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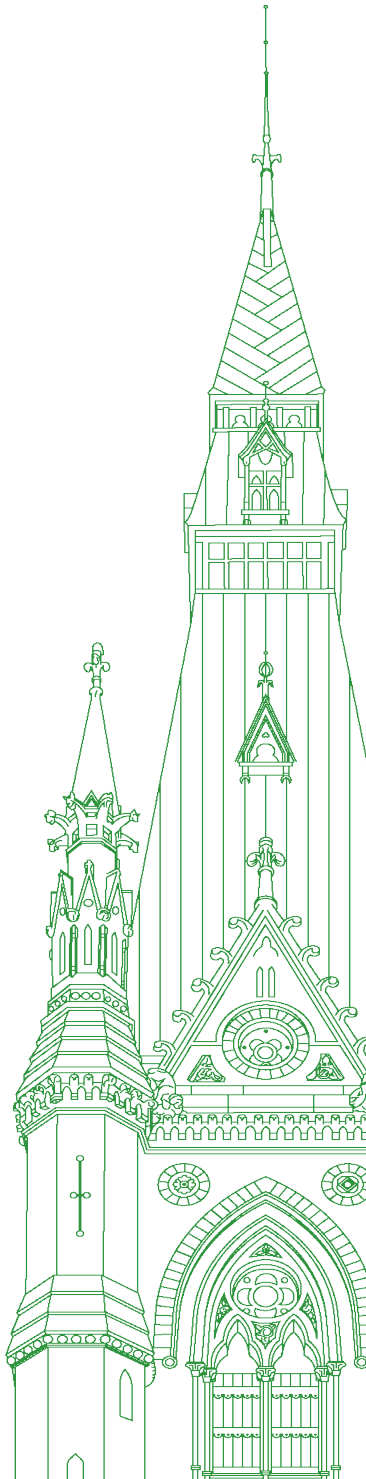

Chair: Michael Coteau

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

Tuesday, February 24, 2026

● (1100)

[*English*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 24 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 and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including our interpreters. You will also notice the QR code on the card, which links to a short awareness video.

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

I would now like to welcome the witnesses joining us here today.

In person, we have Lori Oatway from Western Crop Innovations. Thank you for being here.

We also have, online, Serge Buy, from the Agri-Food Innovation Council, and Sophie Martel, general manager, Centre d'expertise et de transfert en agriculture biologique et de proximité. Thank you so much.

We'll start with Ms. Oatway.

You have five minutes, and then we'll go to the other witnesses. Then we'll open it up for questions.

Welcome to the agriculture committee.

Lori Oatway (Research Scientist, Western Crop Innovations): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this committee.

Today, I will speak from my experience as both a seed grower and a research scientist, which gives me a broad perspective on the importance of research and our research network in Canada.

As a seed grower, agricultural research supports and shapes our businesses through the development of better crop varieties, resilient production systems and long-term farm profitability. Research also provides evidence-based responses to emerging threats, including new diseases, pests and climate extremes, ensuring we have proven tools and strategies when needed.

As a research scientist with Western Crop Innovations in Lacombe, Alberta, I work on developing new cereal crop varieties adapted to western Canadian conditions. Our team collaborates with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, producer groups and private industry partners to enhance yield stability, forage quality, grain quality and disease resistance in crops that support both the livestock and grain sectors. This research ensures Canadian farmers have access to varieties that meet evolving market demands, climate challenges and sustainability goals, while maintaining the high quality that defines Canadian agriculture.

I proudly serve as a board member of the Canadian Seed Growers' Association and as a member of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's advisory committee on plant breeders' rights, further connecting my work as a scientist and a producer.

Our community, producer networks and research collaborators are all deeply concerned by the announcement of the closure of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada research stations across Canada. For our community, this is not an abstract policy change; it is deeply personal and profoundly consequential.

The Lacombe Research and Development Centre has been a cornerstone of agriculture innovation and community identity for 119 years. It is approximately the fourth-largest employer in the city of Lacombe and is considered the highest-impact employer because of the professional nature of the jobs it provides: roles that have anchored families, supported local services and contributed to community stability for generations. The announced closure represents the loss of over 100 jobs and will create an economic shock that Lacombe is not equipped to deal with.

The Lacombe centre has long been recognized as a hub of innovation for the beef, forage and cereal industries. It has played a central role in variety development, feed efficiency research and the integration of crop and livestock systems—work that is uniquely situated to our agriculture industry in Alberta.

With long-standing relationships with post-secondary institutions and research partners, including Lakeland College, Olds College and the University of Alberta, it is a central element of a broader research network. Moreover, the Lacombe Research and Development Centre provides critical infrastructure used by external partners, including Western Crop Innovations and Lakeland College. My own research has supported many of the projects there. The centre is not a legacy facility, but an active and relevant research institution with multiple long-term projects in progress.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada stations in Lacombe, Scott and Indian Head produce important agronomic and pathology information for crop variety registration trials in western Canada. Because of their unique environments, these locations will be extremely difficult—if not impossible—to replace. The closures will also lead to the dissolution of research teams that have taken decades to build. For the seed sector, this disrupts the continuity between plant breeding, pre-commercial variety testing, variety registration trials, seed multiplication and ultimate grower adoption.

More broadly, the closure of research facilities weakens our national research network. Historically, Canada's strength in agriculture development has come from regionally distributed centres that understand local environments. These sites do not operate in isolation. They function as an integrated network. When centres are removed, we lose not just the scientists but also the research, connectivity and trust that sustain innovation across agriculture value chains.

Breeding a new crop variety can take eight to 12 years, and long-term planning and investment are required. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada research centres have provided a stable and critical backbone for this research, and closures will be disruptive and have far-reaching implications for Canadian farmers and the resilience of our agriculture industry.

We respectfully ask that the federal government carefully evaluate the full impact these closures will have on Canada's agricultural system. We continue to urge the federal government to reconsider this decision. If the decision cannot be reversed, we ask that a clear, extended transition plan be developed with our communities and the agriculture industry. That plan must safeguard long-term data, genetic resources and scientific expertise, ensuring that facilities, programs and collaborations are intentionally transitioned.

● (1105)

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide my perspective. I'll be pleased to answer any questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We appreciate it.

We'll next go to Mr. Buy for five minutes.

Serge Buy (Chief Executive Officer, Agri-Food Innovation Council): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning. Thank you for allowing me to present virtually.

I am the CEO of the Agri-Food Innovation Council. It's an organization that has advocated for agricultural research for more than 100 years, including research conducted by the federal government. In fact, the importance of public research was highlighted at our first conference in 1920, and it remains essential today.

We are here because the government has announced the closure of several Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada research centres and satellite farms. I recognize that those decisions were not taken lightly. Our thoughts are with the affected employees and their colleagues. I also want to acknowledge that the senior officials responsible for making those decisions were placed in a challenging position, and we understand the weight of that responsibility.

While the government was transparent in the signalling that cuts were coming, we remain concerned about the lack of consultation. Departments were given only a few months to identify [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] which were not meaningfully engaged.

I will focus on two specific areas: what should have been done and what must be done now.

First, more consultation with industry should have occurred, both to identify where cuts could have been made and to assess the impact of proposed reductions. Stakeholders could have shared critical knowledge on how those decisions would affect the sector and suggested alternatives.

The closure of these centres means the loss of long-term research infrastructure and sensitive, decades-long datasets essential for climate modelling, soil health, crop variability and livestock and regenerative agricultural research. We are losing scientific continuity that cannot be rebuilt elsewhere.

These closures will affect innovation in key areas such as crop breeding, cold-climate agriculture, livestock production and meat science. The impact on current research projects was clearly underestimated. We risk losing irreplaceable expertise. While AAFC may hire new scientists, decades of accumulated knowledge cannot be replaced by new graduates or early-career researchers.

A more effective approach would have been a government-wide review of all science and research programs, identifying duplication, improving efficiency and streamlining funding. This was recommended by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Science and Research in 2024, but it was not implemented. Because of this, we still have roughly 30 departments and agencies funding agriculture and food innovation, with each funding program having its own overhead.

While consolidating everything into one department is unrealistic, combining or aligning some programs is both possible and overdue. In 2016, the advisory council on economic growth identified agriculture and food as a pillar of Canada's economic future and recommended an interdepartmental task force chaired by the Minister of Agriculture. That recommendation was not pursued by the government.

Our organization also proposed a national strategy for agriculture and food research and innovation. Although former ministers expressed support, the department responded that it already had a strategy, later acknowledging that it applied only to AAFC's internal responsibilities, not the broader federal landscape.

Looking ahead, the federal government must operate differently. It must reduce silos, improve interdepartmental collaboration and eliminate duplication while increasing efficiency. Canada needs a national strategy that provides clear direction, measurable outcomes and coordinated implementation. Most peer countries already have one. It is time for Canada to do the same.

Finally, we must support the communities affected by the research centre closures. This includes funding community-led initiatives to continue research and retain expertise. We cannot afford to lose the capacity we spent decades and decades building.

What you are doing in this study is critical for the sector, and we hope that in your recommendations, you will not only address the current situation but provide guidance for the future. We also hope that you will revisit this issue on an annual basis in order to evaluate the situation and see if things have improved. If Canada is to strengthen its position as a world leader in agriculture and food production, and if we are to view agriculture and food as a national security issue, we must be serious about them and take strong actions.

I thank you for your time and look forward to answering any questions you may have.

● (1110)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we'll go to Sophie Martel for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Sophie Martel (General Manager, Centre d'expertise et de transfert en agriculture biologique et de proximité): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair, and members of Parliament on the committee. Thank you for having me here today.

Canadian agriculture is not just going through a rough patch; it is facing unprecedented structural challenges. We're talking about the climate crisis, pesticide resistance and the demand for greener global markets. Our producers are on the front lines, and the facts speak for themselves.

In Quebec, the climate paradox is complete. In 2023, while the Outaouais region was dealing with its seventh major flood in 60 years, Abitibi-Témiscamingue was suffering a historic drought, forcing producers to sell off their livestock due to a lack of hay.

On the Prairies, from 2021 to 2024, Saskatchewan saw its wheat production drop by 48% drop and its canola production drop by 35%.

In Alberta, cycles of hail and drought have cost hundreds of millions of dollars in emergency compensation.

In the Maritimes, chemicals are no longer enough. The Colorado potato beetle has developed resistance to over 50 active ingredients.

In Ontario, even high-tech greenhouses are threatened by new pests, such as the brown marmorated stink bug, putting billions of dollars in investments at risk.

The pillars of our food security and trade balance are crumbling. In this context, science is not a luxury, it's an insurance policy.

As Mark Carney reminded us, “a country that cannot feed itself, fuel itself or defend itself has few options.”

However, the announced closure of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's three research centres sends a contradictory signal. If physical structures must change and this decision can't be reversed, then the mission of fundamental public research must be protected.

The Sainte-Foy centre is a striking example. Research scientists like Marie-Noëlle Thivierge, Martin Chantigny and Franck Stefani are working on issues that the private sector will never fund on its own. For example, we're talking about economic sovereignty, of integrating perennial plants that reduce nitrogen leaching by 50%. This is a direct response to our reliance on imported fertilizers, which cost Canada $2.6 billion in 2024.

We're also talking about climate resilience, as well as work on mycorrhizae, which create a natural shield that helps crops to better absorb water during droughts.

We're even talking about Nordic adaptation. Sainte-Foy is the centre of excellence for forage crop survival in the face of the freeze-thaw cycles we experience in Quebec, among other things. It should be noted that over 50% of cultivated areas in Quebec grow forage crops, which are the basis of our livestock and dairy production.

Without this public science, how could Quebec achieve the objective of its sustainable agriculture plan, funded in part by the sustainable Canadian agricultural partnership, which aims to cover 75% of annual crop areas in winter?

Public research is irreplaceable because sustainable agriculture requires systemic research on soil health, alternative pest management or adapted variety trials.

The private sector is neglecting these areas, as they often aim to reduce the use of commercial inputs or produce non-patentable outcomes.

Without this strong public science, we are creating an imbalance between short-term commercial interests and the interests of the community.

In addition, another threat looms over science in this country: The college and community innovation program, or CCI, which funds applied research in centres like mine, is set to end on March 31, 2026, unless the government reverses its decision.

Mr. Chair, we cannot accept a withdrawal of government support. The Centre d'expertise et de transfert en agriculture biologique et de proximité, or CETAB+, therefore recommends implementing a national agricultural science strategy aimed at ensuring stable, predictable public funding geared toward agroecological transition.

We also want the government to recognize agricultural research as strategic infrastructure, on par with energy and digital technology. Agricultural science is the backbone of our sovereignty.

Finally, if these closures cannot be averted, we ask that every dollar saved as a result of these closures be reinvested in fundamental research with no intellectual property, as well as applied research and knowledge transfer.

Let's not weaken science at a time when the ground is slipping away from under our farmers' feet.

Thank you.

● (1115)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you to all of our witnesses. Each one of you was well under five minutes. Thank you so much for being so precise with your time.

We'll go to the Conservatives now for six minutes. We'll start with Mr. Epp.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for appearing today.

Let me state right at the outset that the size of government does need to shrink. That's not what this is about today.

For the record and for the report, I have a few stats to roll in. From 2012 to 2025, the public service increased by 30%. In that same time period, AAFC declined by 14%. In a narrower time frame, from 2015 to 2024, the federal public service increased by 40%, while the AAFC employees grew by 11% and the economy grew by 3%. Agriculture and agri-food is our largest manufacturing sector. It's bigger than auto, and it's bigger than mining.

The focus of my questioning is on process and priority-setting.

I'll begin with you, Mr. Buy. You talked about how there was a lack of consultation. Can you elaborate? From your bio, I see that you have been through different restructuring processes. With your experience, do you want to disregard the recent history of the changes within the organization, and is across-the-board cutting the most effective...for the best interests of the country?

Serge Buy: I would say that across-the-board cutting is not a good idea, sir. It is very counterproductive. There should have been a little more thought put into the process. I understand things were rushed, but the lack of consultation is resulting in what we're seeing today, and that's too bad. We approached this in a way that's not very conducive to keeping our economy growing and our country strong in the way we are saying we want it to be.

Dave Epp: My understanding is that there is a return on investment in research—obviously in the private sector, and also in the public sector. In your opening comments, you alluded to the fact that there are other areas that should have been addressed. Can you comment further, please?

Serge Buy: Absolutely.

First, based on what an economist at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada says, the return on investment in agricultural research is the best versus that of any other sector, so we should be investing more in it.

In terms of where we should have cut more, that was in my opening statement. I think we have too many programs and too much overhead on a number of things. I would agree with you that cuts are necessary in the federal government, but we looked in the wrong direction. It is easy for Ottawa to look, on occasion, at regional centres that are a bit farther away, rather than right beside it. That's part of the concern we're seeing today.

Dave Epp: My understanding is that there can be up to a $63 return for every dollar invested.

I'm going to switch to Ms. Oatway.

I'm most familiar with minor use settings, being born in Ontario, and the horticulture sector. However, from the background on these closures, there are impacts on western Canada and on your work. I'm familiar with the sharp sands of Tillsonburg. I'm familiar with the muck soils of those areas.

Can you comment on the loss? Particularly in our pest management registration process, what happens when we lose these various locations in western Canada, more so for some of the larger crops?

Lori Oatway: Research is based on having lots of locations to make sure that what we're developing is suited for all of Canada. Lacombe is a unique site in that it has a deep black soil zone. It is also a hub of pathology research for the registration trials, as well as across Canada. That program is uniquely situated in Alberta because we have higher levels of disease. It is different in Ontario, or even in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Losing this network across Canada is going to restrict us in how the diseases we can get in our new varieties are available. We have to make sure the diseases we're looking at are adequately shown in the disease nurseries across Canada. You can't do them all in one location or one province, so the network is critical to what we do.

● (1120)

Dave Epp: This round of cuts seems to be AAFC moving away from applied research to focus more on fundamental research. I know the private sector and different parts of the country have moved into applied research.

I'll stay with Ms. Oatway for now.

Can you comment on the need for public sector involvement in applied research, particularly in both your seed business and the research you do?

Lori Oatway: Public sector research is critical for what we do. The private sector does a very good job of producing new products for our businesses, but sometimes the initial research is not adequately covered.

Sometimes, return on investment is more about new discovery than it is about developing new varieties. Without that, even the private sector doesn't have an opportunity to move forward in new, innovative techniques.

Dave Epp: Thank you.

Mr. Buy, can you comment on the impact of publicly funded fundamental research on innovation, which is what your present occupation works toward?

Serge Buy: I don't think we'd have canola today if the government had been [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] fundamental research. I don't think we'd have today such a fantastic industry and sector. It is essential [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] fundamental research and applied research. Public research sets us up for the future.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to MP Dandurand for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I thank all the witnesses for being here and for their testimony in support of research. I'm grateful to them for taking a solutions-oriented approach.

What should be done in the future to support research?

In that regard, Mr. Buy, your organization seems to have had considerable expertise for over a hundred years. You talked a bit about the impact of the consultation that could have taken place before. You, along with the other speakers, talked about a national strategy.

How do you see research in the future and collaboration between the private sector, the public sector and academia?

Serge Buy: I think we're going to have to increasingly find innovative and decisive models of collaboration to move forward. I think that's important.

Obviously, we never want cutbacks. When we experience them, our initial reaction is to ask that they not be made. However, certain decisions have to be made, and we understand that.

The problem is the lack of consultation, the lack of impact assessment and the lack of solutions for the future. If the federal government had announced that it was going to make budget cuts, but that it was going to support private partnerships, including universities, to try to maintain some of this research, that would have been excellent. I think that was a missed opportunity.

Marianne Dandurand: In your opinion, how could we foster this coordination between the various parties?

We talked about duplication of research. We talked about research that isn't necessarily aligned with the needs of industry.

What could we create to manage this research?

Serge Buy: I think Dominic Barton's idea in 2016 was excellent. [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] for the agri-food industry that would allow for that verification and coordination at the government level, but also at the industry level.

I think it would be absolutely essential to have this overall coordination. It's feasible. It all comes down to will. If the government continued to consider agriculture and agri-food as a pillar of economic development, we would be there. Unfortunately, despite the Barton report, we're not there yet.

● (1125)

Marianne Dandurand: Do you have examples of other countries where this form of collaboration between the public, private and academic sectors is being implemented?

Serge Buy: Absolutely.

You can look at Australia, which is a federal model. You can look at Germany. You can look at the Netherlands, where there are some excellent examples.

We're not here to say that the government has to do everything. We're here to say that the government has to provide support. That's the important thing. I think there are models everywhere. I also think that Canada is a unique country. We need to create our own model, drawing inspiration from others and taking the good wherever we can find it.

Marianne Dandurand: Thank you very much.

I will now turn to you, Ms. Martel.

You mentioned perennial plants and forage crops, which are a strength in Quebec.

In your opinion, what impact will the closure of the Sainte-Foy research centre have on this research?

Sophie Martel: The research centre in Sainte-Foy is working on the genetic improvement of perennial plants. I was talking about the effects of freezing and thawing and their ability to withstand unpredictable weather.

The research centre in Sainte-Foy is certainly fundamental to perennial cultivation. When we talk about perennial crops, we might think of hay, but in a broader sense, I see it as cover crops, where all producers, not just livestock producers, could be impacted by the closure of the Sainte-Foy research centre. It also affects their knowledge and their ability to broaden that knowledge.

Marianne Dandurand: Can you talk a bit about the importance of geographical distribution, among other things, from south to north, in relation to climate change?

In your opinion, how important is it to have research centres located further north in Canada?

Sophie Martel: Research centres in northern Canada are becoming essential, because they are facing new pests, even new agricultural practices that are very specific to their environment.

I'm going to talk about Quebec, but it's also the case everywhere else in Canada. As soon as you go to Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, you start to see different problems, which evolve differently. I would say that this is of paramount importance, both in terms of climate and, I would even dare say, in terms of soil. These are two factors that have a major impact on research. To me, soils differ and the climate differs. It's important to have regional research centres, both for the vitality of the region and for compelling research in these environments. Due to climate change, this is going to become extremely important.

[*English*]

The Chair: Next we'll go to the Bloc Québécois for six minutes.

Mr. Lemire.

[*Translation*]

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

I thank Ms. Oatway, Mr. Buy and Ms. Martel. Their comments are very topical and in line with what we're advocating, namely a return to the past and renewed funding.

This morning, I was with grain producers, who shared with us a statistic similar to the one presented by Mr. Buy and the Conservatives: Every dollar invested in agriculture yields $32. This is an absolutely fundamental investment that we can't afford to forgo.

Ms. Martel, you may not know this, but I was responsible for the Collectif en formation agricole de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue from 2017 to 2019. I therefore had a good working relationship with the CETAB+, the Centre d'expertise et de transfert en agriculture biologique et de proximité. If there's one thing you've clearly demonstrated, it's that agricultural research is absolutely crucial. However, the CETAB+ will be subject to budget cuts across the board. It's true that the increased funding for the college and community innovation program, or CCI, one of the most important vehicles for funding applied research in Canada's colleges, CEGEPs and polytechnic schools, will not be renewed.

Can you tell us in detail what impact this will have on an institution like yours?

● (1130)

Sophie Martel: Yes, absolutely.

The ICC is a very important program for us, but also for other colleges in Canada. We're in applied research and knowledge transfer. So we're positioned after fundamental research. We work very closely with more than 300 agricultural producers. In my case, it will have an impact on my ability to retain talent on my team and on the quality of the people I can hire, which is quite fundamental. That's one of the first things.

Then it will also affect the quality of the research subsequently conducted on the farm, which enables businesses to be more competitive or more efficient. Therefore, I would even say that it has a direct impact on our ability to take action.

Sébastien Lemire: I'd like to go back to what my colleague Marianne Dandurand was saying about climate change in the north.

Several years ago, when I was with the Union des producteurs agricoles in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, an Agriclimat study found that the climate in Abitibi-Témiscamingue could resemble that of the Montérégie region or the northeastern United States by 2050, according to realistic scenarios. So it's extremely important that we know our soils and our climate well, particularly in northern regions.

In our region, Abitibi-Témiscamingue, and in northeastern Ontario, we experienced the closure of the Kapuskasing experimental farm due to budget cuts made by the Harper government in 2015. That had a major impact on my region, because this farm provided us with expertise on clay soils, among other things.

Can you explain the impact that transferring research centres from one place to another has on research? The government tells us that it's no big deal, that we won't lose anything and that it's just buildings it wants to close, but that seems very naive to me.

What do we lose in a transfer?

Sophie Martel: As I said earlier, we are losing local expertise and vitality. That much is obvious. It's very important to have a number of stakeholders working on issues. Earlier, the lady from Alberta also talked about the importance of having relevant studies on climate and soil, known as pedology. You have quite unique soils in the north, in Témiscamingue. You have very beautiful clays that I don't have where I live. I work with sands. So, it's clear that our research won't have the same effect, and that's uncontrollable. Where you live, you do research specific to your environment, and that's one thing.

In that regard, I don't know how long the research centre you were talking about has been closed, but one agricultural season often represents a year of research. So having a history of research on the same location is also very valuable. The lady even mentioned the genetic improvement of grains. We've been working on that for a long time, as well as on soil improvement. So it's really important to preserve this history.

Sébastien Lemire: We must also recognize the importance of intellectual property. The research conducted in Quebec City belonged to universities or Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

If the private sector is given more room to fill this gap, what impact would that have on research and innovation?

Sophie Martel: I think the private sector has its role to play. That's for sure. We work for producers and for the agri-food industry. It's important to note that some research isn't really of interest to the private sector, but it may still have quite significant societal implications in Canada. Earlier, I mentioned soil health, biodiversity and improving crop rotation. These are topics that the private sector will not really be interested in because they are not patentable or interesting from an intellectual property standpoint. I'm not saying that these areas, which are important to society, will be abandoned, but the funding allocated to them may dwindle.

Sébastien Lemire: The organic factor is very important. How could the government better support research, innovation and science in the organic field?

Sophie Martel: I imagine it's the same for all research centres. They all need funding, and that funding must be stable and predictable.

What we study in organic agriculture, but not just in organic agriculture, is systems. We're not necessarily looking at one single thing; we're looking at a whole system. To do that, we have to look at the big picture, and we have to look at the medium and long terms.

Sébastien Lemire: It's the predictability part that's in jeopardy.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we'll go to the Conservatives for five minutes.

Mr. Gourde.

[*Translation*]

Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Martel, you talked about how the government closed the Sainte-Foy agricultural research and development centre and then the Saint-Augustin-de-Desmaures farm, where the government locked the door.

These centres have a tremendous amount of expertise in forage crops, or hay, as you said.

I myself am a farmer. I've farmed hay all my life. When I was young, we cut the hay only once a year. These days, farmers in our region, Beauce, cut hay four times a year. Things have changed a lot. Climate change may have made it possible to harvest a little more, and cultivars are much improved, so we can grow more hay per hectare, which makes farms in our region more profitable.

Right now, we have cultivars that were developed in 2010 and 2015. If the government closes these research centres, what kind of cultivars will be available to us in the 2030s?

It's 2026, but research is being done for cultivars that will be available to the industry in 2030 or 2035. What are we going to lose?

● (1135)

Sophie Martel: That's an interesting question, and it underscores the importance of research.

Cultivar improvement is a long-term process. You're right: We're not necessarily going to see the impact of these closures tomorrow or two years from now. We'll see it 10 or 15 years from now, and the impact will be huge. This will impact farm profitability and productivity. I think that's obvious. Cultivars from other places won't have the same impact on our ability to produce in Quebec. I talked about soils and climate earlier. Farms will definitely experience losses in the medium and long terms.

Jacques Gourde: I'm very disappointed in this decision. This loss of expertise will leave a huge void in the long term. It also creates enormous pressure that could cause forage crops to lose ground as they compete with corn or soybeans.

In many cases, when farms are dismantled, no more hay is grown. Other crops are grown. Hay is extremely expensive in Quebec these days. It costs about $150 to $200 per tonne more than the price of grain. I'm just talking about the equine sector, which I know well because I used to sell hay. A small hay bale sells for $10 in the equine sector. Many Quebeckers who work in this sector will be forced to sell their horses. As you know, horses have a very sentimental value. It will be so sad.

What can be done to fix the situation?

Obviously, we're asking the government to reconsider its decision, but do you see any other solutions?

Sophie Martel: This week, I spoke with producers who want to include [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] base. They would like to include hay in their crop rotation. You're talking about the market. Maybe we need to develop more structured channels for hay to capitalize on it. [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] There are lots of ways to capitalize on it. It's great in crop rotation. It can even increase yields. We need to change how we structure this market [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. We need to capitalize on it.

Sébastien Lemire: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

There's a technical difficulty affecting two witnesses. This is the first time I've seen this technical difficulty in the House of Commons. It doesn't sound like a microphone issue.

Can you see if it's a technical issue? Is it something on our side? Is the connection preventing us from getting consistent sound?

[*English*]

The Chair: We're looking into it on our side. There doesn't seem to be an issue on our side.

If you have an electronic device near your computer, like a secondary phone, move it away. That can cause interference.

We'll continue, but if it happens again, we'll pause.

I'll back up the time a bit. Please proceed.

● (1140)

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Chair, if the witness could repeat her answer, I would appreciate it.

[*English*]

The Chair: Just go back to the natural place. We'll add some time.

[*Translation*]

Sophie Martel: You want me to answer again?

[*English*]

The Chair: If you can, that would be great.

[*Translation*]

Sophie Martel: Mr. Gourde asked about how we can expand the market for perennial crops such as hay. I was saying that, this week, I talked to producers who are looking at ways to develop [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

[*English*]

The Chair: We're going to stop for a second. It happened again.

We'll take a quick break while we try to figure this out.

● (1140)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1150)

The Chair: Folks, we rebooted the system, so we're going to try again.

We'll go back to the Conservatives. They have one minute remaining.

Mr. Gourde.

[*Translation*]

Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have some more questions for you, Ms. Martel. I only have a few seconds left.

Could the centre's crop seeding planning season be compromised, like it is at Saint-Augustin-de-Desmaures and elsewhere, if the government doesn't send a signal in the short term?

Sophie Martel: Are you talking about the 2026 season?

Jacques Gourde: Yes.

Sophie Martel: Absolutely.

Research projects are under way, and most of the seeds should be ordered. I think planning could be compromised. Others can speak for themselves, but if there's no clear signal today, my organization's planning could be compromised.

● (1155)

Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll go to MP Harrison for five minutes.

Emma Harrison (Peterborough, Lib.): Thank you to the witnesses for being here and taking the time to come and further discuss some of these cuts.

Ms. Oatway, I'd like to give you an opportunity to expand on some of the imminent effects of these cuts that you will see in Alberta. Can you explain that to me?

Lori Oatway: I can tell you a bit about how our research group is being impacted and how our area is.

The federal Lacombe research station works very closely with our plant breeding company, Western Crop Innovations. We share some facilities between the two groups.

Our pathology lab is based at the Ag Canada station, and we are concerned about the immediate closure of that station. You need special facilities to get inoculum to do disease nurseries. That is one of our concerns. We've been told that it will be staying open into the fall, but there's no definitive answer to when that will be. Even if it stays open into August, we're still concerned about how that data will get out.

We have several joint projects between the two facilities. At this point, we are concerned with the relocation of scientists, how the programs are going to be moved and whether or not those research trials will be put into the ground in the spring. We have only about six weeks to make those decisions, and right now we are putting together those trials, so we need to know what facilities are going to be available to plant, what experts are going to be there and, of course, what technical staff. Even if the technical staff are not given their severance right away, we still need that expertise on the ground in order to plant the trials, get that data and continue with those projects. We're really concerned about how we shift away from what we've always known, and we need to make some backup plans, because not everything can be transferred locally.

Disease resistance is something we do across the entire country. Our work at Western Crop Innovations involves plant breeding trials throughout Canada, especially western Canada. Typically, we plant trials at Ag Canada in Lethbridge and at Ag Canada in Lacombe. We plant trials in Scott, Indian Head and Brandon, and they also plant trials at our station.

That's a way of getting across Canada, seeing the effects of our plant breeding, seeing how they are performing in all areas and making sure we have a great product coming back to our producers. Missing those locations or even specific scientific staff at those stations will impact the information we get back to our breeding program. We are not in isolation. We have a large scope throughout Canada, and we're concerned about all of those implications.

For producers, there are some definite concerns with closing facilities like Indian Head. Indian Head is responsible for putting out breeder seed. Breeder seed is the first seed given out from a breeding program. It goes to producers to multiply and then goes into farmers' fields. There have been estimates that 20% of all the breeder seed from wheat varieties comes out of the Indian Head facility. They then have to make decisions on whether we can continue forward.

If they have to move that entire program, we're looking at purity issues, staffing issues, technical issues and seed-cleaning issues. We have to make sure those are transferable as well. We could be looking at delaying by two to three years putting a new variety out by impacting just that one station.

We're very concerned about how this is impacting everything we do. I have concerns as a scientist as well as a producer, for sure.

Emma Harrison: Thank you very much.

I'm still stuck on Mr. Gourde's comment that he gets four cuts of hay a season, because in my riding we all struggled to get one cut of hay due to some very significant drought. Currently, we're purchasing hay.

I'm jealous of your cuts of hay.

Madame Martel, you spoke about forage in the private sector and the lack of investment. Do you believe there's a way to incentivize the private sector to invest further in sustainable agricultural research?

The Chair: Give a 20-second answer.

[*Translation*]

Sophie Martel: Can you repeat your question? There's a bit of a lag in the interpretation.

● (1200)

[*English*]

Emma Harrison: Certainly. Do you believe there is a way to incentivize the private sector to invest further in sustainable agricultural research?

[*Translation*]

Sophie Martel: Absolutely. There are a lot of opportunities for the private sector to invest in sustainable agriculture. Lots of technologies can be developed in sustainable agriculture. Use of drones is one example.

There's space for the private sector in many, but not all, aspects of sustainable agriculture. It's not that there's no space for it, but the private sector may not find space.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll go now to the Bloc for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Martel, when it comes to new programs, the government seems to prefer more targeted, short-term funding.

How do these choices affect applied research?

Sophie Martel: As I said earlier, we see agricultural production as a system. Targeted, short-term funding, especially very specifically targeted funding, loses sight of the whole system. When there are targeted, short-term programs, we develop knowledge quickly and apply it quickly. I think some of the programs can be designed that way.

However, we lose sight of the system as a whole, and we also lose the major innovations. When we work from a short-term perspective, our understanding of the impact of major innovations isn't as sophisticated. If we only take that approach, we'll end up with small innovations and rapid applications, but we'll miss out on major innovations in the medium and long terms.

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you.

Mr. Buy, you lead a very interesting agri-food innovation council.

Can you tell me about the importance of providing all of your members with access to open, abundant data? What are the repercussions of access to that data and of disrupting a system?

Serge Buy: When we do research, we rely on existing data, so having access to that data is essential.

That's why these research centres have been around for so long. We have gathered data, we've produced it, we've worked on it and we continue to do so. Having these research centres across the country has given us a good foundation for that. Obviously, without that data, we're going to be in trouble in the future.

Sébastien Lemire: Can you talk about the impact that could have on your members, specifically?

Serge Buy: Our members are researchers, university centres, companies and producer groups that rely heavily on all this research. That's why they're members of our council. They're members because they know that research and innovation are very important to the future of our sector and our country. Without this absolutely essential research, the future of the country and the health of the agri-food sector are in jeopardy.

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

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

I apologize for mispronouncing your name at the beginning.

Serge Buy: It's not a problem. You're not the first one.

The Chair: I'd like to thank all of our witnesses for joining us today. Thank you so much for being here. We appreciate your time.

We're going to suspend and go into our next panel.

● (1200)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1215)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of our witnesses.

Please wait until you're recognized by name before speaking or asked a question directly by a member.

For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you're not speaking. For those on Zoom, at the bottom of the screen, you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation.

I remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

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

We have three witnesses with us here and online.

There is one witness who cannot connect, Heather Bruce, who is the dean of the faculty of agriculture and the campus principal at Dalhousie. If we have the ability to connect with Ms. Bruce, we will, but at this point, there's no connection.

I'd like to welcome MP Calkins. He needs no introduction. Welcome, sir.

We also have a special guest, Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin, from the legislature in Nova Scotia. Thank you for joining us here today. We appreciate you travelling so far to be with us.

Of course, from the Deans Council - Agriculture, Food and Veterinary Medicine, we have Mr. Rickey Yada, dean, faculty of agricultural, life and environmental sciences, University of Alberta.

We'll start with you, our special guest, Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin. We'll give you five minutes.

Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin (Member, Nova Scotia House of Assembly, Cumberland North, As an Individual): Thank you for the opportunity to appear today.

As you mentioned, my name is Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin. I'm the MLA representing Cumberland North in Nova Scotia, home of the Nappan research farm. I'm here to bring the voices of Cumberland and industry groups from across the maritime region who are raising the alarm about what this closure means for Atlantic Canada agriculture research.

I've been following this decision closely and how it will affect not only Cumberland but also all Atlantic Canadians. At the February 12 meeting of this committee, the minister and the department said they planned to keep the current amount of research but that this work will be consolidated and continued elsewhere. Respectfully, the core issue is not quantity. It's quality, relevance and location.

Nova Scotia produces less than 10% of the beef we consume. Losing Atlantic applied research capacity makes that gap harder to close, not easier.

Canada is a vast nation. Where you farm matters. Soil, climate, water management, and production systems are not interchangeable. Applied research delivers value when it is tested in the real conditions that farmers face so that they can adopt practices with confidence.

Nappan is not a generic site. It is a working applied research and extension asset tied to Atlantic Canadian conditions, including the Bay of Fundy dykelands. Dykelands are an engineered landscape with unique drainage and soil dynamics that cannot be replicated by simply relocating work to Swift Current or Lethbridge. If you remove the Atlantic site, you may still count research activity somewhere, but you lose Atlantic-relevant outcomes.

The sector here already faces higher cost pressures, including higher feed costs and a reliance on imported grains. Applied forage and pasture research is one of the few levers we have for improving the cost of gain and resilience in Atlantic Canada.

In correspondence to this committee dated February 3, the deputy minister emphasized that they are consolidating the footprint to reduce overhead and fixed costs. He also asserted that there is no reduction in scientific capacity and that regional relevance will be preserved. Those are strong claims, and they deserve proof that Atlantic outcomes will be maintained.

The minister has also said that much of the work at the closing farms involves soil health. Soil health is site-specific. You cannot maintain dykeland-relevant soil and forage research by moving it to prairie soils and climates.

Agriculture research is also long-term. Nappan projects are multi-year efforts. When you close a site, you disrupt trials and datasets. You lose staff expertise, and you weaken producer-facing knowledge transfer that turns research into adoption. Farmers do not benefit from research that is technically continuing if it is no longer tested where they farm.

Industry across the Maritimes, representing more than 4,000 farms, is sounding the alarm. In a joint statement, they warn that regionally relevant research is essential for productivity, risk management, climate adaptation and on-farm adoption. They also point out that some of the work at Nappan is partly paid for by producers already, not just taxpayers. Closing the site mid-project disrupts that work and wastes the investments that producers have already made.

The same study notes that maritime beef is dominated by cow-calf farms with high input costs and a reliance on out-of-province feedlots and processors. That structure is exactly why Atlantic-relevant research and extension capacity matter.

They also raise a practical operational point that this government should not ignore: Nappan is co-located with and operationally connected to the Maritime Beef Test Station through feed production and shared equipment. If the Liberal government shuts down Nappan, it risks shifting real costs and operational disruption onto the test station and the producers who rely on it. Because the test station is industry-run, not an AAFC unit, these costs do not disappear. They get downloaded to breeders and the regional beef sector.

The deputy minister said that closures cannot occur immediately, that it is too soon to know the ultimate workforce effects and that the wind-down could take up to 12 months. That is exactly why this committee should insist on transparency and continuity now before capacity is dismantled.

Before this committee, the minister has said that the work will continue. I am here to ensure that this statement is not about a quantity on a national spreadsheet, but about quality and relevance for farmers who actually need the results. If we lose the Nappan research farm, this is not consolidation. It is abandoning region-specific research that Atlantic Canadian producers and farmers rely on.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (1220)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Calkins.

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

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Blaine Calkins. I'm the member of Parliament for the riding Ponoka—Didsbury, even though this is its third iteration. The Lacombe Research and Development Centre has been in my riding the entire 20 years I've been a member of Parliament.

I'm here today to discuss the Mark Carney government's decision to close seven agriculture science and research stations across the country and specifically AAFC Lacombe, the storied research and development centre that has served my community for approximately 120 years. The research and development centre in Lacombe has been a staple in our community and has made substantial contributions to agriculture and agribusiness across the Prairies and, indeed, Canada as a whole since its establishment in 1907.

Here are a few of the accomplishments in agri-research at that station.

Lacombe is responsible for developing the Lacombe hog, which is the first livestock breed ever developed in Canada. The centre has also pioneered integrated meat science work on the factors that influence red meat yield, quality, safety and preservation. The centre's research has helped develop and improve meat carcass grading systems, post-mortem influences on meat quality and leaner animals with stronger carcass traits.

The centre has made huge advancements in plant breeding for prairie and parkland conditions. It breeds vegetation with improved disease resistance and short season adaptation. The centre's improved forage resource quality, pasture yield and beef production efficiency have contributed greatly to Alberta's beef farmers throughout the years. Many barley disease nurseries, which are required and crucial for the selection of new varieties protected from various pathogens, are centred out of Lacombe.

There's not only that. AAFC Lacombe doesn't support just agriculture in its relation to the federal government; the centre also works very closely with and supports Western Crop Innovations—you heard from Lori Oatway earlier—the provincial station, which is directly across the road.

The centre also works closely with Lakeland College and other commodity groups. For example, the winter triticale and fall rye breeding programs at Lethbridge have an ergot nursery in Lacombe to screen for new varieties with improved resistance and flag those that are particularly susceptible. This speaks to disease management.

In the mid-1990s, the oat breeding program at Lacombe was discontinued and combined with the oat breeding program at Brandon. Because they are distinctly different environments, specific crosses and selection are done at Lacombe to meet the needs of western prairie and parkland producers. With the shutdown of the Lacombe Research and Development Centre, this activity will also be discontinued, to the detriment of producers, particularly in Alberta. This speaks to a reduction in sector competitiveness, agricultural productivity, regional relevance and climate resilience.

AAFC Lacombe isn't only a national necessity for agriculture science and research; it's also a local treasure and a pillar in our community that employs over 120 people. There are currently 19 projects on the go that are due for completion between 2026 and 2030, despite AAFC moving several scientists to Lethbridge. I'm told the ministry has made an assurance that most if not all of these projects will be completed, although I'm not sure how that's possible, because the centre is to be shuttered later on this year.

We need to understand the context of the time in which these cuts are taking place. Right now, 2.2 million Canadians visit a food bank on a monthly basis. Canada leads the G7 in food inflation, sitting at 7.3%. In the last calendar year, the consumer price index has risen 2.3%. We have an increasingly unreliable partner south of the border and an unpredictable international political landscape. The Government of Canada has a duty to take care of Canadians, and shutting down seven agricultural centres across the country at a time when many Canadians can't afford to eat isn't just tone-deaf and irresponsible; it's wrong-headed.

A month ago at Davos, the Prime Minister said, “A country that cannot feed itself, fuel itself, or defend itself has few options.” The decision to close these agriculture research centres does not help the country feed itself at all. The government says this decision is about saving money, but this is the same government that spent $19 billion on consultants last year and that funds ideological and foreign projects, like $8 million for “gender-just, low-carbon” rice in Vietnam and $22 million for Beans for Women for Empowerment in the Congo. Each of those projects would fund these research stations for several years.

The government is currently operating a $742-million gun-grab program that everybody—virtually every police station in every province and territory—has said is not going to do anything. That program alone would fund AAFC Lacombe for well over 40 years. We also know that investments in research yield a 32:1 return on investment for every dollar spent.

You can't fund these projects and then turn around and say there's no more funding available for domestic agricultural research. It just doesn't make sense. To quote Ron DePauw, a senior science adviser at SeCan, “These closures will significantly reduce Canada’s capacity to develop adapted, resilient crop varieties and agronomic innovations—capabilities that have historically delivered some of the highest returns on public investment in Canadian agriculture.”

Cost savings can be found, but doing so by dismantling research that helps put food on the table is just a dumb idea.

Thank you.

● (1225)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we'll go to Mr. Yada for five minutes.

Rickey Yada (Dean, Faculty of Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Alberta, Deans Council - Agriculture, Food and Veterinary Medicine): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Rickey Yada. I previously served as the president of the Deans Council of Agriculture, Food and Veterinary Medicine. I'm hoping to be joined by my colleague Heather Bruce, who serves as the vice-president.

The Deans Council is composed of deans of 13 faculties in 11 universities across Canada. Our faculties have been teaching and researching agriculture and agri-food for over 125 years, and we have worked together as a pan-Canadian, non-profit association since 1991. The Deans Council engages in dialogue with industry and government to find solutions to national and global issues in sustainable agriculture, food, health and the environment. We felt it was critical to speak today to inform your examination of the importance of science, technology and innovation in the agriculture and agri-food sector.

As you know, the agriculture and agri-food sector is an economic powerhouse. In 2024, it generated nearly $150 billion, or approximately 7% of Canada's total GDP. This industry supports 2.3 million jobs, meaning that one in every nine Canadians goes to work every day because of our food system. We are not just feeding ourselves. We are also a global leader, exporting over $100.3 billion in products to more than 200 countries. The agriculture and agri-food sector's success is built on an innovation chain whose links include our hard-working farmers and ranchers, industry partners, and government and post-secondary institutions.

In addition to providing critical research funding, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada has historically provided the specialized infrastructure and long-term scientific expertise needed to solve complex challenges. This network of federal facilities has been critical to examining nationwide and cross-commodity issues, including longitudinal studies on soil health—the literal foundation of agriculture.

Our academic institutions prepare students to be the scientists, industry leaders and solvers of today's and tomorrow's trickiest problems. We also work hand in hand with industry, translating basic scientific discovery into the tangible tools—like new seed varieties and digital ag tech—that farmers use on the ground. Working in collaboration with universities, AAFC facilities and scientists connect knowledge beyond individual institutions or provinces, enabling solutions to shared challenges that cross borders and sectors. It's estimated that every dollar invested in agricultural R and D yields a long-term return of $10.

What does that really mean? I'll give you an example. You are all aware of the importance of canola to the Canadian export market. In 2024, Canada exported 14.5 billion dollars' worth of canola products. Did you know that the word "canola" means "Canadian oil, low acid"? That's right. It's a Canadian-made wonder created by university researchers in an AAFC lab.

Since its introduction to the global market in the 1970s, canola has continued to be improved through university research, with innovations in the 1990s introducing new cultivars with better resistance to blackleg, a crop disease that was ravaging the industry worldwide. Canadian academic and government researchers first created, then saved, a global industry that now represents nearly 15% of our agricultural exports.

Scientists have continued to innovate, creating drought-resistant, higher-yielding varieties, and omega-3 canola. Our humble crop is now used around the world as a premium cooking oil and high-quality animal feed, and increasingly in emissions-reducing biofuels. That's a concrete example of the invisible lab coats at work in your kitchen, your barn and your car.

We'd also like to talk about Spartan apples, Yukon Gold potatoes, Alberta beef, Ontario and B.C. wineries, and a host of other agricultural products we're all familiar with and that Canada is famous for. Agricultural science is more than wheat and meat. It's innovation and value-added production in not only raw commodities but also fortified foods, the new products consumers demand and other innovations that lead to safer, more secure food chains. It's climate change, nutrition and health research. It's biodiversity, animal welfare, water management, textiles and building materials. While it's still pitchforks and plows, it is now also AI and drones.

● (1230)

This is why we felt it was important to come and speak to you today. We must continue to invest in the science and scientists who have made Canada an agricultural leader.

Universities understand all too well—

The Chair: I apologize, but I have to stop you there. You've exceeded five minutes, but thank you so much. We do appreciate that.

I see that Heather Bruce has joined us.

What we'll do is open it up for questions.

Ms. Bruce, you haven't been tested, but we'll give you a chance. If a question is directed to you and there's an issue, we'll stop. We'll assume that you're good for now.

I'll turn it over to the Conservatives for six minutes.

It's over to the vice-chair, John Barlow.

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

Thank you to our witnesses for being here.

Mr. Calkins, I know from conversations with you that you've had extensive meetings with the agriculture stakeholders in your riding and the staff and scientists at the Lacombe facility. Can you tell me about the feedback you're getting from some of the 100-plus employees at the Lacombe facility? What is their reaction, and what impact is this going to have on them?

Blaine Calkins: That's an interesting question, Mr. Barlow.

I can tell you that many of the presidents and board members of the commodity groups and producer organizations come from the constituency, because Ponoka—Didsbury is one of the breadbaskets of Alberta, as your riding is, Mr. Barlow.

I've had a 20-year relationship with the staff and members of that research station in Lacombe, and as of recently, they're not returning or taking my calls. I'm assuming that has something to do with the email that looks like it was sent out by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's leadership, probably at the direction, I'm guessing, of the minister.

I'm happy to give you this document, Mr. Barlow, in which they've basically told staff they're not to talk to anybody during this closure. They've been muzzled. For the first time in 20 years, I can't talk to the people in that research station. They won't take my calls and they won't return my calls.

● (1235)

John Barlow: The scientists and researchers at the Lacombe facility have been told they've been basically muzzled by the Liberal government and are not allowed to talk about this. Is that correct?

Blaine Calkins: I live in Lacombe. I was born in Lacombe. I grew up on a farm 15 minutes from that research facility. I know many of the people who work at that research centre. They're my friends and they're my neighbours, and they're not returning my calls at a professional level. I have a screenshot that looks like an email that was distributed to the staff at AAFC Lacombe telling them not to talk to anybody.

John Barlow: I would appreciate it if that could be tabled with the committee as a submission as part of this report. It's extremely disappointing that the government would be muzzling your constituents, the people who are going to be impacted most by this decision. If that's the situation in Lacombe, I'm guessing it's a similar situation at all the other research stations within Canada that the government is shuttering.

Mr. Calkins, from these meetings you had with many of the stakeholders, what is the economic impact of the closure of Lacombe? As you mentioned, it's not just that station. It's partnerships with Lakeland College and Olds College, as Ms. Oatway was talking about. Her own operation is also part of that. Can you talk about the economic impact this will have?

Blaine Calkins: I've talked about the number of programs. I wouldn't have time in a six-minute round of questions to list all of them. I'm happy to provide you with a list of all the partnering organizations, as well as the funding models and research projects that are going on there right now.

I will give you an example, Mr. Barlow: the check-off fees. Everybody at this committee ought to be aware that producers pay a check-off fee, and that money pays for various projects and programs in various commodity organizations. One of them is research.

If you're paying for wheat research in a black soil area like central Alberta, and the only black soil research centre in Canada is being closed down, as a wheat producer in that area, what confidence will you have that the money you're now contributing to research is going to be of any benefit when you have no trials to prove that any new varieties or any new commodities coming onto the market will be successful in the area of the country you're growing in?

For the edification of everybody here in the committee, land values in my constituency for agricultural land are north of $1.5 million per quarter section. It is some of the most highly valued and expensive land used in agriculture in Canada, because you can grow varieties and crops where you get yields in excess of 100 bushels per acre because that land is so valuable.

Furthermore, regarding shutting down Lacombe, if you're running trials as a researcher, you're running trials at a variety of different places because it's a redundancy. At any point in time you could get hail on your trials or you could have issues where you have a loss of these trials. If you're going to centralize everything and just do a handful of research facilities, if something does go wrong, you're going to lose entire years of research because you don't have redundancy.

I can't find anybody from any producer organization or anybody involved in agriculture at all who is praising this decision.

John Barlow: Thanks for that, Mr. Calkins. I appreciate you talking about the research that's lost.

Rickey, it's great to see you, by the way.

Heather, it's good to see you as well. Thanks for being here.

Ms. Oatway from Western Crop Innovations was talking about the loss of research capability. Mr. Yada, you talked about canola as an example, which took more than 20 years to develop in Canada. It was a partnership, if I recall, between the University of Manitoba and AAFC. More than 50% of the wheat varieties that Canadian farmers use were developed by AAFC. We're hearing that the government is hoping the provinces and universities will take over this research that is now going to be lost as a result of these cuts.

Mr. Yada and Ms. Bruce, do universities have the resources—the budgets—to take on the lost research that the current government is now ridding itself of?

Rickey Yada: Heather, do you want to take that first and then I'll chime in?

The Chair: We have about 30 seconds for the answer.

Heather L. Bruce (Dean and Campus Principal, Faculty of Agriculture, Dalhousie University, Deans Council - Agriculture, Food and Veterinary Medicine): Yes, that would be great.

In a word, no. We are currently facing our own fiscal realities and challenges. We are rapidly rightsizing and restructuring based upon those. We are also facing some challenges with research infrastructure.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go next to the Liberals for six minutes.

Mr. MacDonald.

Kent MacDonald (Cardigan, Lib.): Thank you to the witnesses.

I think we're all aware that research and critical, publicly funded science are really important to ag producers. Whether we're talking about crop resilience, soil health, livestock disease resistance, food safety or value-added innovation, these things are all extremely important to the agricultural sector.

From the discussions we've had at previous meetings and at this meeting, we all recognize that research must continue regardless of the physical location of the research. The deputy minister pointed out last week that 17 locations for research are still open across the country—at least one in every province. The transition decisions that are going to take place in the next 12 months or longer are being done in consultation with the ag sector. The industry partnerships that we're going to form, whether it's with private producer organizations, provinces or academia, are going to be the driving force of research and sustainability into the future.

I say all that because, as a producer for over 40 years, I perceive problems in the way research was conducted. There was duplication and there was research done in silos. The sharing of information has gotten better in recent years, but we have to really do a comprehensive review of what research is getting done and how we can do it most effectively. I think one of the speakers earlier spoke to that. It should be a driving force of this committee to make sure this happens.

I just want to question Mr. Calkins briefly.

I fully understand your passion about the Lacombe station in your riding. I actually visited Lakeland. My son is a graduate of the ag science program there, so I fully understand your passion about the closure.

This week we've been hearing about this made-in-Canada, Liberal problem. I think for the integrity of this committee's work, it's important we distinguish between reallocating these research functions and erasing scientific work, which happened under your previous Harper government. *The Fifth Estate* even did a documentary called “Silence of the Labs”. You gentlemen who have been around here a lot longer than me would remember that. I'm just pointing that out.

Your party's criticism here today is rather disingenuous considering you were a member of the Harper government. I'm just going to list the things that were closed. There was the cereal research centre in Manitoba in 2012, and the dismantling of the rural secretariat in 2013, which was an advocacy group for rural issues and rural research within government. There was the closure of the Kamloops, B.C., station. This was all during that term when you were a sitting member here—an MP.

Do you agree that there's a significant difference between restructuring and dismantling? I'm just looking for a yes or no answer.

● (1240)

Blaine Calkins: Of course, you're looking for a yes or no answer.

The agriculture research station in Lacombe survived the Harper government. As a matter of fact, it's thriving and has continued to do so.

If you want to go through the list, here it is. Budget 2006 gave $1.5 billion for agriculture in 2006 and 2007 to help address gaps in production and insurance, including a disaster relief framework. In 2007, the farm made package had $1 billion for improvements to national farm made income programs.

Budget 2009—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Calkins.

I just want to remind the witness that we have to capture the conversation, so when you go really quickly, the interpreters can't capture it.

Go ahead.

Kent MacDonald: In the interest of time, can I ask another question?

Blaine Calkins: I have lots more, Mr. MacDonald. As a matter of fact, I even chaired the legislative committee—

Kent MacDonald: Maybe you could share—

Blaine Calkins: —to end the Canadian Wheat Board, which is what my producers wanted.

The Chair: Order.

Kent MacDonald: Please, just send it to me, because I don't have time to listen to it today.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Kent MacDonald: Can I continue?

The Chair: Mr. MacDonald, go ahead. It's your time.

Kent MacDonald: What we're discussing here today is a restructuring of the framework for research. I'm taking this right from the Treasury Board. From 2020 to 2024-25, science research funding increased by $185 million. I didn't make that number up. That's from the Treasury Board.

We've also seen a levelling out of full-time equivalent positions for science and research in Canada. In 2021, there were 2,614 positions. In 2024-25, there were 2,621. We've seen a very modest change in the number of full-time equivalent positions in research within the federal government. The plan reduction is estimating 2,608 positions.

● (1245)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Kent MacDonald: It's a very small percentage.

Blaine Calkins: Let me just—

Kent MacDonald: I'm not finished there yet, Mr. Calkins. I hope this allows you to understand the difference between restructuring and reinvestment. The federal government is reinvesting in research, and we have to all work together collaboratively.

Blaine Calkins: AAFC staffing dropped by 14% between 2012 and 2025. The federal public service grew by 30% overall during the same period. When the department grows 30% and implements a 15% cut, it remains 10% larger than it was in 2012.

When AAFC, which already cut 14%, implements an additional 15% cut—

The Chair: Okay, we're going to stop there.

Blaine Calkins: —about 27% less money—

The Chair: Next we're going to the Bloc for six minutes.

Mr. Lemire, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Calkins, thank you for being with us. It's amazing to see you, as a member of Parliament, advocate so vigorously for your riding. It's very inspiring.

Can you tell us about the impact of this closure in your riding? I took a quick look at the map during your presentation, and I get the impression that your needs are very similar to ours.

I'd like to hear what you have to say about the direct impact of this closure on your riding.

[*English*]

Blaine Calkins: Thank you very much. I appreciate the question.

Let me quickly go through some of the research that's happening right now.

There's the Prairie Crop Disease Monitoring Network. This is an entire network across the Prairies. It's happening right now, headed out of Lacombe—a $126,000 project.

Phenotyping barley breeding lines and germplasm and disease resistance is happening right now. That was supposed to go to 2023. That's going well beyond the timeline for closure right now and is worth some $200,000.

There's barley pathogen variation and surveillance, with implications for managing disease via host resistance, and in-crop management strategies to reduce the impact of fusarium head blight in barley. These are all things that are important to producers.

Another is sow milk microbiome and the development of piglet gut microbiome and resistance to.... As a matter of fact, I haven't even talked about the fact that Olymel has a hog slaughter facility in Red Deer, which is 20 minutes down the road.

When you take a look at what happens in Lacombe, it is an agricultural hub, not just for Canada, but certainly in central Alberta.

Agriculture Financial Services Corporation is headquartered there. It does all of the business risk management programming for all farmers and producers in Alberta, including funding growth and new businesses and start-ups. You also have the Lacombe crop innovation research centre across the road. I call it the Alberta research centre.

You have partnerships with Lakeland College, which is actually in Ms. Stubbs' riding. Moreover, the University of Alberta and Olds College, which is now in my riding, are doing all kinds of joint research.

You have virtually every commodity organization, not only in Alberta but also in Canada, including the Canadian Cattle Association. You name it, everybody is involved in helping fund research, and virtually all of it goes through...whether it's beef, pork, canola, barley or wheat. For virtually all of these commodities, which we use not only to feed ourselves, but to export to the broader world to create the $150 billion of economic revenue, the 7% of our economic GDP and the one in nine jobs that the other witnesses talked about.... That all happens because of the innovation and technology that's developed.

We have about a four-month window every year. We're not competitive with Brazil. We're not competitive with places that can grow things 12 months of the year, which means that we must have applied innovation and technology to bridge that gap. That's what these research centres do.

They say on this side of the table that they're going to continue to do research. Well, you can fund some master's degree students and some Ph.D. students. That's important. Some of that's applied work; it's not all esoteric research that's done at our universities. However, the real gap in our economy, as everybody has been saying for decades, is the applied research component—getting these ideas and getting them to marketplace. This is what the Lacombe research station does.

When a researcher at the Lacombe research station takes on a project, they take it on for the lifetime of the project, not just long enough to complete a master's thesis or a Ph.D. thesis. They do the research because it's a lifelong passion for them, and they work constructively. They consult the farmers. They consult the commodity groups. Everybody works together. The scientists ask, “What can we do to help make you a better, more productive farmer, to reduce things like herbicides, pesticides and fertilizer?” Those are all things I thought the Liberals wanted to do to create a healthier and cleaner environment.

For reasons that are beyond me, it looks to me, Mr. Lemire, like the government actually said, “What's the dumbest thing we can do to find money for budget cuts? Let's do that.” That's what this looks like to me.

● (1250)

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: What's even more shocking is that it seems like this is just the first of many things the government wants to knock down like dominos. Budgets across all departments will be cut by 15%. Focusing on agriculture, though, there's one thing I really want to know.

Your answer to my question is similar to what's happening in my riding. Rouyn-Noranda may be 4,000 or 5,000 kilometres from Lacombe, but you shared examples of research that's being done there that's very useful in Quebec and Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

I can't help but ask you about this. You've been a member of Parliament since 2006, so about 20 years. You were a member of the Harper government. Your government closed the experimental farm in Kapuskasing, which had a similar effect on my riding. The farm in Kapuskasing, in northeastern Ontario, was researching agriculture in a northern climate and clay soils, which is crucial to our local agriculture.

You're in the same position now as you were then. On the strength of those same arguments, how can you argue in favour of keeping experimental farms and research centres like the one in Lacombe open, when your government closed the Kapuskasing experimental farm? Was it a mistake to close the Kapuskasing centre, just as it would be to close Indian Head and Lacombe?

[*English*]

Blaine Calkins: I'm not familiar with the Kapuskasing research facility. What I can say is that there are political entities at this table that claim the moral high ground on science all the time. Right now, I find it absolutely infuriating that this round of cuts has happened.

Mr. Lemire, look, it's always fine to look for savings, but on January 27, the associate assistant deputy minister, Mr. Goldstein, who was here, basically issued a statement saying that they had done a thorough analysis of what needs to be done insofar as the closures of the seven facilities being proposed right now are concerned. Then at the same time, the science director for Saskatchewan basically put out a call to his research areas that he's responsible for, saying, “What are you actually working on? What projects are you doing right now?" How can you have a thorough discussion when you don't even know what your own scientists are doing in your own department?

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Blaine Calkins: There's no consultation. It's just a—

The Chair: You're 20 seconds over. Thank you very much.

We'll go to the Conservatives now for five minutes.

Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses.

I'll be directing my questions to Ms. Smith-McCrossin today. They're in regard to the news, which hit many of us in Atlantic Canada really hard, about the closing of the Nappan research facility in Cumberland County, Nova Scotia.

Recent research by the Canadian Cattle Association has shown that for every dollar spent on research, there is a $63 return. That's an amazing return on investment for research.

Right now, during these times when food security is paramount, would you not agree that this is the wrong time to be cutting research and science capacity within this country? We should be doing the reverse, which is augmenting and helping complement it.

Here is my first question for you, Ms. Smith-McCrossin. Why should Canadians outside of Nova Scotia care about what's happening at the Nappan facility? Can you tell us what the relevance of that is?

Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin: The research that has been done at Nappan research station has dramatically improved productivity for beef farmers and other farmers throughout the maritime and Atlantic region.

I have to point out that I was really excited, when the Prime Minister came back from the trade mission to China, to hear that we're going to increase our exports of beef. I thought we would have seen an increase in investment in agriculture, not a decrease in our research facilities.

There's so much good work happening at the Nappan research farm. They actually generate revenue, so the excuse of cutting this research for financial reasons doesn't make any sense, and I have to ask whether the government has looked at the books. Last year alone, they generated over $400,000 from the beef they raised and had been doing research on.

Those are just a couple of comments.

Richard Bragdon: That's interesting. Make sure you submit that to us in writing. That's fantastic.

We understand that because of these cuts, Canada is now in last place among the top seven OECD nations in agriculture-related research and development funding and investment. At a time when food security is emerging as a massive issue, to see these cuts happening at a facility that's generating revenue definitely doesn't make sense.

The deputy minister wrote to the committee and said that the department is considering consolidating the footprint to reduce overhead and fix costs. What is your reaction when he says that somehow this is going to save money?

● (1255)

Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin: My reaction is that they may not understand how farming works. I grew up on a dairy farm, and agriculture is a pillar of our economy in Nova Scotia.

If you're going to research beef cattle, you need a barn and infrastructure. The Nappan research farm currently sits on 600 acres of pasture land and 60 acres of Acadian forest, and you need infrastructure to do your research.

Like your colleague, I have not been able to speak with employees from Nappan because they have been silenced; they've been muzzled. It's hard to believe that this is happening in Canada, and that people are being told that they're not allowed to talk to their elected representatives. I think it's not Canadian; it's very un-Canadian.

We need to take a closer look at the good work that's happening at Nappan. The maritime region needs a voice here in Parliament. Thank you for all the work you do. We need to recognize that the Maritimes wants to stand on its two feet, and taking away money for research that helps us improve the food supply, for local and domestic use but also for export, is the wrong decision. We need investment, not divestment.

Richard Bragdon: Excellent. I want you to dive a bit deeper into what the real-world cost is to producers in Nova Scotia, in the Maritimes and in Atlantic Canada as a result of this. I'm sure you've had conversations with farmers.

Coming from a farming family as you do, can you tell us about the real-world impacts of the closure of this facility and what it will mean for Cumberland County in Nova Scotia, and all of the Maritimes and Atlantic Canada, for that matter?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds left.

Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin: This is devastating. There are direct costs. Contractors who are involved have reached out to me. There's already private sector money here at the Nappan research farm that will be lost.

I want to add that the Nova Scotia government just tabled its budget yesterday. There is a 25% cut in advanced education. That's our university sector. The federal government can't be relying on the Nova Scotia government and universities to pick up the slack here. It's not going to happen.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to MP Harrison for five minutes.

Emma Harrison: My colleague Mr. MacDonald will be taking my time.

Kent MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Smith-McCrossin, I come from Prince Edward Island, so I'm an Atlantic Canadian. I've spoken with many stakeholders involved in the Nappan station. There is a common agreement that the assets there are very valuable to the region. There are over 600 acres of farmed land. There are buildings and facilities.

One of the problems is that when it was identified as an area that had to be cut—the deputy minister spoke to this—over 60% of the budget the federal government was putting in was going into the maintenance of those older facilities. The federal government was asked by the public to find ways to reduce its expenditures. We did a comprehensive expenditure review, and the Department of Agriculture was asked to contribute. Unfortunately, the maritime provinces, as part of Canada, had to contribute.

I was as disappointed as you that they closed that research station. We don't have a lot of research stations in Atlantic Canada. We have Kentville, Harrington in P.E.I. and a facility in New Brunswick.

From the discussions I've had, I know that many of the industry associations—the Maritime Beef Council and the federations of agriculture—recognize the cost-cutting measures that had to happen, and they're willing to work forward to a solution so that the assets are used for the benefit of Atlantic Canada. Let's be honest. That's going to involve private investment taking over the federal investment, but we're at a time in the beef sector right now when prices have been very stable—actually, as good as I've ever seen in my lifetime—for the last few years. The opportunity is there for us to go forward.

Would you be willing to support the industry if that's the direction it takes? You could negotiate with the federal government to acquire those facilities at Nappan and work out a partnership.

We know the bull testing station is linked to that facility. Genomics has taken over bull selections somewhat, so science has advanced there, but it will be up to the industry to decide if it wants to leave that attached.

Are you willing to work with the industry as the MLA for that region?

● (1300)

Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin: Yes, and I have, certainly, but it is about downloading. All of the industry partners have come out against these cuts. They made a statement last week. I believe there were eight stakeholders or organizations that came out against these cuts.

Being from P.E.I., you know our soil is different in the Maritimes. You can't simply move the research that's happening in Nappan to Saskatchewan. It won't be relevant to the farmers of our area, whether they're in Prince Edward Island or the County of Cumberland—

Kent MacDonald: Excuse me. I think the soil research that's getting done isn't going to Saskatchewan. I understand it's going to Kentville, Nova Scotia, which has a different soil structure from Nappan's. Nappan is similar to P.E.I. It has heavy clay soil.

Anyway, I'm going to cede the rest of my time to my colleague Ms. Chatel.

The Chair: You have a minute and a half left.

[*Translation*]

Sophie Chatel (Pontiac—Kitigan Zibi, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Thank you to our witness for being here.

In this part of the study, and as Canada faces serious challenges with trade disruptions, we are looking to grow our economy. This part of the study will roll over into our next study on strategic partnerships among the federal, provincial and territorial governments on agriculture.

My question is for Madame Bruce and Mr. Yada. How important are science and innovation as Canada lays out its ambition to grow this sector of our economy and to build strong food security, food autonomy and food sovereignty in Canada? In particular, how can academia partner with the government, industry and producers in order to achieve our ambition?

That will be very important in our study. If you run out of time, please submit your thoughts on that in writing, because we will be using them to advise our government on this very serious challenge.

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

Heather L. Bruce: Rickey, did you want to take that?

Rickey Yada: Yes.

Innovation is foundational through universities, but we've worked very closely with AAFC researchers, and I think we're all facing similar situations of constrained finances and resources. One of the things the Deans Council is trying to do is work on a repository of information with regard to expertise and infrastructure.

The Chair: I'm sorry, but I have to stop you. We've run out of time.

Next I'll go to the Bloc for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to say one thing. I'm fascinated by what happened in Kapuskasing. We need to know what was done in the past to get a sense of the impact of decisions being made now.

To Mr. MacDonald's point, the City of Kapuskasing wanted to buy the centre. It tried to keep it going for a few years, but sold it to private entities in 2021, so that expertise has basically been lost.

I have a question for you, Ms. Smith-McCrossin.

First of all, thank you for being here. What you're saying is very enlightening.

I want to quote you. You've said that agriculture is essential to our society, that it feeds us, that it sustains us, that it provides food for our children and grandchildren and that it is crucial to our health and economy, yet agriculture is too often neglected, misunderstood or even disrespected, particularly by decision-makers far removed from rural realities.

Our agricultural producers are small and medium-sized businesses. There are thousands of them. Why do you think governments don't take care of them even though they're just as important as large businesses or businesses in major Canadian cities?

[*English*]

Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin: It's a good question, and only those in government can answer that. I can assume they're simply from an office making cuts without actually looking at the impact of those results.

I'll give you a couple of examples.

At the Nappan Experimental Farm, one of the studies improved the productivity of the beef farming industry by 60%. It was on grazing on their pastures and continuously changing where the beef cattle were grazing. A 60% increase in productivity is unheard of.

That research is then shared with our farmers, and they are able to apply it and have cost savings. In agriculture or in any business, you want to decrease your input costs and increase your revenues, and that's exactly what the research is doing through the Nappan Experimental Farm.

There are many other studies, too, with regard to reducing methane emissions. A former MP from P.E.I. worked on a program with a farmer there to feed seaweed to cattle and reduce emissions. This is important research that is improving the economy of our beef industry.

I can't say enough about the importance of having a stable food supply for the people of Canada, including the maritime region. We produce less than 10%.

● (1305)

The Chair: Thank you. I apologize for cutting you off, but we've exceeded the time.

We'll do a final two and a half minutes for the Conservatives and two and a half minutes for the Liberals, and then we have a bit of committee business.

Go ahead, Mr. Bonk.

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

I've had the privilege of working all over the globe in agriculture, exporting livestock and equipment from Canada. Canada has had a stellar reputation across the globe as a leader in agriculture and agriculture research, and that's been eroded severely over the past 10 years.

I'll ask this of my colleague from Alberta. They talk a lot about saving money, and that's the reason for these cuts. Could you highlight where we could save money and how we could get research back on track in Canada?

Blaine Calkins: Thank you very much, Mr. Bonk, for your question.

I think Mr. Epp had it right in the previous round when the previous witnesses were here: This is about priorities. If there was a priority given to agriculture and agricultural research, you wouldn't necessarily need to cut it. It has nothing to do with streamlining or being more efficient. Those consultations were never done. This came out of the blue. There was no planning or strategic plan being followed here, with the industry and everybody else paying attention.

What we have now is a government that's lost control of its spending, and it has since the change in government in 2015. There hasn't been anything even remotely close to a balanced budget and we're billions of dollars away.

The global environment has changed, and it looks like it will be even harder to get there. In a panicked frenzy to balance the budget, the government now, rather than doing something strategic, is doing what I would call silly things. Last year it was $19 billion on consultants by this government. For AAFC alone, it's been $16 million in just the last couple of years. There's the AAFC climate funding and the $700 million in OFCAF money that's been spent. That would fund all of these research centres for decades, if they were allowed to, but that money has been spent. It doesn't look like there's any return on the investment there.

In international development, there was the $22 million for Beans for Women for Empowerment in the Democratic Republic of Congo. I'm sure that's bringing our wheat producers in central Alberta a lot of comfort and joy. There was the $8.2 million on “gender-just, low-carbon rice” in Vietnam. I'm sure the pork producers in central Alberta who are just hanging on by the skin of their teeth appreciate that investment.

Then there's the cricket factory. AAFC gave a bankrupt cricket factory company, Aspire Food Group, $8.5 million. FCC funded it for over $40 million and has recovered only about $15 million. The Government of Canada has been funding protein replacements, trying to replace pork and beef producers with another form of technology. That's been a boondoggle.

The Chair: The time is up.

Blaine Calkins: It's almost as bad as the battery boondoggles that are happening.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Calkins.

Blaine Calkins: I could go on and on, Mr. Bonk, but I'm not going to get a chance to do so. I have a couple of hundred more of these examples.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we'll go to the Liberals for two and a half minutes.

MP Chatel.

[*Translation*]

Sophie Chatel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have some questions for Ms. Bruce and Mr. Yada.

Canada has excellent, world-renowned universities and veterinary schools. However, we sometimes hear that scientific discoveries in this area are slow to trickle down to producers and farmers themselves.

Can you tell us how to align farms and universities and create better partnerships between them? How do you do that?

● (1310)

[*English*]

Heather L. Bruce: Universities are working very closely, usually with industry and government partners, to address this and speed things to market. There is a distinct motivation in universities to transfer knowledge quickly to market.

In some cases in agriculture, particularly pertaining to breeding and particularly if it's cattle, there's simply a biological generation lag. It just takes a long time to grow them and measure them. Those are some of the things slowing progress in some cases. In other cases, particularly if you move into gene-editing technologies, those kinds of technologies allow for very rapid change.

Rickey, did you want to add to that?

Rickey Yada: Yes. Thank you.

I think university researchers have transitioned from doing discovery research to addressing strategic needs. Part of that equation is being in constant contact with our industry partners, because nowadays, a lot of funding is reliant on partnerships with industry. It's our commitment now to be transparent and more communicative with the industry so they see the progress we're making on strategic needs.

Sophie Chatel: I would say that the future of research, science and innovation is partnership—partnership and more partnership—so thank you for taking that forward. Thank you for being here.

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you to all of our witnesses—our witnesses online and, of course, our witnesses here with us today. Thank you again for travelling all the way from Nova Scotia to join us. We always love to hear from our colleagues in other provinces.

We have a few small items.

Sophie Chatel: I have one too, but go through yours.

The Chair: Okay.

We have three budgets we need to approve. They have been circulated. We have studies on the subject matter of clause 223, on science in Canadian agriculture and the closure of research centres and on the subject matter of the supplementary estimates (B).

Is everyone in favour of all three?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Are there any issues? Okay. They have been adopted. Excellent.

Go ahead, Ms. Chatel.

Sophie Chatel: I would like to invite the minister to appear on the estimates for an hour on March 24 and officials for the second hour. That's what I would like the committee to agree to.

I'm officially moving a motion.

The Chair: Is there any debate? All those in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: I saw Mr. Bragdon even voted from way back there, so thank you.

Are there any other items?

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

The meeting is adjourned.