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# Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

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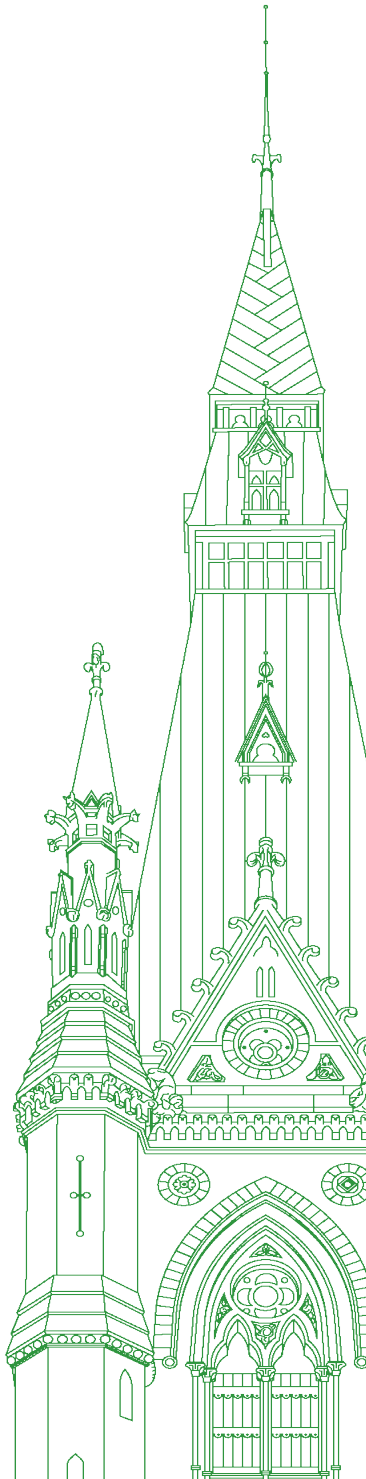

Chair: Michael Coteau

# Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

**Tuesday, March 10, 2026**

● (1150)

[*English*]

**The Chair (Michael Coteau (Scarborough—Woburn, Lib.)):** Welcome to meeting number 26 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 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 a QR code on the desk, which links to a short awareness video.

As everyone knows, we had votes, so our time has been cut. I'd like to propose that we break the meeting into two 40-minute segments, if folks are okay with that, and maintain our scheduled time.

Monsieur Lemire.

[*Translation*]

**Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):** Is it possible, depending on the availability of House resources, to extend the meeting slightly beyond the scheduled end time?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** It's the will of the committee. I would suggest that we finish at one o'clock as suggested, because I know people have appointments and meetings. It's really up to you. What do you all think?

**Steven Bonk (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC):** I'm free. I'm willing to go longer.

**The Chair:** How about if we extend it by 15 minutes? Is that fair? Is that okay with everyone?

Okay. We do have the resources, so that's perfect.

We'll start with our first panel.

From the Government of Alberta, we have the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation, Hon. Richard J. Sigurdson, joining us today.

Also, from the Town of Indian Head, we have the mayor, Steven Cole, and the retired officer in charge, David Gehl.

From Protein Industries Canada, we have one representative, the chief executive officer, Tyler Groeneveld.

I'd like to invite the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation to start.

Welcome, sir, to our committee. Thank you for being here. You have five minutes.

**Hon. Richard J. Sigurdson (Minister, Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, Government of Alberta):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on an issue of significant importance to Alberta producers and to the future of Canadian agriculture.

Farmers and ranchers across Alberta and, frankly, all of Canada are deeply concerned by the federal government's decision to close seven Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada research and development centres across our country.

I will be speaking specifically today of the research centre in Lacombe, Alberta. For more than a century, this research centre has been a cornerstone of agricultural innovation in western Canada. It has supported generations of producers with applied, practical science that directly impacts productivity in our agriculture industry.

This closure creates immediate issues for programs funded by our provincial government through Results Driven Agriculture Research, RDAR, totalling over $2.5 million across livestock genetics, crop disease monitoring, barley agronomy, meat quality, food safety and weed management. The closure of this centre would result in multiple RDAR projects requiring adjustments, reallocations of field plots, operational challenges or termination of research.

At this time, considering current challenges, such as food affordability in our country, combined with the growing global demand for food, it's important that we continue to focus on more investment into agriculture research. Research and technology are fundamental keys that will ensure that Canada continues to be a global leader in agriculture production. For every dollar invested, the future downstream results are exponential to growth, productivity and the profitability of the industry.

Alberta producers are navigating serious challenges already. They are dealing with volatile global markets, increasing input costs, labour shortages, transportation bottlenecks and a growing regulatory burden. Ongoing research is essential to productivity growth, which is what allows Canadian farmers to remain profitable while meeting rising environmental and market expectations. The optics of this decision will be a risk to our domestic and international reputation as a world-class producer of high quality, sustainable food.

Specifically, loss of funding will result in Alberta no longer having a federal research abattoir, in turn affecting capacity for carcass evaluation, food safety improvements and value chain studies. The facility's advanced grading technologies, including near-infrared, NIR, scanners and DEXA imaging, will also be lost.

As well, the Lacombe centre addresses prairie-specific conditions and challenges. Western Canadian agriculture is distinct in its climate, soils and livestock production models. The closure of this facility will have a ripple effect on the agriculture industry at large in western Canada. A large, multi-site weed-resistance project valued at over $3.2 million, which will require the relocation of research plots, is an example.

The loss of staff—such as losing a senior cereal pathologist, a leader in barley disease registration—will result in certain projects losing the ability to proceed.

This facility is a core prairie-wide data source for variety registration. This facility is the only one that is working on the development and federal registration of new varieties, which requires rigorous disease research.

On a local level, it is key to know that the economic impact will be a loss of staff. Of the 112 staff at the Lacombe centre, only six have been offered relocation opportunities, with all remaining positions being affected.

Let me be clear: Alberta supports fiscal responsibility, but agriculture research is not discretionary spending. It is strategic investment that aligns with the need for Canada to strengthen its economy and grow the national GDP, which is more important now than ever.

Investment in agriculture research delivers strong economic returns. Closing this facility to achieve short-term goals risks losing long-term economic gains that far outweigh immediate fiscal savings.

On behalf of Alberta producers, I am urging this committee to reconsider the decision to close the Lacombe Research and Development Centre, conduct a transparent impact assessment, and formally engage directly with effective provincial governments to discuss all options to ensure the preservation and the continuation of this essential research.

Thank you, committee.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (1155)

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

Again, we appreciate the fact that you've taken time from your busy schedule to join us here today.

Next we'll go to Mayor Cole.

Your Worship, you have five minutes.

**Steven Cole (Mayor, Town of Indian Head):** Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of the town of Indian Head and the surrounding region regarding the proposed closure of the Indian Head research farm.

For more than a century, this research station has been a cornerstone for both our local community and Canadian agriculture. Starting in 1886, the facility at Indian Head, Saskatchewan, played a vital role in providing support to settlers moving west, many of whom had little farming experience. Today, the farm continues to play a pivotal role in the agriculture industry, developing varieties to thrive in our new climate and withstand the threat of ever-evolving pests and diseases.

The decision to close it would have far-reaching consequences, not only for Indian Head but for farmers and agricultural innovation across the country. For the community, the research farm employs approximately 30 full-time staff, with significantly higher employment during the summer research and field season. In a small, rural community like ours, those jobs are significant. The impact of those job losses will not be limited to the employees themselves; it will ripple outward to spouses, families and many local businesses that depend on its presence in our community.

From an agriculture industry perspective, the closure is estimated to save approximately $3.8 million in the federal budget. This is a very small fraction of the federal budget, and it comes at the cost of research that generates enormous returns for Canadian agriculture. Research consistently shows that public investment in plant breeding and agriculture science returns between 10 and 30 times the original funding. In fact, innovations developed at the Indian Head research station have already demonstrated extraordinary value. One example is the development and advancement of direct seeding and zero-tillage practices. These technologies, which have now become the industry standard around the world, are estimated to benefit the agriculture industry by approximately $204 million every year, while reducing labour and machinery costs by more than 50%. In addition, environmental gains through improved soil health, reduced erosion and lower emissions have long-term impacts on the sustained health and well-being of the environment for future production.

The current assumption appears to be that if the public research capacity is reduced, private companies or producer groups will step in to fill the gap, but private industry operates under different incentives. Its research priorities must generate profit, which can lead to higher seed costs for farmers and a narrower focus on the commercially viable traits. In such a system, farmers will ultimately bear the cost through per-acre technology fees or seed premiums, which will shift the financial burdens to producers. At the same time, research that provides a broad public benefit, such as environmental sustainability, soil health or long-term economic resilience, may receive less attention.

A major concern with the closure of the Indian Head facility is the loss of the seed increase unit associated with the research farm. Experts estimate that moving the unit would delay research progress by three to five years due to the time required to prepare new land. Those delays could cost the agriculture sector as much as $400 million in lost progress and innovation.

Finally, I want to address the scientific implications of these closures. There is an important geographical reality to agriculture science. Canada is a vast country with highly variable soils, climates and production systems. Research conducted in Indian Head, because of its unique location in the transition area between the parkland and the grassland, reflects conditions across the prairie region and strengthens the overall quality of Canada's agriculture science.

Research conducted in Indian Head also supports projects and studies across the country. The data generated here feeds into national research networks and informs work happening at other facilities. When the station closes, the impact will cascade through the multiple research programs, slowing progress far beyond Saskatchewan.

Agriculture research cannot simply pause. Pests evolve, diseases adapt and environmental pressures change. This closure undermines Canada's long-term research capacity and weakens our ability to respond to emerging challenges in agriculture. Continuous research is necessary to develop new varieties and management practices that allow Canadian farmers to remain productive, competitive and sustainable in the global market.

In closing, I urge this committee to reconsider the closure of the Indian Head research farm. This loss would not only be devastating economically and socially, it would risk sacrificing hundreds of millions of dollars in annual returns to the agriculture industry in Canada and weaken a network of research that has taken generations to build.

● (1200)

Thank you, and we look forward to your questions.

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

Next, we'll go to Mr. Groeneveld.

Welcome to the committee. You have five minutes.

**Tyler Groeneveld (Chief Executive Officer, Protein Industries Canada):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members, for the invitation to appear today.

At Protein Industries Canada, we work to advance food production and value-added agriculture as a national economic priority. We're doing this by building on Canada's strong foundation that makes its agriculture and food production sector one of the best in the world. We're reliable, and we have farmland, high-quality production, rain-fed crops and people committed to bringing healthy food to tables in Canada and around the world.

Innovation is the foundation of Canada's food production and agriculture sector. In Canada, we have a strong track record of investing in innovation and adapting it to support the continued growth, success and competitiveness of our farms, ranches and processors. Over the last seven years, Protein Industries Canada, along with our industry partners, has invested more than $800 million to advance crop-based ingredient processing and food manufacturing right here in Canada. This investment is strengthening Canada's agriculture and food value chain, and supporting Canada in becoming globally food secure while helping it establish its position as a global agricultural powerhouse and preferred trading partner with the world.

Continued investment in research and production is key to our continuing competitiveness, but please understand that we are in a race with other countries around the world. Investment in agriculture and food production research would improve Canada's productivity and drive economic growth. It continues to advance solutions to some of humanity's greatest challenges, including food security, better human health and nutrition, and producing the most carbon-positive crops in the world.

As you are all very aware, we are facing global food production and distribution challenges at a scale that many of us have never experienced before. The lingering effects of fragile supply chains impacted by COVID-19 and global conflicts have led to record-high food inflation. Countries around the world are scrambling to ensure that they have a secure and reliable source of food and ingredients.

This is Canada's opportunity. Very few other countries can match us in terms of arable land, water availability, sustainable farm practices and political stability. However, without a sustained focus on research and innovation among all players—including industry, government and academia, and across the entire value chain—Canada risks falling further behind. Already, in a recent ranking of countries in terms of global food innovation, Canada ranks number five behind countries like the U.K., the U.S., Germany and Australia.

Agriculture and food production are key to Canada's economy and two of the greatest opportunities for innovation-driven growth. This has been understood for more than 100 years, when Canada started investing in the sector. Now, because of these foundational investments, agriculture and food and beverage manufacturing contribute nearly 10% of Canada's GDP and support more than 2.3 million jobs. That's more than auto and aerospace combined. It's the largest manufacturing employer in Canada, and it anchors economic activity in every region of the country.

This is because of the innovation underpinning the entire sector, from genetics and digital agriculture to advanced processing, automation and novel food ingredients. Innovation is what drives productivity, competitiveness and long-term resilience. It is also what positions Canada to lead globally in sustainable, high-value food production. Historically, primary production—including genetics and on-farm practices and applications—has been well invested in. We have a robust ecosystem that includes academia, research institutions, private industry, commodity organizations and public research anchored by AAFC.

● (1205)

This ecosystem has led to the creation of some of the most important inventions in Canada's agricultural history, including the development of canola and zero tillage.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. We've run out of time. You can take five seconds to wrap up.

**Tyler Groeneveld:** We need to make it here. Innovation is the backbone of a competitive food and agriculture economy.

Thank you for your time.

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

We'll go to the Conservatives. We'll do five-minute rounds.

Go ahead, Mr. Bexte.

**David Bexte (Bow River, CPC):** Thank you very much, Chair. I appreciate it.

Thank you, witnesses, for attending here today. We appreciate your insights and hope to gain from your wisdom.

I'd like to start with Minister Sigurdson.

Welcome, sir.

**Hon. Richard J. Sigurdson:** Thank you for having me.

**David Bexte:** I'm going to pivot a little bit to one of the big questions in the industry that's related to strychnine. You toured the federal Minister of Agriculture around and showed him evidence of what gophers and Richardson's ground squirrels were doing. Could you please comment on what the potential losses might be in Alberta, this season and ongoing, if this damage continues unabated and we don't have access to strychnine, especially since the forecast this year is looking at drought-like conditions that double the impact of gophers?

**Hon. Richard J. Sigurdson:** I think it's important to state this first. A lot of comments have come from many individuals about why Alberta needs access to strychnine over a lot of other jurisdictions around the world. It's important to understand that the unique soil conditions and environment in southern Alberta create an ideal breeding ground for this pest, Richardson's ground squirrel. That is why we need access to the strychnine over many other jurisdictions.

From what we've seen since the ban, I would say that the damages have increased tenfold. Currently, we as a department are actively looking at bringing a full economic impact assessment to that this year, understanding the pressure we're seeing from our producers, ranchers and farmers in southern Alberta. I would estimate that damages in the past three years have increased, at minimum, tenfold, anywhere from $80 million up to probably over $800 million. We'll have a more accurate economic impact assessment this year.

What I can tell the committee is that it's visibly become a major problem. It is affecting livestock health. We're seeing an increase in injuries to animals, which is impacting the health and wellness of our animals. We've seen it move through our native grasslands, destroying one of our biggest carbon sinks in the province. As well, it's now moved into crops and fields with impacts of far more damage. I think one of the most concerning issues that we've never seen before in the province is that the population has grown to a level where we're not just seeing crop and pasture damage; we're actually seeing visible impacts to buried irrigation lines, buried natural gas lines and fibre optic cables.

This is becoming a disaster in Alberta. That's why we moved, in conjunction with Saskatchewan, for an emergency use application, which was denied. I urge the federal government to reconsider that decision, understanding the current situation that this has caused in the province. If it continues and we do see drier conditions through July and August this year, we will almost move to a state of disaster.

● (1210)

**David Bexte:** Thank you, Minister.

The Liberal Minister of Agriculture said he would support an application. What were your feelings when it was denied?

**Hon. Richard J. Sigurdson:** Well, definitely the emergency use application is built for conditions like we're seeing in Alberta. That's why I've urged the federal government to reconsider the decision made by the PMRA. I'll flat out state this emphatically: All the risks that were proposed to us by the PMRA on why we couldn't have access to strychnine were mitigated. We are looking at education and training. We're talking about on-field assessment and restricted use based on the conditions that are seen in-field. We mitigated all risks. We would have inspections. We put requirements in place to make sure that we mitigated all risks related to predators gaining access to strychnine and unintended deaths because of that. We had a very strict protocol put in place.

We mitigated all the risk and we still saw a “no”. To us in Alberta, that's unacceptable. We're in an emergency situation. Our producers need access, and they need access this year—immediately; right now.

**David Bexte:** Thank you, Minister.

In the short time we have left, do you have any other thoughts on this?

**Hon. Richard J. Sigurdson:** We have to take a look at all the impacts. We're twofold, of course, and today I presented on the closure of the Lacombe research facility.

I'm going to say this flat out: I've travelled around the world and I see an increase in global demand. Food security, as well as food affordability, is front and centre for every country I've visited. Research is key to that. I think it was pointed out by individuals as well that there are other countries—

**The Chair:** Minister, I'm going to have to stop you there. I apologize. We've run out of time. I gave you an extra 20 seconds there. Thank you again for everything.

We'll go to MP Connors for five minutes.

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

Welcome to our invited guests.

Minister, can you elaborate a bit for us on RDAR?

**Hon. Richard J. Sigurdson:** I love talking about RDAR. It's a model that we started back in 2019. It's been active for multiple years now. We moved into funding RDAR as the extension arm for the Government of Alberta to conduct research within the province. I'm very proud to say that RDAR leverages additional dollars. Of course, our government invests $41.5 million in RDAR every single year. With that, it leverages private dollars, as well as post-secondary dollars. RDAR has done a great job of taking the initial investment and returning up to $3 to $5 additional for every dollar the province invests in research.

It's a co-operative model. With that, we've seen RDAR really connecting with farmers right on the field. The impact it is having is substantial right now, at the highest level we've seen in history. Our research is resulting in on-farm application, which is moving our industry forward faster. It really is being driven by our producers, our farmers and ranchers.

RDAR is an elected board. They're responsible to the industry. We're very proud of the work they're doing. It's having on-farm and farm gate impacts. We're seeing the research that's being invested in get applied in real time on the field, which is really what we want to see: research that's being applied as quickly as possible and is being adopted early. We're seeing the impacts of that in the province in a very positive manner.

**Paul Connors:** All this research is happening on-farm. Is it happening anywhere else? What facilities are being used for this research?

● (1215)

**Hon. Richard J. Sigurdson:** We fund RDAR. It has research projects within post-secondary as well as some of our facilities in Alberta, including Western Crop Innovations, WCI, as well as CDC South, our crop development centre south, and our CDC North. It engages as well with Olds College and Lakeland.

RDAR has a multitude of investments in project-based research across the different platforms in Alberta. It's not just on-farm research. It's a very co-operative model that extends to multiple different research facilities, including the Lacombe research facility itself, where, as I mentioned in my presentation, they're doing $2.5 million in research within that facility. It's project-based research there as well.

**Paul Connors:** You mentioned that we need more investment in research. I want to talk about some of those institutes, such as the University of Calgary the University of Alberta, which are doing a lot of research in agriculture and agri-food. Do you think there's a way that we could do more with those centres?

**Hon. Richard J. Sigurdson:** When we look at the research dollars we put towards agriculture, there's no better investment in Canada right now than exactly that. When we talk about the overall impact you've heard, every dollar we spend now can equate to six to 10 in the future.

I will make the comment that it's essential that we take a look at the models with colleges, universities, crop development centres and our applied research centres across individual provinces and industry, as well as farmers. This is the key, not really focusing on one but on all as an essential piece to make sure that we have the most impact with the dollar spent.

I would say that the research that we have ongoing, whether it be at the U. of A., U. of C., Olds College or Lakeland, is having an incredible impact on our industry.

I was just recently in Dubai, and I need to make this comment. When we're talking about the global demand, Canada is known for the highest grade commodities in the world, but the comments expressed to me were that countries like Russia, Australia and others are catching up extremely fast.

If we continue to decrease the amount of research money, they will surpass Canada, and we will lose massive market share. That's the reality, and that's why we need to continue to make sure that we not only maintain the dollars towards research in all facilities but have the opportunity to increase those dollars in the future to be able to maintain Canada's agricultural advantage.

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

Next, we'll go to the Bloc for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Cole, I'd like to start with you because you mentioned something I'd like you to expand on regarding the impact of these $400-million cuts.

Can you tell us more about that research or study? What is your assessment of that?

[*English*]

**Steven Cole:** I have Dave Gehl here. He is my colleague and has far more knowledge on this. I'll switch over to him, if that's all right.

Go ahead, Dave.

**David Gehl (Retired Officer in Charge, Seed Increase Unit, Town of Indian Head):** Thank you, Steve.

This was basically, I believe, based on comments from Dr. Richard Gray at the University of Saskatchewan. He's looking at the introduction of improved crop varieties that are coming out of the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada system.

At Indian Head, the seed increase unit is a bridge between science and commercial farming. It receives the newly developed varieties from research scientists, and it produces basic breeder seed of the new varieties each year. That seed is distributed to the pedigreed seed growers who propagate it through their system and produce certified seed. That is then sold to commercial farmers.

Delaying the release of these improved varieties will result in an annual loss to farmers. We're seeing fairly rapid genetic gain in all traits, especially disease and yields. We've seen that yields really have improved in the last 10 or 15 years. Especially with our cereal crops, we're seeing a real improvement. If we reduce the introduction of that new technology, it will lead to a loss for our farmers. That's what we're talking about with a delay of innovation.

● (1220)

[*Translation*]

**Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you for your presentation. It is interesting to see that $8 million invested generates $400 million in economic benefits. Therefore, cuts to agriculture will have an impact on an entire ecosystem and on knowledge. In my region, we experienced this when a research centre in Kapuskasing closed. The impact is still being felt decades later. It has to be made up elsewhere. We'll come back to this in the second hour.

Minister Sigurdson, I'd like to hear your thoughts on this. As Alberta's Minister of Agriculture, do you feel that the federal government can pass the bill on to you rather than paying it? Obviously, this data in agriculture is fundamental. Your argument has demonstrated that in a particularly effective way. Is this a way for the federal government to shirk its responsibilities and pass its deficit on to the provinces?

[*English*]

**Hon. Richard J. Sigurdson:** I'm here to express that the loss of research dollars will have an overall impact on the industry, right down to our farmers and ranchers. Whenever these facilities are closed, we understand how essential the research happening at these facilities is to the industry. We're going to have to find a way to continue that research in order to make sure that we continue to be global leaders. That is our competitive advantage in the global market space, and it has to be maintained.

Of course, when this is closed, it creates pressure on us to partner with industry, agencies, boards, commissions and farmers in order to pick up that research and continue it, because agriculture is essential to Alberta's economy. It's our second-largest industry and arguably the most important industry to food affordability, food safety and security within our own country. We will have to continue that work in some way, shape or form. This will be a downloaded cost in one way, shape or form in Alberta at a time when we're struggling.

I want to be clear in saying that we need to be partners in this. Federally, provincially and municipally—right down to industry, farmers, ranchers, agencies, boards and commissions—we all have to be involved in research in a meaningful manner. I urge the federal government to continue the partnership.

[*Translation*]

**Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chair, you are signalling to me.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I just thought you might want to say one final thing.

We'll do four minutes and four minutes. It's over to the Conservatives.

Mr. Bonk.

**Steven Bonk:** Thank you.

I'd like to make a comment to Minister Sigurdson.

I want to thank him for his advocacy when it comes to strychnine, which Mr. Bexte brought up earlier, and for working with Saskatchewan. I know Minister Marit and Mr. Harrison previous to him are also very much on board with this, as well as the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities and many other producer groups.

Thank you very much for the work you're doing on that.

My farm and ranch are very close to the Indian Head research centre. I would like to take this time to advocate very strongly for that centre and the good work it does.

I'll ask His Worship Cole if he could give us a quick synopsis of what this closure would mean to the town of Indian Head.

**Steven Cole:** It's another huge impact. Twelve years ago, we had our PFRA tree nursery farm shut down. We lost 70 to 100 jobs there. Now it's another impact for Indian Head again—losing the research farm. Indian Head was built off these two farms. It started off with the Bell farm, and then the research farms came into effect.

Closing this farm down is going to have a huge impact on our community: loss of jobs, loss of businesses and people moving again. It's just not a good thing for the community.

● (1225)

**Steven Bonk:** I want to highlight some of the great innovation that's come out of the Indian Head research centre.

The minister told us that it costs about $3.8 million a year to keep that centre going. Look at what's come out of that centre and the good work that Guy Lafond and Jim Halford did when it comes to zero tillage in particular. I've had the good fortune of travelling all over the world promoting Canadian agriculture. We see companies like Seed Hawk, Bourgault and John Deere, which bought the Conservapak technology that came out of Indian Head. There's a huge economic impact.

Can you or Mr. Gehl talk quickly about economic impact when it comes to soil health, moisture retention in cropping and the yields we've gotten out of that?

**David Gehl:** We're talking about a huge impact on increasing productivity in all areas of the world dealing with rain-fed agriculture. We've seen that here at Indian Head. For example, we have what's called a long-term rotation study, which is a benchmark study that's been going on since 1957. It's been looking at the impact of management practices on soil health and crop yields. Since the adoption of zero tillage in those plots 30 years ago, we've seen a marked increase in yields. They've doubled. We're seeing huge increases in soil carbon sequestration that are not plateauing, as originally thought. We're having an impact on the climate and improving soils through our innovations.

Zero tillage is being adopted around the world, wherever we're looking at rain-fed agriculture.

**The Chair:** Mr. Gehl, we're going to have to stop.

Next, we'll go to the Liberals for four minutes.

**Paul Connors:** I'm going to share with MP Harrison.

Minister, there were no cuts to the actual research budget, so that will continue on, and RDAR seems to be a very successful program in Alberta. Would you like to see, under the next policy framework money or research money, more investment in those types of models?

**Hon. Richard J. Sigurdson:** Definitely one of the engagements I'm doing right now is stakeholder round tables on the next policy framework as it relates to the sustainable Canadian agricultural partnership, SCAP. We've seen lots of positive impacts from the investment through SCAP. We are currently engaging with our producers, agencies, boards and commissions on what they would like to see. I think what we're hearing from the ground level right now is more flexibility from province to province to be able to guide research that fits the soil conditions, the climate and the industries' understanding that Canada is a very broad nation. As well, the increase in research dollars, I think, defensibly creates a great economic argument on how we can continue to grow GDP for the country.

When we look at the new policy framework, we'd love to see more dollars come into this to be able to connect with our industry, to be able to support research projects. Also what we're hearing from our producers is more flexibility in the next policy framework to allow more provincial and producer-led research as it relates province to province, understanding the unique and distinct differences we have across the country.

**Paul Connors:** MP Harrison.

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

Mr. Gehl, I was hoping that you could finish elaborating on the question asked by my colleague Mr. Bonk about no-till and the success of that. I've seen on my farm first-hand how successful no-till drilling is.

Could you elaborate or submit to the committee further testimony in regard to that?

● (1230)

**David Gehl:** Zero tillage is now the commonly used practice in western Canada. When I started out as an agronomist in the mid-1980s, we were seeing a large proportion of summer fallow used for moisture conservation and weed control. That has almost totally vanished, so now we're seeing continuous cropping with diverse crops. That includes cereals, oilseeds and pulses, and we know how successful Canada has been. We've seen a huge increase in our oilseeds and canola. We're world leaders in that. Zero tillage has been really key to those changes.

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

I'm going to extend a two-minute round to the Liberals and Conservatives, and then we'll pause and go to the next round.

Mr. Epp.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for appearing.

Mr. Groeneveld, you stated in your testimony that we—Canada—are in a trade race. Minister Sigurdson said the same thing, identifying countries, in particular, that we are racing to maintain our trade advantage with. You also said, “Innovation is the foundation”. Innovation occurs at the nexus of the private sector, academia and public research. Academia has come and basically testified that they are stretched, given the present situation in university funding. Can you comment on what the withdrawal or the reduction of public research does to that nexus? We have basic research, innovation, commercialization through....

By withdrawing another leg, what is the impact to both the protein cluster and agriculture, broadly speaking?

**Tyler Groeneveld:** Innovation is the foundation. Canada has a very strong innovation agenda, which does include academia, the federal AAFC, farms and industry. Withdrawing a leg at this point in time, as we're trying to create more value-added ingredients and food production, more economic opportunities.... It's not the time to be pulling back on innovation right now. We need to continue to invest there and, along with resources, to scale up and commercialize more of the innovations that we create in the country across all facets of agriculture.

**Dave Epp:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We will go to the Liberals and MP Dandurand for two minutes.

**Marianne Dandurand (Compton—Stanstead, Lib.):** Thank you so much.

It's very interesting to hear about PIC and the example it sets. I think that your funding comes from ISED, and you're a cluster with a lot of innovation.

I'd like to hear more about your results. Where is the money coming from, how does it work and how could it set an example for AAFC as we are looking forward on how to do research in the future?

**Tyler Groeneveld:** Our funding comes from ISED. We've been recapitalized twice. We've invested about $220 million in projects. We've had about a 3:1 industry-leading investment. Industry is investing $3 for every dollar that we are able to co-fund. We're de-risking innovation through these funds and trying to give permission to create and evaluate.

As a model for AAFC, it's important to look at Crown corporations like Farm Credit Canada. It recently announced significant dollars. I think it was about $7 billion.

We need to apply and create a landscape where we can de-risk and get industry to invest more here in Canada. That's the race we're in, which we spoke to earlier, so that industry decides to invest in Canada versus some other jurisdictions. We're in that race to really secure more economic opportunity from the value-added ingredients and value-added agriculture and food production that we're trying to create here.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will pause now for about five minutes while we change our panel.

Thank you to everyone online, and thank you to our witness in person.

● (1235)

(Pause)

● (1240)

**The Chair:** I call this meeting back to order.

I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of our new witnesses. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by teleconference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired language. 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.

I'd like to welcome our witnesses.

Joining us here today as individuals we have Carole Lafrenière and Vincent Poirier. From the Centre d'innovation agricole, we have Jean-Pierre Charuest and Anthony Laroche; and from the Global Institute for Food Security we have Nancy Tout.

Welcome and we'll start with Madame Lafrenière online.

[*Translation*]

**Carole Lafrenière (Retired Professor in the agricultural field, Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, As an Individual):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

I'm a retired professor at the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, UQAT.

Agriculture in our region is facing the closure of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada research centres for the third time. Agriculture in our region is mainly based on livestock sectors, including dairy production and veal calf production. In the 1980s, the Kapuskasing Research Farm played a major role in the development of veal calf production. A key outcome of this research is the development of competitive businesses with large livestock sizes of 250 to 350 or more cows, based on productive and quality forage crops stored in bunker silos.

The first budget cuts at the Kapuskasing Research Farm were made in 1995, with the elimination of the horticulture and grain programs, leading to its closure in 2013.

Given past successes, the agricultural community knew that research was essential for the development of its businesses. As a result, as early as 1996, there was a major mobilization in the community to encourage UQAT to form a partnership with the Kapuskasing Research Farm. This started research on grass-fed beef, but the farm's closure in 2013 wiped out these efforts.

It took a little over 10 years to assemble a team of five professors with the expertise the region needs. Veal calf production is now shifting toward agroforestry systems to increase resilience and reduce greenhouse gases, as well as toward a new stream of organic grain research. These production efforts are supported by expertise in soil science, agrometeorology and agroeconomics.

In 2025, the UQAT board of directors approved the creation of the Institut de recherche en agriculture et agroalimentaire. In 2026, for the third time, budget cuts at the Quebec City and Nappan research centres have affected us. Over the years, professors have built strong collaborations with researchers at these centres in the fields of soils, forage crops and pastures. With budget cuts at Quebec universities, this time, resilience will be very difficult to maintain.

● (1245)

**Vincent Poirier (Professor of Soil Science, Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, As an Individual):** Good morning. I would like to introduce myself. I am a professor at UQAT, an expert on carbon sequestration in agricultural soils and director of the Institut de recherche en agriculture et agroalimentaire.

I will begin my remarks by drawing inspiration form the words of my colleague, Professor Jean Caron. Political circles and civil society rarely realize that people around the world are 30 centimetres away from famine. What does that mean? It means that all of our food depends on the top 30 centimetres of soil on the earth's surface. Perennial forage plants help enrich soils, so healthy forage production and healthy soils go hand in hand.

Soils and forage plants provide a number of other ecological services to society. They can sequester carbon, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, support biodiversity, and regulate water and nutrient cycles. Despite this, the science is clear: Our soils continue to degrade, especially in Quebec and eastern Canada, and their ability to produce food is declining.

Research on soils and forage plants is vital, particularly at the Quebec City research centre, to counter this degradation. The announced closure of research centres is a true scientific disaster that will set us back by several decades. The loss of expertise in forage plants and of long-term field studies will have an incalculable negative impact on society and the agricultural community.

At UQAT, our work is rooted in the local community. Thanks to our complementary expertise, we've managed to put in place two unique systems under real-world farm operating conditions—one in agroforestry and the other focused on the revitalization of abandoned farmland. These two production systems are promising for the future, but their current status is precarious.

In the current climate and geopolitical context, it is essential that Canada increase its food self-sufficiency and reduce its greenhouse gas emissions. Significant funds must to be invested, particularly in universities, to support infrastructure and research staff focused on soils and forage crops. Time is of the essence, as changes are occurring faster than our ability to adapt to them.

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

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

Next, we'll go to the Centre d'innovation agricole for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Jean-Pierre Charuest (Chair, Centre d'innovation agricole):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My name is Jean-Pierre Charuest. I'm the chair of the board of directors of the Centre d'innovation agricole. I have with me Anthony Laroche, who is the centre's general manager.

The centre is a non-profit organization that serves as a platform for coordinating technology transfer, innovation and support for training the next generation of farmers in the greater Eastern Townships region of Quebec. We act as a catalyst between the generators of new knowledge—universities, federal research centres, college centres for technology transfer—on the one hand, and the recipients of this knowledge and technologies—agricultural businesses, front line advisers and educational institutions that train the next generation of farmers—on the other hand.

We operate within an exceptional regional ecosystem characterized by the presence of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Dairy and Swine Research and Development Centre in Sherbrooke, and a number of university faculties at the Université de Sherbrooke and Bishop's University, which offer valuable expertise in agriculture; the Productique Québec college centre for technology transfer, which specializes in digitization, automation and robotics; as well as two post-secondary agricultural training institutions: the Cégep de Sherbrooke and the Centre de formation professionnelle de Coaticook-CRIFA.

This regional ecosystem is distinguished by its focus on sustainable and resilient agriculture, which includes livestock production and perennial forage crops. This integrated approach positions the Eastern Townships as a true living laboratory for agri-food innovation capable of supporting the competitiveness of industries while addressing environmental and socio-economic challenges.

Since 2021, the Centre d'innovation agricole has mobilized nearly 175 agricultural producers in the Eastern Townships to adopt new agricultural practices based on research done in Canada. Our mission is to support producers in adopting and integrating research findings into their farming practices in order to adapt to the changes affecting them.

The Centre d'innovation agricole also acts as the Eastern Townships regional coordinator for the deployment of the Living Lab—Lait carboneutre project, which is led by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and aims to achieve carbon neutrality in the dairy industry. Thanks to our involvement, five dairy producers in the Eastern Townships are contributing to research conducted by researchers at the Quebec City research centre on forage crops, greenhouse gas reduction and sustainable farming practices adapted to modern but profitable dairy production.

Why did we choose perennial forage crops?

Since 2021, the Centre d'innovation agricole has identified the perennial forage crop sector as a strategic pillar in addressing climate change affecting agriculture.

Perennial forage crops are the foundation of dairy and beef production in Canada. These crops provide highly nutritious forage crops rich in effective fibre and protein. They promote the digestive health in ruminants and help cattle reach their full milk production or growth potential. On-farm forage production enhances a farm's food self-sufficiency and reduces businesses' reliance on imported food, which is often expensive and subject to high market volatility.

Perennial forage crops keep soils healthy by protecting them from erosion caused by annual crop rotations and contribute to soil carbon capture through their root systems.

As we can see, climate change is amplifying the weather variability, which causes summer droughts, intense precipitation and more volatile winters.

Perennial plants, thanks to their deep and permanent root systems, are better able to adapt to this climate stress than annual crops. They improve soil water retention and show faster growth recovery after extreme events, which contributes to the stability of agricultural production in a changing climate. Global warming opens up the possibility of agricultural expansion into more northern regions, where perennial crops will play a decisive role.

● (1250)

Therefore, perennial crops play a crucial role—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. I'm going to have to stop you there. We've run out of time. Thank you so much.

We'll now go to the Global Institute for Food Security for five minutes.

**Nancy Tout (Interim Chief Executive Officer, Global Institute for Food Security):** Good afternoon, and thank you for the invitation to present to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

My name is Nancy Tout, and I'm an experienced innovation executive with over 25 years of experience across both public and private research organizations leading commercially focused innovation to support Canadian agriculture. Today, I'm representing the Global Institute for Food Security, GIFS, based in Saskatoon. I previously held the position of chief science officer and currently hold the position of interim chief executive officer.

The innovation model at GIFS is unique and differentiated here in Canada—a public-private partnership model. We work with public, government and academic labs and private industry, from large multinationals to small and medium-sized enterprises, to leverage the investments made by both public and private partners and to accelerate innovation outcomes to commercial entities.

I'll begin by sharing two important pieces of information to provide a framework on how we elevate the discussion on the research station closures and lean into a conversation of the future of Canadian agriculture and agri-food innovation.

Number one is that innovation, as we've heard this morning, has always driven the world's top economies to become even stronger, and that is certainly true for agriculture and agri-food. While Canada ranks quite strongly in our innovation inputs, our outputs—notably commercialization and scaling innovation—are disappointingly lagging behind the rest of the world. It's a return on investment no one should accept or would accept within their own retirement investment portfolios.

This provides clear direction for Canada and for this committee. Let's continue to celebrate our innovation assets and inputs in Canada, but let's remain laser-focused and shift greater attention and investments on the output part of that equation to ensure Canada doesn't continue to lose ground versus the rest of the world.

Number two is that Canada's productivity gap is growing, as highlighted in Farm Credit Canada's recent report, threatening Canada's competitiveness and ability to meet global food demand. Through innovation, we can fill this productivity gap, unlocking $30 billion in additional farm income.

With these two pieces top of mind, let me address the subject at hand in two ways.

One, in the face of a rapidly changing innovation technology global landscape, we acknowledge and support the government in moving forward with a tough but necessary decision-making process.

Two, we all have mixed feelings about the news of closures and staff layoffs across the country. As one of Canada's inputs into our innovation ecosystem, we celebrate the past and rich history of Ag Canada's research stations, the talented scientists, the land and the data that has been generated over decades across diverse and critical areas of agriculture and agri-food research.

As part of this study, this committee must work through a collaborative framework to consider the land, the capital and the data assets impacted. What's great about Canada's diverse innovation ecosystem is that there are existing and new partners—public, private and producers—who are willing and capable to assign value and to lead and support the path forward.

The land base and data are two areas that are often forgotten about but are important considerations for the committee. Canada hasn't done a great job of valuing data in our innovation ecosystem. As we further embrace AI and predictive modelling in agriculture and agri-food, data and digital assets can help turn outdated spreadsheets and manual guesswork into smart, timely and predictive data-driven decisions that will improve crop and animal performance, and soil health; reduce costs; and increase profitability.

This leads me to two strong recommendations for the committee's consideration.

The first recommendation is this. Although Canada has world-class agriculture research capacity, it is increasingly fragmented and complex. Other jurisdictions have built a highly coordinated, national but industry-driven innovation framework with cross-sectoral innovation systems driven by stable funding, integrated governance and strong industry-research alignment, all focused on scale and commercialization.

Canada can too, but we must act now. To do this, we must not restrict our thinking to the individual silos that make up our system. We must move research to deployment at scale and build bold new national innovation models.

The second recommendation is that we must strengthen our partnership model and approach to innovation to be inclusive of public, private and producers. It's called the P3 model. Many will say it exists, but I'm here today to say the balance is off, and we can do better.

In summary, as we move forward with the next steps in this study, let's ensure we properly steward and transfer leadership of valuable land and data. Let us also lean into new collaborative models of innovation, positioning Canada's agriculture and agri-food innovation systems, but more importantly their outputs, in a leading position globally.

I'll end with Let's Grow Canada, a movement recently rolled out by Farm Credit Canada at Canada's Ag Day here in Ottawa to shape the future of food in Canada. These words also summarize my comments here today for the committee. Let's Grow Canada's innovation system is focused on partnerships and economic impact.

● (1255)

Thank you for the opportunity to share this bold vision and imperative for Canadian agriculture. I'll take questions from members of the committee.

**The Chair:** We have about 16 minutes left. I did promise Mr. Lemire two opportunities to speak because he passed on the last one, and I know that Mr. Gourde has something to bring up in committee business.

We will start with four minutes for the Conservatives, if that's okay. Then we'll go to the Liberals. I don't know how we're going to do this. We may have to go past 1:15.

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

My question is for the team from the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue.

In 2008, a truly disastrous global crisis took place. Canada put in place its economic action plan, which was implemented in 2009, 2010 and 2011. I remember making an announcement on forage research in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, which is a very beautiful region, by the way. We know that, in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, forage crops benefit from more sunlight than in southern Quebec. Funding had been made available. I don't remember the amount, but I believe it was about $2 million. This funding was granted for research on forage quality—primarily to highlight it—and for research on yield potential. The funding was also used in the beef sector, as it's a region where beef production is significant.

Has this funding been beneficial for the entire forage and beef sectors? What have the results been? We know that the results take a few years to materialize after an investment. If you remember what happened, could you tell us about it?

● (1300)

**Vincent Poirier:** I would ask my colleague Carole Lafrenière to answer the question.

**Carole Lafrenière:** Good afternoon, Mr. Gourde.

Indeed, the investment made at the time was extremely beneficial. It aligned with what we wanted to do, which was to enhance the value of forage crops. It has enabled us to establish infrastructure and to continue doing research. It was very beneficial and kicked off our work on pastures. It came at a time when we really needed it. We were beginning to feel the effects of climate change, so we started working on pastures. We still need funding for forage crops. That need is still there; the funding is still necessary.

Of course, the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, as a small university, has limited resources. I say “small”, but not in the sense that it can't do big things. Working on pastures, for example with the people in the forage sector in Sainte-Foy and Matane, has enhanced the way we can do things.

In short, I can tell you that the funding has been beneficial, and we would like to have more of it.

**Jacques Gourde:** Unfortunately, we have a Liberal government. The Conservative government has always been very, very responsive to that, especially in the past. I'm a former forage producer and exporter, and I really appreciated that funding announcement. It's a really fascinating region with a truly magical bioclimate.

I know that you would like to have more funding, but there are cuts. We've talked about how injecting funds was beneficial and would have yielded 30, 40 or 50 times the amount invested. If we make cuts, Ms. Lafrenière, what will happen in the next 10 or 15 years?

**Carole Lafrenière:** We began to feel the impact of the cuts very quickly after the farm closed in Kapuskasing. That had repercussions, such as a reduction in herd sizes initially. We were on a roll.

I'll give you some figures regarding the regional economy.

Our beef production, both in the 1990s and the early 2000s, was in the neighbourhood of $45 million worth of revenue or $50 million worth of GDP. However, the revenues then dropped to $35 million in terms of GDP. At the time, the financial impact was greater on beef production than on dairy production.

In recent years—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I apologize for interrupting you. We're really pressed for time. Thank you so much for your time.

We'll go to the Liberals for four minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Marianne Dandurand:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Charuest, I'd like to start by giving you the opportunity to conclude your opening remarks.

**Jean-Pierre Charuest:** Thank you. I'll try to be quick.

Federal budget cuts and the closure of the Quebec Research and Development Centre will lead to the dismantling of a world-class research team. At the Centre d'innovation agricole, we do technology transfer. The research results are the basis of our work. From there, we ensure the transfer. If there's no more research in sectors as crucial as forage plants, then we have nothing left to transfer, since that's really the mission of the Centre d'innovation agricole.

We propose that the government transfer the forage plant expertise to the Sherbrooke Research and Development Centre. There's space there, and all the research infrastructure is already in place. The centre benefits from a large plot of land, that is, 300 hectares of crops, so there's space to carry out research. This would also bring researchers closer to the collaborative ecosystem we have established with the Sherbrooke Research and Development Centre since 2021. We were already working with the Quebec Research and Development Centre on the living lab, but this would also bring them closer to the university and college sector in the Eastern Townships.

We also think it would be appropriate to create a national centre of excellence in the Eastern Townships to strengthen the links between forage production and livestock, dairy and cattle production. We could work together with the national associations, such as the Dairy Farmers of Canada, Les Producteurs de lait du Québec, or the cattle producer associations like Les Producteurs de bovins du Québec and the Canadian Cattle Association. The Canadian Forage and Grassland Association and the Conseil québécois des plantes fourragères are also working with us. We already have a whole platform for working together.

At the beginning of my speech, I mentioned 175 producers. Over the past five years, we have seen that when we support producers in innovation, they embrace innovation more easily. When we leave their businesses, the innovation stays on the farm. Producers are open to innovation, they're mobilized and they only ask us to support them. That's really the role that the Centre d'innovation agricole wants to play. The unfortunate closure of the Quebec Research and Development Centre will give us an opportunity to somewhat reshape the scene in Quebec.

● (1305)

**Marianne Dandurand:** Thank you, Mr. Charuest.

I'm going to follow up with you, because what I'm hearing is really a desire to reconnect with both the university sector and the college sector, given that you're in the professional sector. You're talking about the industry, which is also present, and you mentioned Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's research centre.

In committee, the minister talked about his desire to better coordinate and support innovation in agriculture. I hear you talking about a national centre of excellence. Are you suggesting some kind of pilot project? What role could the federal government play in that?

**Jean-Pierre Charuest:** We already do technology transfer. If we decide to set up a pilot project, we will definitely want to work together to implement it. The federal government's role will be to support us financially. There are surely similar models, not in research, but in technology transfer.

When it comes to transfers, it's certainly important to have producers around the table, but it's also important to have research. That's why I find it a shame that world-class expertise is being let go, particularly when it comes to forage plants. This is a sector that hasn't always been supported by the industry, which means that we often rely on results from the United States.

If Canada wants to stand out in northern agriculture, now is not the time to abandon research, especially in such an important field.

[*English*]

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

We're going to Mr. Lemire. He's going to have six minutes. He gave up his two minutes in the last round, and we gave an extra two minutes to each group.

Mr. Lemire, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

This is a particularly interesting meeting.

Mr. Poirier and Ms. Lafrenière, thank you for being here today. I am particularly proud to see that your research is being showcased at the same time, that carbon capture can be used to enrich soils, and that northern agriculture has a particularly bright future. There's a whole connection with agroforestry, but unfortunately, we aren't here to talk about that.

Today, we're here to look at the impact of the research cuts, so instead of talking about investments, we're talking about cuts.

You're proposing some interesting solutions. Your research station in Notre-Dame-du-Nord has a state-of-the-art laboratory capable of providing soil analyses to the various agricultural producers in the region and elsewhere.

During a conversation, Mr. Poirier, you told me how difficult it is for researchers to fund such projects out of their existing budgets for technical services and expertise. Would you say that universities in the various regions should receive targeted funding so that they can provide this service directly to producers?

**Vincent Poirier:** Yes, absolutely.

In fact, I would say it's essential. We have facilities with equipment, a state-of-the-art analytical park and incredible potential to provide services to the community. Those services aren't linked to any official organizations, either, because we maintain scientific neutrality.

However, we're limited by the lack of research support and the lack of technical support. We need investments that would enable us to support this team and unleash our full potential to provide businesses, the public and academic colleagues with the best we have to offer.

We're currently operating at a slow pace, and our situation is precarious. As a result, it's frustrating to see that we have a real gem in our hands, but we can't make it shine as it should.

**Sébastien Lemire:** You say that you're operating at a slow pace, but on the other hand—and correct me if I'm wrong—the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue has particularly interesting expertise in making a return on investments, especially when they're public. When governments, particularly the federal government, invest in the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, or UQAT, we see benefits in partnerships. Can you tell us more about that?

● (1310)

**Vincent Poirier:** It's in UQAT's DNA to work with the community. We create very many partnerships. We're the second-largest university in the country in terms of the volume of research per professor. In our field, we often work on a co-creation basis, which means that we develop projects in co-operation with businesses to directly address their needs on the ground.

Every dollar invested is enhanced through various grant programs that we can participate in. We're really enhancing those investments, and the work isn't done in a vacuum. Our work takes place with people in the sector, and we work with agricultural businesses to determine the issues that we study. In that way, we want to make sure that our research results will have a real impact on the ground.

**Sébastien Lemire:** Right now, we're talking about potential or current cuts to agriculture across Canada.

The nearest station that provided us with data was the Kapuskasing demonstration farm. However, that had to close its doors about 15 years ago. UQAT is taking over that expertise. Under the circumstances, the theory being put forward is that, at worst, the data analysis will have to be redone elsewhere, in greenhouses or in a somewhat haphazard way.

Why do you think there are limitations to greenhouse studies and the impact they can have in a given region? It's important to remember that Abitibi-Témiscamingue and northeastern Ontario have clay soil, which isn't found elsewhere in Canada. Why do you think there are limitations to greenhouse studies?

**Vincent Poirier:** It's because you can't move land. The land is where it is.

It's possible to use greenhouse experiments to isolate variables, measure certain things, adjust models and set parameters, but it will never be possible to recreate specific land within a laboratory or a greenhouse.

Soil can't be moved. It's unthinkable to do that. It's also impossible to move climate conditions. We can try our very best, but there's so much complexity involved in the natural environment that I would say it's unrealistic to think that we can recreate everything under controlled conditions.

However, it's necessary if we want to see what's going to happen in 50 years, because we don't have the luxury of waiting. We need modelling tools and artificial intelligence to help us refine our models, set better parameters and better understand the mechanisms. Ultimately, all of this has to translate into the field to validate these models.

**Sébastien Lemire:** According to studies conducted around a decade ago, such as those conducted as part of the Agriclimat project, it's realistic to think that within 20 or at most 30 years, Abitibi-Témiscamingue should have a climate similar to Montérégie or the northeastern United States. For that reason, it's important to know the climate impact and soils of a region like Abitibi-Témiscamingue.

I'd like us to talk about your work and that of Professor Simon Lafontaine, and the expertise developed at Écobœuf, in particular, which has an impact on cattle production. How do you think agroforestry adds value to agriculture today?

**Vincent Poirier:** In my opinion, agroforestry is the agriculture of the future.

I would say that what we did with the system at the Lafontaine-Noël farm in Abitibi-Ouest was create an experiment that doesn't exist anywhere else in the world, on 20 hectares and with livestock, with the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions produced by livestock.

Since the soil there is clayey, and good-quality perennial plants grow there, the bar was high, so tree hedgerows had to be planted. We conducted a big experiment to try to manage grazing livestock and sequester carbon in the soil, in the trees and in the plants to create a new farming model. It's also important to mention that we did this under real-world farming conditions.

Farmers come to visit the farm and can see how things are run, how the livestock moves and where they have access to water to get a sense of what it could represent—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** That's six minutes and 30 seconds. I have to stop you.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. Thank you very much.

Mr. Gourde.

[*Translation*]

**Jacques Gourde:** Mr. Chair, I think we're victims of our own success in this study. We still have a huge number of witnesses to meet. We haven't seen my witnesses, for that matter. I'm going to put forward a motion that we have one or two extra meetings. That would be really important.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** MP Chatel.

[*Translation*]

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

I agree with my colleague that the discussion on science and technology is important. I would remind this committee that we agreed to continue the discussion on science and technology as part of our next study, which we'll be starting soon, and which will focus on the partnership between the federal, provincial and territorial governments. I encourage my colleague to submit his list of witnesses to continue the discussion, perhaps even at the first meeting of this study on science, technology and the role of vision. I think there has been a lot of discussion about the issues. We now have to discuss the vision, the solutions. There are a number of potential solutions that would be important to explore. I invite my colleague to use the time we have left to invite his witnesses. I think we have one hour left for this study. However, we would then have to continue the discussion as part of our next study.

● (1315)

**Jacques Gourde:** I have a question, Mr. Chair. When it comes to witnesses participating in two different studies, can you swap witnesses from one study to another if they're similar?

**Sophie Chatel:** Mr. Chair, regarding my colleague's question, this committee had already concluded that this study would focus on science and innovation and that it would inform the discussion on science and technology in the next study. This committee was already in favour of that approach.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** This is the last meeting. There's no “one hour” left.

We'll go to Mr. Bonk.

**Steven Bonk:** One thing I'd like to point out is that this is imminent. The research will be lost this year on these existing research farms. It's very well within this committee's purview to have a few more meetings on this very important topic because we're talking about programs that are five, six and 10 years in the making, and all of that research will be lost. I think it would be prudent of us to hear from all of the witnesses.

We've had a very rushed meeting today, for example. We can spare the time on something as important as this.

**The Chair:** We'll go to Mr. Epp.

**Dave Epp:** I'll just echo his comment and add one other small point. It came up in testimony today. The Alberta Minister of Agriculture listed three countries that are pulling away from us. One of the questions I didn't get time to ask today is whether those countries that are racing ahead of us got there by pulling back on public research. I highly doubt it, so I see the need for more study.

**The Chair:** We'll go to Monsieur Lemire.

[*Translation*]

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

It might be interesting to ask them the question and send it in writing because I would indeed like to have that answer.

In this context, I would like to ask the Conservatives this question. John Barlow isn't here right now, but what was agreed was that the testimony could be used in both studies and that we could draft a report on science and research and make recommendations. What I'm interested in is how this government will respond to our recommendations and how it justifies these cuts.

If we extended our study over the parliamentary sitting weeks and breaks, we would delay the adoption of a report, as well as the adoption of the recommendations and the government's responses, knowing full well that we could include witnesses in the other study on the sustainable Canadian agricultural partnership, which will cover science and research.

Do you want us to continue with one meeting or move on to the other topic, and have a report on science and research to, in my opinion, denounce these cuts?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Gourde.

[*Translation*]

**Jacques Gourde:** We're always open, including holding additional meetings if we have a deadline for June or if we don't have to finish more quickly. That's also possible. It's up to the committee.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We have a motion on the floor to add one or two meetings.

**Jacques Gourde:** It's for two meetings.

**The Chair:** Are we good to take the vote?

[*Translation*]

**Sébastien Lemire:** Are you asking for two or one?

**Jacques Gourde:** I'm asking for two, in case we don't have enough.

**Sébastien Lemire:** Okay, but the basic idea was to deal with those elements in the other study. None of the witnesses such as the Union des producteurs agricoles or the federations came to the meetings for the study on science and research, precisely so they could talk about the cuts to science and research as part of the study on the sustainable Canadian agricultural partnership.

**Jacques Gourde:** We're going to add them now. From there, if they don't need to come back, they won't need to come back. However, I want to have them there.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Please speak through the chair so I can recognize you.

MP Chatel, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Sophie Chatel:** I agree with Mr. Lemire. We really ought to hold a meeting to, firstly, allow the analysts to produce their report and, secondly, to present the report along with recommendations. Then we can discuss it.

We are finishing this week. Next week, we will be in our constituencies. After that, we start again. The recommendations will therefore not be sent to the government for several weeks if we adopt your proposal. Furthermore, the same witnesses and the same discussions may take place as part of the other study.

Mr. Lemire's proposal is a good one. We will conclude this study and immediately, upon our return, schedule a meeting to discuss the recommendations. The aim is to do this as soon as possible and send our report to the government.

We must also continue this absolutely vital discussion on the role of innovation and science in the next partnership to ensure a strong agricultural sector in Canada in the future.

● (1320)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Bonk.

**Steven Bonk:** In some instances here, we're dismantling research stations that have been in existence since the late 1800s. I hope we're not so lazy that we can't have a couple more meetings to further discuss this issue. We're talking 130 or 140 years of research centres with all this historical knowledge. Like Mr. Gourde said, I'm open to having meetings into June if we have to. If we have to add extra meetings, I have no problem working.

**The Chair:** Mr. Lemire is next.

[*Translation*]

**Sébastien Lemire:** I'm just doing a political calculation. Obviously, I'm a member of the opposition too.

If we want to have a report, we'll need to give our instructions on Wednesday so that, hopefully, we can have a first draft as soon as possible, in order to adopt it and give the government 45 days to provide its responses. We would need to have these before the summer to be able to exert some influence on the next budget and to prevent the minister from making these budget cuts. That is what I hope, anyway. This is standard practice in the budget review process.

As a member of the opposition, I believe the aim of our work is also to have a committee report with recommendations and the government's responses so that we can conduct these negotiations. If we delay this by a month, I fear we will miss this favourable opportunity when we wish to negotiate by putting forward the committee's official recommendations. I think there is still a fairly good consensus among committee members to block these budget cuts.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Epp.

**Dave Epp:** I think there is another whole area of questioning that we didn't get to and we just touched on today, which was the north. That area is being closed off. On my own farm, I've changed my farming methods in my own career because of the patterns of weather that are shifting. Now we're closing an area of competitive advantage that Canada could have going forward. This is just so important. I understand the timing questions, but I am very concerned about cutting this off and not fully exploring it.

**The Chair:** Let's call the vote. The motion is to extend the study by two meetings.

(Motion negatived [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

[*Translation*]

**Sébastien Lemire:** [*Inaudible—Editor*] to resume these studies in the next one. The fact that there are two meetings means, in my view, that we are losing our entire action plan regarding the government.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** This ends our testimony for this portion of the study.

This Thursday coming up, we will have an opportunity to provide draft instructions on this report, and we'll also get a draft report on reference prices in beef and pork supply chains. Please have that information ready to go.

Go ahead, Mr. Epp.

**Dave Epp:** Given the decision we just made, is there a hard deadline for external submissions for this report?

**The Chair:** That's a good question. I think that's really up to us.

When would be an appropriate time for people to submit? Can they submit to add to the report?

**Dave Epp:** That's to be considered.

**The Chair:** How does that work?

**Sarah Houle (Analyst):** Normally, we would have a time for that. At some point, we cannot add it to the report itself—

**The Chair:** Is there still time for people to submit? If so, what would be an appropriate day to make it good for the analysts?

Is the 19th fine with folks?

Go ahead, MP Chatel.

[*Translation*]

**Sophie Chatel:** As Mr. Lemire mentioned, can we give instructions to the analysts this Thursday, so that they can use the spring break to work on a report and get back to us on this after the spring break?

● (1325)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** That's the plan.

[*Translation*]

**Sophie Chatel:** Perfect. Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Four o'clock on the 19th will be the last time to submit any external testimony to be considered for the report. Everyone agrees that's fair.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you to our witnesses.