlow (Foothills, CPC):** Thanks, Mr. Chair. I'm going to share my time with my colleague Mr. Gourde.

I just have a couple of very quick questions.

Mr. Hanson, I want to confirm that you said that the AAFC budget for research was about \$300 million. Is that correct?

**Lawrence Hanson:** Yes, that's roughly the number—\$300 million.

**John Barlow:** Thank you.

My colleague was nice enough to talk about the importance of the climate action program and the on-farm climate action fund. An additional \$300 million was announced to bring it now to \$700 million. You could more than double the budget for research if you actually attributed those funds to something that works.

I want to talk about OFCAF for a second, and the climate action program. The Liberals talked about the importance of the on-farm climate action fund. The former agriculture minister announced an additional \$300 million for that program, bringing it up to \$700 million. You would be able to double the research budget to keep these research centres open so they could do the good work they're doing.

The Auditor General audited this program last year. Here are a couple of the comments that came from that audit: no strategy to meet the expected contributions of the program, poor results management, "unreliable and incomplete results", and performance targets were exaggerated.

You are throwing more good money after bad in a program that clearly doesn't work. Last year, we talked to every single stakeholder. We asked them which programs they wanted to get rid of, and every single one—almost to a person—said that OFCAF is one program that could be eliminated to ensure those resources go to programs that actually work, like the research being done on the ground.

Why are you choosing programs that clearly don't work or that have no metrics to measure their success, and sacrificing the good research being done on the ground?

**Lawrence Hanson:** Thank you for the question.

In terms of OFCAF, it is important to note, first of all, that these are resources being provided directly to producers to undertake beneficial management practices on their own farms.

I would certainly never contest what the member heard from stakeholders. I will say that I did—on my own or with the minister—visit a number of producers. I've heard their appreciation for the support from OFCAF, including for things that are very useful for BMPs.

[*Translation*]

**Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC):** I'll take the rest of my colleague's time. I have another question.

Thank you, Deputy Minister.

On Canada's Agriculture Day, I want to thank all farmers for putting food on our tables.

I find what we're studying today unfortunate. In my province, in Saint-Augustin-de-Desmaures, the Quebec Research and Development Centre is a leader in cultivar and forage crop genetics. That means hay, the foundation of our agriculture and, unfortunately, cuts are being made to that. Later on, we'll wonder why there's a lack of hay, why there's a lack of milk in the fridge and why there's a lack of steak on our tables.

Governing means making choices. I would ask the deputy minister where the order came from to make cuts to the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food's research centres. Who gave you that order?

[*English*]

**Lawrence Hanson:** When the CER was announced last summer, the department immediately began looking for savings across all of its activities—

[*Translation*]

**Jacques Gourde:** Where does the order come from? Does it come from the government? Does it come from the Privy Council? Does it come from the Clerk of the Privy Council? Someone asked you to make cuts. Who was it? You can give a name or the name of an organization. Who was it?

• (1245)

[*English*]

**Lawrence Hanson:** It's not a question of a name or an organization. We provided advice to the minister based on our best understanding of where reductions could take place and have the most limited negative consequences.

[*Translation*]

**Jacques Gourde:** Deputy Minister, did the government ask you to make cuts at the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food?

[*English*]

**Lawrence Hanson:** Yes. That was the whole CER exercise. All departments were asked to find operational savings.

[*Translation*]

**Jacques Gourde:** Thank you. You've answered my question.

Governing means making choices. There are billions of dollars to buy F-35s.

[*English*]

**Lawrence Hanson:** Chair, I'm sorry. I would like to say—

[Translation]

**Jacques Gourde:** I'm not asking you a question. I will finish my remarks.

The government chose to invest billions of dollars in artificial intelligence and the purchase of F-35s. There are cost overruns for artificial intelligence, but the government refuses to save a few crumbs for agriculture.

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay. We're going to have to stop there. Thank you.

Mr. Connors, you have five minutes.

**Paul Connors (Avalon, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Lawrence Hanson:** I will just say that the department was asked to make reductions, but the advice—

**The Chair:** Mr. Hanson—

**Lawrence Hanson:** —on where to make those reductions came from us and—

**The Chair:** Order. I'm sorry. Can you stop for a second?

We're going to go to Mr. Connors. Someone will ask you the question after this, but the time was over by 15 seconds.

Go ahead, Mr. Connors.

**Paul Connors:** I'm going to go back to Mr. Hanson.

The spending review that was undertaken by Agriculture Canada was part of a review that had taken place across all of government. Can you elaborate on that a bit more? I'll allow you to answer what you were trying to state at the beginning.

**Lawrence Hanson:** Thank you.

The concept of the CER itself was a government policy to find savings. Each individual department and minister were asked to propose reductions associated with their department. We gave advice to our minister in terms of where we thought those reductions could come in a manner that was the least disruptive possible. I continue to emphasize that more than half of our cuts came in the form of operational reductions and spending.

I would just draw members' attention to budget 2025. There is an annex that goes through each department and its individual reductions associated with CER, including those of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

**Paul Connors:** Mr. Hanson, does the department think, or know, that the way agricultural research is done is changing and we may have to change our approach to agricultural research?

**Lawrence Hanson:** Absolutely. There are new fields of endeavour starting all the time.

This was just mentioned so I will mention it: AI actually holds enormous promise for the agriculture sector. If you look at some of the advancements the Dutch have made in controlled agriculture environments, there's huge opportunity. The answer is yes.

The other thing I'll note is that this is why so much of our research is project based. Projects begin and projects end and new ones launch. It gives us the opportunity to reflect those changes that

are ongoing. If you look at the issue of precision agriculture, the technological landscape is changing dramatically, and agriculture has to be part of that change.

**Paul Connors:** You mentioned what's being done in other countries. I know that Australia is taking a different approach too. It's based more on an industry-led research approach. How is that happening in Canada?

**Lawrence Hanson:** Thank you. It's a very good question.

A lot of this has to do with issues, and I think you might be referring to plant breeding, among other things. What we are trying to do and continuing to work toward is a way to have incentivization for private sector investment in things like crop breeding and so forth, but also to ensure that producers are feeling they are getting the maximum value from the research that we do through check-offs and other kinds of expenditures that they themselves make.

**Paul Connors:** Just going back, I think you mentioned in previous statements the assets—the buildings and that—on the farms. What is the go-forward plan for that? Could any of that be transferred to universities or other research institutes in order to maintain their benefits?

**Lawrence Hanson:** I will turn it over to my colleague, Alain, who can speak a bit about what a reasonably standardized process is for the disposal of land and other assets in this kind of instance.

• (1250)

**Alain Lagacé:** First and foremost, the winding down of scientific activities is going to be our primary activity over the next 12 months. After that, we're going to be following a prescribed Treasury Board process of divestiture of real property assets. Basically, we're going to be looking at gathering the assessment of property details, such as land survey and environmental condition.

Then, we're going to be engaging in a priority circulation process whereby we are going to be offering the assets, first and foremost, to other government departments. Then, moving down that list, we go to provincial and territorial governments. If that doesn't reap success, we go down to municipalities and the process for land claims or aboriginal or territorial requirements.

The process is going to be a lengthy one, then. It's over a matter of years that we do this, and until we divest of the assets, we are still the custodians of the land and the buildings.

**Paul Connors:** Is there any way to confirm that they will stay in agricultural use?

**Lawrence Hanson:** They won't, necessarily. Once we declare land surplus to our needs, it goes through this process and could potentially be used in other capacities. We can't really speculate on that.

**The Chair:** Thank you, sir.

We're going to do four minutes, four minutes and two minutes.

We go now to the Conservatives for four minutes.

**Steven Bonk (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll just go back to what my colleague mentioned earlier about the on-farm climate action fund—OFCAF. You said that there is \$300 million of research. There was just another \$300 million announced on top of what existed already, which is \$700 million for a program that no one asked for, that nobody wants and that doesn't work. That money could be much better spent on other programs that we have quantifiable data for.

I'll give you a good example of that. We have the Indian Head research centre, which was established in 1887. This is the home of zero till. Zero till has done arguably more for the climate than any other thing in agriculture that's ever been invented. That's not only in Canada. It was developed in western Canada in Indian Head, where the main research was done, and it was exported all over the world. It is the main agricultural practice now in Australia, Russia, Kazakhstan and eastern Europe. This is the kind of research we need.

How on earth can you justify closing down research centres that provide this kind of research, when you're giving \$22 million to beans for women's empowerment and \$8.5 million to a cricket factory? I have a whole list of absolute Liberal silliness right here. I can go through this one by one, the millions of dollars that no producer in Canada would be interested in funding.

How on earth can you justify closing a research centre that's done more for agriculture than probably anything else in Canada and that's costing \$3.8 million?

**Lawrence Hanson:** I'll maybe note a couple of number points, because OFCAF has come up. I'm just making the obvious point that the \$700 million and \$300 million is a bit.... It's important to remember that the \$300 million is an annual spend. The \$700 million for OFCAF, I believe, takes place over eight years, so it's not a similar annual quantum.

I honestly cannot speak to some of this. At least some of the programs you mentioned are not AAFC programs. I will speak on the issue of Aspire—

**David Bexte (Bow River, CPC):** Mr. Hanson, it's again our time, and time is brief, so I'll get straight to the point. I would like to specifically ask for you to table the net savings, which includes ongoing maintenance costs until land and facilities are disposed of. The net savings are what really matter, and I'm not sure we fully appreciate how trivial the savings are going to be for the magnitude of the negative impact on the research opportunity.

To go further, you mentioned the minor use pesticide program. It's been difficult, if not impossible, for minor use pesticide products to get certified in Canada because of arbitrary requirements for duplicative testing. Also, these products, typically developed outside of Canada, have such a small market that the foreign producers that produce the products can't justify the additional expense. Farmers don't get access to these programs. They don't get access to these products, and they likely, usually and traditionally, have had an outsized impact.

Can you please explain how this capacity is going to be saved? With the closing of the Scott Research Farm, this is on the block. What are farmers going to do?

• (1255)

**Andrew Goldstein:** Yes, the minor use program is something that is highly important to the agriculture sector, particularly in the horticulture sector. We have maintained all of our personnel related to the minor use program. Yes, there are some testing sites at the location. We will be shifting them to another location to maintain that capacity, and we won't be reducing our capacity on the minor use program.

**The Chair:** Thank you. We'll go to the Liberals for four minutes.

MP Chatel, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

**Sophie Chatel:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Thank you to our witnesses for being here.

One thing that the Prime Minister has said is that a country that cannot feed its people has few options, and top of mind is food security and food autonomy.

As we embark on the next phase of the partnership with provinces, central to that is the importance of science and technology. The "Food Price Report" by Dalhousie University pointed out that many researchers say that structural and long-term drivers of food inflation include extreme weather events, geopolitical conflicts and energy and productivity trends. These are things that science, innovation and technology can really change.

As this committee is studying science and technology in this study, how can Agriculture Canada be a key partner with universities, producers and farmers to embark upon the challenges that this report notes in order to give Canadians food security?

[*Translation*]

**Lawrence Hanson:** Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

I think one of the key things that we need to be thinking about in the next policy framework are the resilience and the adaptability of the sector. So many of the expenses in the agriculture sector come in the form of extreme weather events over which producers obviously have no control, so one of the areas of emphasis in the next framework ought to be on this very issue of climate resilience to help protect the investments and the activities of producers and for these food security concerns.

**Sophie Chatel:** Thank you.

Mr. Chair, there's a lot of chatter.

**The Chair:** Yes, I've noticed that.

Folks, people obviously have to have conversations, but please keep your voices down because it's hard to hear the speaker.

Please continue.

[*Translation*]

**Sophie Chatel:** I would also like to know what discussions have begun as part of the next consultation. I had the pleasure of meeting a number of stakeholders in a first round. What I'm hearing from producers, producer associations and processors, is really, as you noted, about climate resilience and resilience to the challenges caused by geopolitical conflicts.

Let's go back to the consultations. What are you starting to hear from stakeholders?

[*English*]

**Lawrence Hanson:** We have only really just begun the formal consultations, but I would say that the things we are hearing most are that the government needs to be working with provinces and territories to think about the next policy framework in the context of being able to grow the sector to strengthen our capacity to trade and to meet these resilience issues. Again, that's a very unscientific sampling. We've just started the process, but those are certainly messages we're hearing a lot.

[*Translation*]

**Sophie Chatel:** We talk about the importance of science and innovation. In your cost-cutting exercise, did you cut services and support to farmers?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Give a very short answer.

**Lawrence Hanson:** No, the SCAP funding was not reduced, and there was no impact on the business risk management suite. In fact, there have increased as a result of a higher payment rate for AgriStability and an increased interest-free component under the advance payments program.

• (1300)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

For the Bloc Québécois, we have Mr. Lemire for two minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Deputy Minister, I want to make sure that you will provide us in writing with the impact analysis of closing the research centres, if one has been done. I would also ask you to provide us with the amounts invested in each of the centres that were closed and to break them down between the amounts invested in research and innovation and the amounts invested in paying administrative staff and researchers. I asked you for them at the end of my first round, but we ran out of time before you could tell us whether you were going to do so.

Will you commit to providing it to us?

[*English*]

**Lawrence Hanson:** We can provide the financial information on costs associated with the centres. In terms of our own analysis, we will provide information about how we're seeking to address any limitations coming from the reductions.

[*Translation*]

**Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you.

I want to mention that, in 2016, the former Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lawrence MacAulay, reopened the Frelighsburg experimental farm. In 2019, he opened an experimental vineyard at the Kentville research centre. Even recently, in 2024, he announced investments of \$4 million at the Harrington experimental farm.

In that spirit, we are surprised to see a major change of direction on the part of the Liberals, who have decided to turn away from science. Obviously, this is true only for some Liberals, not all of them.

According to an OECD report, Canada invests half as much in agriculture as many other countries. Also, some countries use agriculture as a military expenditure. Feeding people is perhaps the most critical aspect of a country's security. Have you considered the fact that spending on agriculture, in particular research, and science could be considered military spending?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Give a short answer.

**Lawrence Hanson:** Thank you, Chair.

I would not share the characterization of this as walking away from science. As I've indicated, roughly 7% of our research scientists are not getting an offer to move to another job.

In terms of dual use and things like that, I confess I am not an expert on this, so I will be very careful in my response. I can imagine there are certain kinds of technologies that are useful for both defence and agriculture. Remote sensing strikes me as one and earth observation is another, but I would not presume to have any expertise on what does or doesn't count toward a defence expenditure.

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

[*Translation*]

**Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Deputy Minister, thank you for your time, and thank you to your team for joining us here today.

Is there a will to adjourn the meeting?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** The meeting is adjourned.







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