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Chair: Michael Coteau



Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

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• (1100)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 39 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders.

Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application. Before we continue, I'd like to ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines written on the back of the cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters. You will also notice a QR code on the card that links to a short awareness video.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and members.

First, please wait until I recognize you by name or are asked a question directly by a member 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 your earpiece and select the desired channel.

I would like to remind witnesses that committee members may ask questions in either French or English. If you will need interpretation, please take a moment now to prepare your earpiece and select the listening channel you need in advance in order to take full advantage of the time allotted for the questions and answers.

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

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, September 18, 2025, the committee is resuming its study on food security in the face of global instability.

We have three witness joining us here today. From Marc Bercier Seed Cleaning Inc., Karine Bercier, farm manager, will be joining us. From the Prince Edward Island Federation of Agriculture, we

have Donald Killorn, the executive director. From Strawberry Hill Farm, we have Tim Livingstone, who is the co-owner.

We have a few MPs who are substituting today for others. I think, for the first half, MP Al Soud will be substituting for MP Chatel. We also have MP Kronis, who is substituting for MP Gourde.

Welcome to our committee, and thank you for joining us here today.

For our witnesses, you'll have up to five minutes for opening remarks, and then we'll proceed with questions.

I'd like to invite Mr. Killorn from P.E.I.

Welcome to our committee. You have five minutes, sir.

Donald Killorn (Executive Director, Prince Edward Island Federation of Agriculture): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair, for the invitation to join you today.

My name is Donald Killorn. I'm the executive director of the P.E.I. Federation of Agriculture. I'm here today to discuss food security in the face of global instability.

As I'm sure you know, 24% of people in Canada live in food-insecure households. That's about 10 million people, with 2.5 million being children. Those percentages are very similar to what we see on Prince Edward Island, which is remarkable since we grow so much food on Prince Edward Island.

Food security is not simply the ability to grow food. It is the outcome of a complex system that includes agricultural production, labour availability, transportation, processing, trade, land use, environmental stewardship and public policy. Disruptions in any of these areas can ripple through the entire food system, affecting affordability, availability and the resilience of that food system.

Our expertise at the P.E.I. Federation of Agriculture is at the grassroots. It's in the farmers' fields. In those fields, across Canada, there is a bottleneck. Information struggles to move between the field and the larger food system. Farmers are wary of how their data is handled. As Canada considers both its AI strategy and its food security strategy, we must take this opportunity in the space where these overlap to build intelligence for farmers that connects the food system to the farmers' field.

At the P.E.I. Federation of Agriculture, we developed a sovereign agricultural compute strategy that will strengthen food security by improving Canada's ability to understand, manage and respond to the complex system that produces, processes, transports and distributes food. Our efforts began by building AgIntel, a precision agriculture platform that runs on artificial intelligence.

We quickly learned that the future of precision agriculture is not the development of artificial intelligence that understands farming. Rather, it's the implementation of a national sovereign compute strategy that reduces the resources required to equip our Canadian farmers with the technology they need to drive improvements to our food security. By keeping agricultural data, models and computational capacity under Canadian control, a Canadian agricultural compute strategy would enable better decisions across the entire food system, from farm-level production to national food security planning. This would transform our sovereign compute from a technology initiative into a foundational piece of our food security infrastructure.

As agriculture becomes increasingly data-driven, decision-making capacity becomes infrastructure. The ability to model risk, optimize production, forecast disruption and support policy decisions depends on access to trusted compute infrastructure and sovereign agricultural data. Farmers demand it.

A Canadian agriculture compute strategy would provide the digital foundation required to strengthen national food security while maintaining ownership and control of agricultural data. Farmers grow the food, but many of the inputs required to support modern Canadian agriculture are sourced from other countries. Agricultural data faces the same challenge. While Canadian farms generate the data, the platforms and models that transform it into actionable intelligence are often foreign-owned. As a result, both the data and the value it creates are processed outside Canada's jurisdiction. This represents a growing sovereignty gap in a sector critical to national food security and economic resilience.

A \$150-million investment in sovereign agricultural data infrastructure would turn Canada's farm data into a national strategic asset, strengthening food security, keeping the intelligence layer Canadian and returning multiples of the spend in farm-level value. By adopting a sovereign compute strategy, Canada would lower the electricity required to implement artificial intelligence in agriculture from 200 gigawatt hours to less than two. The system would spend full compute only when a farm record teaches the system something new. It would interpolate the rest.

Expanded nationally, this system would reduce the national compute load from 150 petaflops to 15 teraflops. This sounds like science fiction, but these are quickly becoming critical resources we must use efficiently in order to be competitive. On top of a signifi-

cant reduction in resources, the system would also reward the farmer when they provide this novel data, giving them ownership over the platform and credit to use on the insights derived from their data.

• (1105)

In the near future, our farmers will utilize robust models to maximize their agronomic and economic performance. They will access most of this modelling locally. However, when something novel takes place, that information—

The Chair: Thank you.

• (1110)

Donald Killorn: —should pass to a compute warehouse, ideally in a jurisdiction with clean electricity—

The Chair: I'm going to have to stop you there. We've exhausted the five minutes. I've given you an extra 20 seconds.

Donald Killorn: Thank you so much. I appreciate your time and apologize for going over.

The Chair: Thank you so much. I'm sure that for anything else you want to say, we'll get to it in the questions.

Next, we'll go next to Mr. Livingstone.

Tim Livingstone (Co-owner, Strawberry Hill Farm): Thank you.

We're going to come at this from a very different angle, because my wife and I are first-generation farmers. We started this farm in 2011, with our first season in 2012. It has grown. We hire around 20 people at the maximum time. We're probably the largest organic farm producing vegetables in New Brunswick, and possibly even in the Maritimes. We're highly diversified and we do a lot of home delivery and local pickup, with 90% of our product going direct to the consumer. I would like to talk more about why that is. We'll see if I have time in my five minutes or if we have to do that later.

On the barriers to growth as a start-up farm, general bureaucracy comes to the top. Every time you add a layer. We're very diversified and grow over 50 crops, and we have beef, pork and pasture-raised chicken, but each thing is developed in a silo to our government. For example, we raise poultry and have to come under the quota system. This is pasture-raised poultry. I need a whole separate audit for the food safety side of our poultry operation. That's one of multiple streams. I fought to see if my organic certification would be enough. It wasn't.

All of these different aspects make it really challenging. There are the safe food for Canadians regulations. We're on the east coast. Our three provinces of New Brunswick, P.E.I. and Nova Scotia are roughly equivalent in population to the greater Montreal area. It's like taking Montreal, splitting it all up and saying you have to go through provincial borders just to get your stuff to market. I have a farmer who farms on the border of New Brunswick but sells into Halifax and Moncton—two different provinces. He has safe food for Canadians registration and is up for a multi-day series of audits in the middle of his busy season.

One of the challenges, and the reason we sell 90% direct, is getting into the chain stores. When we talk about food security, the reality is that over 80% of people still buy from the chain stores. We can talk about markets, direct sale and all of these other ways, but I feel we really need to look at the elephant in the room, which is how does a starting farm or a new farm get into the grocery chain system? Sobeys asked us to grow carrots for them. In the end, they couldn't give us a price, and there was no way we could build a business plan that would make sense to a bank for us to put up the warehouse Sobeys wanted. Anyway, logistically, it was a nightmare.

I know other farmers who have run into the same thing. There's no way to get from farmers' markets or local sales to the supermarkets that want you to supply 50.... There's a big gap there. A friend of mine started supplying carrots and, three years in, ended up going bankrupt.

Then we can look at the more obvious things like the cost of fuel, which has doubled. The carbon tax was taken off. As a farmer, we used to be able to get carbon tax-free fuel, but now that the carbon tax is built in upstream, we have to pay top dollar for our fuel. We're not getting a break there.

There are labour costs and a lot of audits around labour, especially our foreign workers. Out of our 20 employees, six are Canadian and year-round. We have five seasonal workers from Mexico. They come back every year. They love it. It means the world to their families, but to give you an idea, out of 20, we have five. We are under the impression—and I could be proven wrong—that the current government really dislikes that program. However, the reality is that if we didn't have those five, we would probably lay off all 20, because we need that surge of help during the six-month growing season. I can get into all the whys and wherefores, but I just want to convey the utter importance of that.

● (1115)

Another thing that's a challenge is all the government audits and surveys. We have probably 12 different surveys that we're hounded to do each year. I talked about the audits—

The Chair: I'm going to have to stop you there, sir. You've exhausted the five minutes.

Thank you so much.

Next, we're going to go to Ms. Bercier for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Karine Bercier (Farm Manager, Ferme Agriber Inc., Marc Bercier Seed Cleaning Inc.): I thank the committee for inviting me to testify today.

My name is Karine Bercier. I am a certified public accountant and a former agricultural tax specialist. For the past eight years, I have been a cash crop farmer, along with my spouse and my in-laws, near Saint-Isidore in eastern Ontario. We are also seed producers. We operate a seed-cleaning and bagging facility that processes seed for various Canadian companies. We distribute and sell the seed to farmers in eastern Ontario and western Quebec.

Today, I'm speaking to you as a farmer, an entrepreneur and someone who experiences the realities of food production firsthand. In my view, food security is often taken for granted in Canada. However, international conflicts, supply chain disruptions, inflation and weather events remind us that a country's ability to produce its own food is truly a strategic challenge.

This ability depends first and foremost on productive farmland and viable farms. As you know, Canada has a limited amount of highly productive farmland. In eastern Ontario, as in other parts of the country, this land supports family farms, livestock operations, agri-food businesses and regional food systems. Once farmland is taken out of production, it is rarely reclaimed.

In fact, this is why I got involved in the Alto high-speed rail project in eastern Ontario. Regardless of one's position on this project, it raises a fundamentally important question: Do we place enough importance on protecting farmland when making decisions that will have consequences for many generations?

Of course, food security doesn't stop at farmland. It starts with farmland and continues with seeds. As a seed producer and processor, I can tell you that every improvement in yield, disease resistance and drought tolerance starts with genetics.

Today's crops are the result of investments made in research decades ago. The investments we make today will determine our ability to feed future generations.

People in this sector are increasingly talking about a loss of confidence. Farmers invest when they have confidence. They invest when they believe their business will still be around in 10, 30 or 50 years.

[*English*]

The committee's motion speaks about investment, innovation, automation and strengthening local food production. Farmers support all of those objectives, but investment, like I said, follows confidence. Today, farm margins are under tremendous pressure. Fuel, fertilizer, financing, labour, insurance, machinery and repair costs have all increased significantly.

Many family farms are, yes, asset rich, but very much cash flow constrained. Rising land values may strengthen a balance sheet, but they do not necessarily generate the cash flow needed to invest in innovation, productivity or succession. Government also has a role to play in removing barriers to investment. Programs intended to encourage investment and innovation must work not only in urban Canada but also in rural Canada.

Consumers increasingly want food that is local, traceable and produced closer to home. To meet that demand, we need strong farms, strong processing capacity and continued investment throughout the food chain. Canadian farmers are among the hardest-working people in this country. They're not asking government to eliminate risk. They are asking for the opportunity to farm. They're asking for the opportunity to compete. They're asking for the opportunity to invest in their businesses and succeed through their hard work, their innovation and their ability to manage risk.

My message today is simple. If Canada wants stronger food security, we must protect productive farmland, invest in seed genetics and innovation, support domestic processing capacity and create the conditions that encourage long-term investment.

Food security starts with productive farmland and continues with seed. Food security depends on profitable farms, not simply productive farms, and investment follows confidence.

● (1120)

Increasingly, in an uncertain world, food security is national security, and a country that cannot feed itself is a country that is very vulnerable.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now turn it over to the Conservatives for six minutes.

Mr. Bragdon.

Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses today. I am honoured and glad to have you here, bringing the perspectives that are needed at this time.

I will be directing most, if not all, of my questions to Mr. Livingstone today, who happens to be from New Brunswick, a province I happen to be from as well.

Mr. Livingstone, you mentioned a lot about the bureaucratic barriers that are inhibiting the ability of farms to maximize their potential and to help lead us in a direction towards more food security in Canada.

What would be some suggestions that you would have to help alleviate those barriers at a national and localized level? I just wanted to start off by asking that.

Tim Livingstone: It's quite challenging when you're talking to government because I've just about never heard of government getting rid of stuff, which is maybe needed here, or maybe some amalgamation.

I want to start this though by saying we're all for safe food. It's a really difficult discussion to have because of all these different rules and regulations, be it CanadaGAP or SFFCR. There are other organic certifications and standards around poultry production. All of these things came out of, presumably, a need. None of us are against that, but it's when you pile them all together that it becomes burdensome, to the point where it can be hard to have the will to keep going and to fight it.

Just as a simple case in point—I wrote my notes before this happened—yesterday I got stuck at the border trying to get some sweet potato cuttings from the States into Canada to start our sweet potato production for the year. We're in an ideal spot in New Brunswick, one of the few places in the Maritimes where we can grow really nice sweet potatoes. I was stuck for about six hours waiting for the right stamp on the document so that I could cross with them back across the border.

That's just one example of the challenges where I should be in the field planting and a logistical bureaucratic thing holds me up. It took them five hours to recognize that I had actually paid the invoice so they could release it. Helping to speed up the process and make the things that are there work better would certainly be an asset.

Then I wish there was a way to have more cross-communication. The organic certification that we do deals with almost all of the same things that the chicken board has in their regulations, but because the chicken farmers are all under this umbrella, they don't want to allow us to provide our organic certificate as enough. Now I need yet another audit in order to raise 5,000 birds on pasture. It's these kinds of things.

If I had a \$2-million or \$3-million business and I could hire somebody full time—we're getting close to that, close to being able to hire somebody full time—it becomes a full-time job just to manage the logistics around these governmental departments. I have a friend who grows about half the annual volume that we do. He's strapped in this middle management crisis where he can't do everything, nor can he afford to pay somebody to do everything for him.

Richard Bragdon: Okay.

Tim Livingstone: This is all part of growth that's necessary if we're going to have new farmers supply the system.

Richard Bragdon: Thank you. It was very insightful.

I just wanted to follow up with a couple of little questions here that coincide with this.

We know research is a big and important component of agriculture as is being able to have access to research. I'm sure you're aware that recently there was announced the closure of a research centre in Swift Current. As it relates to organic farming, organic farming in Canada is around an \$11-billion industry and growing. Shutting down this program may save, I think it's estimated about \$1 million, but the long-term cost of this could be extremely high.

Do you have any comments around that and the importance of research as it relates to organic farming and the business that you're in?

• (1125)

Tim Livingstone: Yes, I've learned a lot of what I've learned by being at conferences and being on national boards. I have visited some of the research stations across the country. It is really important, especially in organics, because a lot of the systems we use in organics do not provide a lot of income to a chemical manufacturer, or there's a lot less of an incentive to find, let's say, mechanical weeding solutions or solutions other than a chemical. That's not to badmouth anything or say that one's right or one's wrong, but I believe that a lot of what we do in organics is for the greater good, with fewer chemicals in the environment and in food. It's part of a whole system, but it's very hard to get that looked at, and it's very hard to get investment in that. However, it's really important, as new weeds come up and as new systems come up, that we stay competitive.

There is a model that I think could potentially help. This is not to say we should close research centres—I would never go there—but on-farm research is something that is supported a lot in the States. Actually, they had a grant in Maine, which is the state next to me, where the government bought a whole bunch of different cultivation equipment and then loaned it out to farmers all over. I actually imported some of that myself, because I'm friends with a researcher, and I go down to visit their meetings. I had to pay taxes as though I bought it, but I imported some of that to try it on the farm. Then I was able to say, "Okay, I'll buy a \$10,000 unit."

The Chair: Thank you so much.

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

Ms. Mingarelli, are you next?

Giovanna Mingarelli (Prescott—Russell—Cumberland, Lib.): Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

[*Translation*]

My questions are for Ms. Bercier, a farmer from my part of the country, the riding of Prescott—Russell—Cumberland. I welcome her to our committee.

As Canada's largest supplier of certified seeds, how would you rate the resilience of the Canadian seed system in light of recent international conflicts?

Karine Bercier: It's not an easy situation to deal with. We had some great years in 2020, 2021 and 2022, when market prices were on the rise. Things were going very well for cash crop farms, in that we were able to invest more in our infrastructure and purchase additional farmland.

Nowadays, it's getting harder to stay competitive in the seed industry. We offer Canadian products, of course, but we're competing against major players—multinational corporations. Speaking of seeds, I'd say that the grain we buy to sell as seed accounts for a very small percentage of the total value of a bag of seed. There are so many other factors to consider. There are seed premiums, which are paid to producers to encourage them to continue production. There are royalties we have to pay for genetic development. There's screening, cleaning, screening losses and treatments, among other things. The grain accounts for less than one-third of the value.

There are so many other factors to consider when producing a bag of seed locally for customers. Convenience comes at a price. When prices are high, it's good for large-scale growers, but it gets hard for us to compete when we sell seed to our customers. Profit margins are very tight, so the price of seed is important to customers. The big players produce large volumes, so they're able to sell their product at our cost of production. This makes it very difficult for companies like ours to compete against them. In today's market, our margins are very tight.

• (1130)

Giovanna Mingarelli: Thank you very much.

Have local producers experienced delays or price increases because of supply chain disruptions?

Karine Bercier: Absolutely. We've certainly seen this with our seeds in recent months.

On the farm, compared to last year, we've seen a 60% increase in fuel costs alone. Fertilizer costs have also risen sharply. We're definitely very focused on our cash flow, so we bought our fertilizer in advance. Our fertilizer costs have gone up, but not as much as for some other farmers.

Obviously, all of those factors put pressure on margins that were tight to begin with. Market prices are more or less back to normal. Prices also fluctuate. We all agree that it's very difficult to predict what will happen. Sometimes prices go up a bit, then drop back down again fairly quickly. This situation definitely has a major impact on the farm's bottom line. In situations like this, it's hard to plan investments because there's so much instability—not only due to input costs but also because of market prices.

Giovanna Mingarelli: Thank you.

In your view, what is the most urgent measure the government should implement to secure the seed supply and protect Canada's long-term food security?

Karine Bercier: My answer to that is two-fold.

First, protecting our farmland is crucial. We can't add much more of it. Our biodiversity is very rich. We have to protect our forests. Of course, we also have a housing crisis, so homes will have to be built. What it comes down to is that we have to protect the farmland we have.

Second, the government has launched infrastructure projects. If these projects are necessary, that's fine, but I need proof that it's truly necessary to give up productive farmland that contributes to food security.

I think we need something like an environmental impact assessment—a food security impact assessment for every infrastructure project, the goal being to protect our highly fertile land. Furthermore, I think it's important to safeguard the viability of our businesses.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Karine Bercier: Thank you.

Giovanna Mingarelli: Thank you, Ms. Bercier.

[English]

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

Mr. Lemire, you have the floor.

[Translation]

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

Ms. Bercier, first of all, thank you for your testimony. We have many very committed and passionate witnesses here this morning, and you're one of them.

We're talking about food security and affordability and many issues that obviously have an impact on your production. What you do is key to food security, but the government is determined to build a high-speed rail line that threatens to devastate some of the best farmland in Quebec and Ontario—including yours, potentially.

Do you think Alto truly understands the realities of farming—your machinery, the importance of drainage and the need to have access to every part of your land, be it for grain or hay, or for feeding livestock and other purposes?

How do you feel about the fact that the threat of expropriation hangs over a business like yours, your farm and the neighbouring farms?

• (1135)

Karine Bercier: Mr. Lemire, I have been voicing my concerns since January. I sent documents about the project's impacts. I met with Ms. Mingarelli at a round table discussion. We want answers. We want to understand Alto's business plan and why this project is necessary. We want data about feasibility. We want transparency about costs.

As farmers, our farmland is the foundation of everything, as I said, so we're asking questions, and I have to tell you that we've received responses, but they're quite generic. There's nothing concrete. I'm a prominent voice on the Alto issue in my community. I hand out signs to show our opposition to the project. I've met so many farmers who come to us in tears. These are strong men, but they're completely devastated by all of this. For some of them, their farms will be sliced in two by the Alto corridor.

This is certainly a cause for concern. We've received letters about how the train corridor could force farmers to take 45-minute detours to get to their fields. As I said, profit margins are already very tight, and these detours would make our workdays longer and drive up payroll costs. We'd also have to use even more gas and take on a host of production costs—costs that are going up—just to access the same fields.

All of these challenges are currently taking a toll on farmers in our region and across Quebec. We're asking questions, and we're getting answers that aren't very concrete, which only adds to the turmoil we're experiencing here.

This whole situation is emotional for me. We're asking questions. There are things we'd like to know. Since we're not getting answers, I figure that, if we're all expropriated at the same time, we need to prepare accordingly. I've started having land appraised. That all costs money, and even if these properties aren't expropriated, we're still getting ready for it. I've consulted my accountant and my lawyer. We're right in the middle of the business transfer process. We're the next generation of farmers, so we're trying to expedite matters. That way, if any land is ever expropriated or subject to pre-emptive rights, we won't be caught off guard and can continue the succession process before that happens.

This is all creating an excessive workload for our accountants, tax specialists and lawyers—all for something we don't even know about yet. That's why farmers are worried and have lost confidence, as I mentioned in my opening remarks.

Here on the farm, we actually had a plan. We were looking to diversify a bit and were thinking of trying the new entrant chicken farmer program here in Ontario. I had already started my business plan and so on. Obviously, my infrastructure and all the land I own are in the Alto corridor. Needless to say, I've put that on hold for now. We're looking to invest more in Canada, but given Alto's lack of transparency, we've put that on hold.

Sébastien Lemire: Ms. Bercier, thank you for your testimony. The passion you bring to this affects us all. This is a problem we in Quebec are experiencing as well. We also raise concerns about the way things are done.

Do you feel that Alto's balance of power with farmers is so disproportionate that it could literally crush them?

• (1140)

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry. We've run out of time.

How many seconds...?

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: I would ask you to give us 10 seconds for a short answer.

[English]

The Chair: Okay, you have 10 seconds. Go ahead.

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you.

Karine Bercier: Absolutely. We're small players. Farmers seem to be a small voice in this big Alto project, which scares us. We obviously feel powerless in the face of all that.

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: We will move to the Conservatives and MP Kronis for five minutes.

Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Livingstone, thank you so much for making time to be here.

I'm from Vancouver Island, where we have a lot of small farms like yours. I know how busy it is, especially around this time of year, when the chickens are brooding and the calves are calving and everything is starting to sprout, so thank you for making that time.

Like you, our local farmers also struggle with labour and land costs, processing, transport and bureaucracy, but I want to ask you about a very specific kind of bureaucracy.

I have no idea whether you know this or not, but food is one of those areas that constitutionally is shared between the federal government and the provinces. This means that you often have all levels of government messing in your space, but when it comes time to remove a regulation or when there is something that's existing, something that's a challenge, they often turn around and say, "It's not me."

We're dealing with this, particularly near my riding right now. We have things like ALRs and regional districts and municipalities and provincial zoning and all kinds of changes that are aimed at building homes. It has created a bit of chaos in the agricultural space.

I'm wondering if you might like to speak to that.

Tim Livingstone: We are fortunate where we are that there is not a lot of zoning and that kind of regulation, but you are right. It has taken me years to actually understand who controls what. As you said, there's a lot of cross-control. For example, there's health in New Brunswick. We also own and operate a small abattoir, a meat shop, and we service the local population as well as doing our own chickens. The CFIA, which is federal, does some of the inspecting and regulation, whereas some of it is also done on a provincial level. It's quite confusing.

Often we have questions and issues, and you're right: We do get handed off a lot from one to the other. It's quite difficult to navigate that space.

I'm not sure if I'm answering the question, but it is part of bureaucracy.

Tamara Kronis: You're dead centre on the target.

One thing I'd like to invite you to do is to make some supplementary submissions on that to the committee, because no one should need a Ph.D. and the British North America Act to get anything done in this country, and farmers are among the people who really do need that.

I want to ask another question before I turn the rest of my time over to my colleague.

There is also a tension in the country between food that has to travel long distances and food that's produced locally. Do you think we do enough to measure how much food is being produced close enough to where Canadians actually live?

Tim Livingstone: No, I don't. I think there's a lot of greenwashing that goes on.

In our case, we have a very loyal customer base and lots of them, and they want to buy local. Where it gets very grey is what you get in the grocery store. As I said, 80% of people buy there. If it comes from Canada, that is usually the best option, but you can't really tell where it's coming from. At least in the east, very little of the bulk of produce in the grocery store—the fruits, the berries—actually comes from even east of Quebec.

Tamara Kronis: I'm sorry to cut you off. I want to give my colleague a chance to ask a question as well.

The Chair: You have 45 seconds.

Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Ms. Bercier, I'm going to ask you two questions. If there isn't time, please respond in writing.

With respect to Alto, I'm getting two streams of concerns in my office, one from those in the path, as you've articulated, and one from across the country around the cost.

The minister stated in the House yesterday that 5,500 farms are affected and that there is going to be access supplied to those farms. I've not seen that anywhere in the world for high-speed rail. I'd like your comments on that and on the impacts.

Secondly, I see that SeCan is in your backdrop. They are very much opposed to the closures of agricultural research stations. You're a private enterprise seed breeder and distributor. Can you talk about the importance of agricultural research to the seed industry and to agriculture broadly?

• (1145)

The Chair: I'm sorry. I'm going to have to end it there. There are three seconds left.

I'm going next to Mr. MacDonald.

I want to let folks know that there will be votes. It sounds as though, in about 10 minutes, bells will be ringing. If that's the case, then I'm going to have to ask for unanimous consent to continue working during that time. I'm assuming that folks are going to vote remotely, so when the bells ring, I'll ask for unanimous consent. We'll continue working and do the switch over during the bells.

Once I go past the five minutes and then the two and a half for the Bloc, we'll get unanimous consent, stop, move over and hopefully start five minutes early because we will then go into the votes. We'll stop around 12:20 and go into the votes. Then we'll come back and do the draft instructions, etc. I'll need some help from the committee getting to that point.

Mr. MacDonald, you have five minutes.

Kent MacDonald (Cardigan, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to direct some questions to Mr. Killorn from the P.E.I. Federation of Agriculture.

I'd like to thank you, Donald, for attending today.

I really want to thank the Federation of Agriculture. As you're fully aware, I served as a board member there for many years. It may have been the sounding board for getting me to go further and become a federal member of Parliament.

We know that the federation in P.E.I. serves as a strong voice for producers across all agricultural sectors, but I was particularly interested in your presentation when you mentioned that food security is no longer just about food production, and the part about AgIntel and the agricultural compute strategy. When you represent a riding, as I do, where agriculture remains the cornerstone of the economy, you see the potential in technologies that improve productivity, reduce costs and obviously try to strengthen food security. In the meantime, we have to ensure that farmers continue to own farms and that their data is their data.

Can you speak to why it's important that we have sovereignty over our Canadian data in agriculture rather than have it owned by foreign platforms?

Donald Killorn: Thank you for that question.

It's great to have you here. You were really tough on me as a board member, so it's nice to have you out of my hair. We were in your riding yesterday. I wasn't, but my team was on the roof at R.A. Rose & Sons, installing an AgIntel antenna, and I was in town getting a haircut. We expect that will save them about \$70 an acre this year, and the data will never leave their control.

That's really where this project started. Farmers are not willing to implement precision agriculture. It's so data-intensive that they won't implement it unless they know their data will be secure as an asset for the farm. That was an idea that emerged prior to artificial intelligence becoming such a concern or an opportunity. Now that it's taking place and people are asking ChatGPT or Claude what they should do and how they should do it, we can't lose the sovereignty and control over that data.

As the AI strategy starts to filter out and as you hear about the importance of health and health data, I would argue that agricultural data is equally important to the sovereignty of our economy and certainly of our food security. There's a path forward where we can deliver the value, the business risk management and the food security. It requires an investment in technology and in digital infrastructure, and it will ensure our national sovereignty, our food sovereignty, our national security and our food security.

Much the same as that we don't want to send Canadian chickpeas away and buy marked-up chickpea pasta, our data has to be value added at home. We have to process our data at home. It has to be an asset owned by the farmer. It can't be an asset owned by a large, multinational corporation and have the value add of that data be sold back to the farmer at a significant markup. We have to take a grassroots approach to this, and only then can we leverage these new-found technologies into increased food security.

• (1150)

Kent MacDonald: Thank you, Donald.

Can you also speak to how having this data on the farm...? You talked about the Roses up east putting in an antenna—for lack of a better term.

Donald Killorn: That's what it was, yes.

Kent MacDonald: How will this help farms as a tool for business risk management?

Donald Killorn: I really think that's the most exciting part about it. As we get into the serious business of the next policy framework for agriculture, it's clear that, at the national scale, business risk management is going to be the debate. We hear about the problems, but we don't hear a lot about solutions. We hear that it's slow, backward-looking and blind to the challenges of climate change. My understanding is that 40% of AgriStability payments come in over eight months after the program year ends.

Our vision for business risk management and data infrastructure has parametric insurance, best practices, climate best practices, support for business risk management and rewards for farmers when they create more resilience. If we could go back and take a moment before the second round of OFCAF began, we could have done quite a bit with that money to further these goals.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Donald Killorn: BRM is going to require a huge investment in on-farm data.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next, we'll go to the Bloc Québécois for two and a half minutes.

Kent MacDonald: Thanks, Donald.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Bercier, I was very affected by your testimony and your vision of agriculture.

There is an article in *Le Droit* about your business, the fact that you sell green manures and its importance to the resilience of your farm. Your spouse is quoted in the article. He mentions a practice in Quebec where you get a refund if you present a bill for green manure seeds.

Would that kind of practice hasten the transition to more resilient farms? Ultimately, is it possible that the more the government is involved in initiatives that lower prices for producers, such as local distribution, the more food security and affordability for consumers will increase?

Karine Bercier: Absolutely. That's right.

I would say that we've seen a huge increase in green manure sales in the last five years or so. Year after year, it's going up. That's very encouraging because, especially in recent years, we thought that the economy and tight margins would dictate that farmers would invest less in green manures precisely because it's something they could cut from their budget. Like it or not, when you apply green manure, it's a long-term investment. You don't automatically see the benefits of green manure the next year. It's really long term.

However, I must say that, in recent years, we have been encouraged, both in Ontario and in Quebec. That said, much more sophisticated green manures are sold in Quebec, precisely because of the provincial subsidy that farmers receive. It encourages them to invest in their soils and enrich them to provide higher yields in future years. Investing in green manure definitely leads to resilience and benefits future generations.

Also, it would be great to have a program. There is a federal program to encourage people to apply green manure, but it is a bit

complicated and the maximum amount people can get is \$20,000, I think. Again, it's a system where you have to set up an environmental plan. It's a bit complicated. It also operates on a first-come, first-served basis.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

• (1155)

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you.

Karine Bercier: However, if we could encourage the use of green manures more at the federal level, that would be great.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

What we're going to do is suspend for a few minutes in order to get the next panel up. We need to get them up as soon as possible because if the bells start while we're suspended, we'll be stuck for half an hour without being able to do the work.

Thank you to our witnesses. We'll suspend for a few minutes.

• (1155)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1200)

The Chair: Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, September 18, the committee is resuming its study on food security in the face of global instability.

I'd like to welcome our witnesses joining us here today.

I assure you that it will be quiet in a few minutes.

From the Community Food Sharing Association Inc., we have Fred Marshall and Tina Bishop. From Moisson Estrie, we have Christian Bibeau, general manager. From Prince Edward Island Potato Board, we have Greg Donald and Krista Shaw.

Thank you to each and every one of you for being here today and joining us. We do appreciate it.

We will start with five-minute deputations by our witnesses.

Actually, I'll go through a couple of the rules here. Please wait until I recognize you or until a member directly asks you a question. For those participating by video conference, click the microphone icon to activate your mic. Please mute yourself when you're not speaking. For those on Zoom, select the appropriate channel for interpretation. Committee members may ask questions in either French or English, so please adjust your interpretation to the right channel.

Of course, we want to make sure that all participants 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. There's a card with a QR code for a short awareness video, if you need more information.

We will start online with the Prince Edward Island Potato Board.

You have five minutes.

Krista Shaw (Director of Stakeholder Relations, Prince Edward Island Potato Board): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and honourable members. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as part of your work to strengthen food security in the face of global instability.

My name is Krista Shaw. I'm the director of stakeholder relations at the Prince Edward Island Potato Board. I'm joined today by our general manager, Greg Donald.

Food security is no longer a future concern. It's a national priority directly tied to Canada's economic stability, sovereignty and resilience. Around the world, supply chain disruptions, geopolitical conflict, protectionism, climate pressures and economic uncertainty are reshaping how countries approach food production and access. At the same time, the number of farms in Canada, including in P.E.I., continues to decline.

If Canada wants a secure and resilient food system, food security must become a central lens in all federal decision-making. This is no longer simply an agricultural issue; it is a matter of national security. Canada is fortunate to have some of the most skilled, innovative and environmentally responsible growers in the world, yet producers face mounting pressures, including persistent inflation, rising input costs, labour shortages, market volatility, declining margins and increasingly severe weather events. Farmers are being asked to produce more with fewer resources while continuing to invest in new technologies to promote sustainability. Every farmer who leaves the industry represents a significant loss to Canada's economy and food-producing capacity. Government must do everything possible to protect this vital sector.

One clear example is the delay in product and application approvals through the pesticides regulatory directorate, formerly the PMRA. These delays place Canadian agriculture at a competitive disadvantage and limit our ability to respond to evolving challenges. Timely access to safe, federally approved crop protection tools, precision technologies and modern application methods, such as drone applicators, are essential to managing crop risks, adapting to weather pressures, improving productivity and reducing environmental impact. Canadian farmers cannot fall behind global competitors in accessing the tools they need to remain productive and sustainable.

Innovation is critical to both sustainability and food security. New technologies allow growers to produce more food with fewer resources and lower environmental impact. In P.E.I., increasingly hot and dry conditions have made irrigation a necessity rather than an option. Modern storage facilities and advanced packing technologies are also essential to maintaining crop quality and reducing waste. However, shrinking margins are forcing many growers to

choose between taking on additional debt to modernize or leaving the industry altogether. Access to capital investment programs for all sizes of farming operations will be essential to maintaining a secure domestic food supply.

Canada's regulatory and trade bodies must also recognize the real-world impacts of their decisions on interprovincial trade, export competitiveness and international partnerships. P.E.I., a province of roughly 180,000 people, grows enough potatoes to feed 25 million people. Canadian growers depend on reliable access to domestic and international markets. Regulatory decisions must be made with a practical business lens that supports competitiveness and strong trading relationships.

Canadian farmers are resilient. They adapt, innovate and continue moving forward despite the immense pressures they face—

• (1205)

The Chair: I'm sorry. I have to interrupt for one second. I apologize, Ms. Shaw, for interrupting. I'll just stop your time here for a second.

The bells are going, so a vote has been called. It's a 30-minute bell, so the vote will be at 12:37. It will take us 10 minutes to vote, so we'll be gone probably until 12:47 or 12:50.

I need a motion from the committee to continue working now. I'm seeking unanimous consent.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: That's good. We can continue.

I'm going to work out the math here, because we do need to do the drafting instructions. We've delayed this since last week, and I don't know if we're going to have time to do that. I'll try to figure that out with the clerk now, but we'll continue now.

I'll get back to you. We may have to adjust the time a little bit.

Go ahead, Ms. Shaw. You still have one minute and 20 seconds.

Krista Shaw: Thank you. I'll just restart this last paragraph.

Canadian farmers are resilient. They adapt, innovate and continue moving forward despite immense pressures, but resilience alone cannot carry the burden. Growers need policies, regulatory systems, trade frameworks and investment programs that support innovation, modernization and global competitiveness and that put the business of food production first, not last.

Canadian farmers already excel at producing safe, sustainable food. They should be focused on growing that food, not questioning whether they can survive the next season, because, in the face of global instability, the countries that remain strongest will be those capable of feeding themselves and feeding the world.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Next, we'll go to the Community Food Sharing Association Inc. for five minutes.

Tina Bishop (Executive Director, Community Food Sharing Association Inc.): Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee, thank you for the invitation to appear before you today as part of your study on food security in the face of global instability. As your letter notes, this study focuses on strengthening local food production and processing, reducing environmental footprints and supporting local purchasing initiatives. These are priorities that deeply reflect the realities we face in Newfoundland and Labrador.

My name is Tina Bishop. I serve as the general manager of the Community Food Sharing Association, the provincial hub for food banking in Newfoundland and Labrador. We support a network of more than 60 food banks across the province, from remote coastal communities to urban centres. We see first-hand how global instability translates into local hardship.

Food insecurity in our province is shaped by three intersecting pressures.

The first is geography. Many communities rely on long, weather-dependent supply chains. When global instability disrupts transportation or availability, our shelves feel it immediately.

The second is cost of living. Food cost inflation hits harder in Newfoundland and Labrador, where prices are already amongst the highest in the country.

The third is limited local production. Newfoundland and Labrador imports roughly 90% of its food. Any global shock—economic, environmental or geopolitical—becomes a local crisis.

Your motion notes that consumer demand for locally produced food has reached unprecedented levels and that Canada has fallen significantly in agri-food capital investment. These challenges are magnified in Newfoundland and Labrador, where local production capacity is small but community willingness is strong.

One community-driven solution is the Sowing Seeds—Growing Community partnership. While large-scale structural change is essential, I want to highlight one partnership that demonstrates what is possible when community organizations, volunteers and local leaders work together to strengthen food security. The Sowing Seeds—Growing Community partnership is an initiative that brings together community groups, growers, volunteers and local leaders to expand community gardening; increase access to fresh, locally grown produce; build skills in growing, harvesting and food prepara-

tion; and strengthen local food systems in a province with short growing seasons and limited arable land.

We are grateful for the recent grant from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, which is helping us expand and stabilize the Sowing Seeds—Growing Community program. This federal investment is enabling new community growing spaces, increased production of fresh produce for food banks, training and engagement opportunities that build long-term food skills, and greater resilience in local food access during periods of global instability. This support is a concrete example of how federal investment can empower community-led innovation and directly advance the committee's focus on strengthening local food production and processing, from northern and remote communities to urban centres. It also demonstrates that innovation in food security is not only technological but also social. It is about empowering communities to grow together, even in challenging climates.

There are also infrastructure challenges. While community partnerships are essential, our ability to distribute food efficiently across the province is limited by a critical challenge. The Community Food Sharing Association has outgrown its current facility. Our warehouse was never designed to meet today's scale of need. We are facing insufficient storage capacity for dry goods and perishables, limited refrigeration and freezer space, inadequate loading and distribution infrastructure, and no room to expand programming, training or community initiatives. In a province where supply chains are fragile and weather-dependent, a modern, climate-resilient food distribution centre is not a luxury; it is essential infrastructure.

• (1210)

A new purpose-built facility would strengthen provincial food security, improve emergency response capacity, support local food procurement and processing, reduce waste, increase efficiency and expand our ability to store and distribute fresh, locally grown produce.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're running out of time, so I have to stop at five minutes.

I'll turn it over to Moisson Estrie and Christian Bibeau for five minutes.

[Translation]

Christian Bibeau (General Manager, Moisson Estrie): Good afternoon, and thank you for having me here today.

My name is Christian Bibeau, and I am the general manager of the Moisson Estrie food bank in Sherbrooke, Quebec.

Food security refers to the ability of a population to have stable, sufficient and affordable access to nutritious food. In Canada, security is increasingly influenced by global instability.

The international factors that undermine the food supply include wars and trade tensions, climate events, rising energy and transportation costs, and dependence on imports.

Wars in the Middle East and Ukraine, as well as the current geopolitical tensions, are having serious effects on the food security of Canadian households. We're also seeing the effects of the tariffs imposed by the United States and the growing number of trade conflicts involving China and Europe, in particular. This global reality has a major impact on the Canadian government's ability to act while budgets focus substantially on the military industry rather than food security.

The cost of living in general and, specifically, the financial burden of finding and living in adequate housing are among the direct consequences of conflicts and wars. Also, the cost of food is increasing and grocery baskets are getting smaller. Farm businesses are undermined by the energy and input costs needed for production.

The climate issue also has major material and human and financial consequences as forest fires, droughts, floods and other events erode the overall health of our communities. This forces our governments to take costly emergency measures that harm public finances, which has a trickle-down effect, reducing the investments needed to facilitate and promote access to sufficient quantities of healthy food for the public.

In short, despite a significant amount of farmland and a strong bio-food sector, Canada remains at the mercy of situations beyond its political and diplomatic control and capacity.

There are solutions: having a strong, confident and bold commitment to replace imports, where possible, through ambitious food self-sufficiency policies; promoting access to land and decisively funding the next generation of farmers; putting an end to farmland speculation; taking action to be better prepared to face the consequences of climate change; funding, along with the provinces, the purchase of Canadian food and implementing a bold bio-food policy; and implementing attractive tax measures to encourage reclaiming food that is fit for human consumption.

Lastly, we need to do everything we can to significantly reduce food waste.

Food waste is a major economic, social and environmental issue in Canada and affects the entire food chain, from farm to table. Canada is the biggest food waster in North America and the second biggest in the G7. Each household throws out an average of 140 kilos of food each year, a loss of approximately \$1,300.

According to a 2024 study by Second Harvest, Canada's largest food rescue organization, 46% of all food in Canada is wasted every year; 41% of that waste is avoidable and is worth \$58 billion. Best-before dates are responsible for 23% of avoidable food waste, which contributes to greenhouse gas emissions to the tune of about 25.7 metric tons per year, or the equivalent of 253,000 flights from Toronto to Vancouver.

Back home, we have a small but very concrete project called Viande solidaire, which seeks to reclaim and upcycle meat from compromised animals in order to support organizations involved in the fight against food insecurity. The project objectives are to reduce food waste, offer a new path for producers by providing an additional option for some compromised animals, support local communities by supplying them with meat and give food aid organizations in our region access to more animal protein.

When an animal can no longer be processed in the usual commercial channels, producers can choose to send it to the Viande solidaire project so that the meat can feed the community. Otherwise, the producer has to basically dispose of the animal, which amounts to a net loss for them and also, obviously, for the community as a whole.

● (1215)

Generally speaking, when an agricultural producer donates food to a registered charity in Canada—

[English]

The Chair: Hold on for a second, sir. I think we lost interpretation there for a second.

Kent MacDonald: The sound quality...

The Chair: We lost the sound quality as well.

The five minutes are exhausted, but what I'll do is give you an extra 20 seconds just to wrap up, considering there was a bit of disturbance at the end. Maybe you can try again and we can see if the quality has restored itself.

[Translation]

Christian Bibeau: The Canadian government offers a 100% tax benefit to a producer for a protein, animal or food donation. In Quebec, the tax deduction is 150% under certain conditions. Adopting the same measure across Canada would certainly make it possible to promote donation, combat food waste and help feed our communities.

● (1220)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much. Thank you for your patience.

Folks, what time is the vote?

Dave Epp: It's in 16 minutes. Can we ask questions?

The Chair: If we have 16 minutes, why don't we do the first round? We'll do five, five and five. Is that okay?

Let's do the first round. My hope is to suspend while we vote and then come back and finish, using the last 14 minutes, hopefully.

Dave Epp: Is that for drafting or questions?

The Chair: It's for questions. We'll push the drafting to next week.

We go now to Mr. Epp for five minutes.

Dave Epp: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses.

I will give the blame to the P.E.I. Potato Board for installing the earworm into my head "ketchup loves potatoes". I'm off to the World Processing Tomato Congress this weekend. Your involvement with the World Potato Congress is very important in putting Canada's place in the world...

You talked about the importance of trading arrangements domestically and internationally. What happens if Canada doesn't get a deal at CUSMA? One hundred and sixty ag groups from across three countries have emphasized the importance of that trade deal. Can you talk about the importance to P.E.I.?

Greg Donald (General Manager, Prince Edward Island Potato Board): Most certainly.

Thank you very much, by the way, for the opportunity today.

For our business, our fresh business in particular, half is in Canada and the other half is in the U.S. That's a significant portion of our fresh business. If I combine our frozen processed business that goes to the U.S., it would represent about half of our production. We are in the process of gaining access to the Mexican market as well so, to say the least, a trade deal that will ensure uninterrupted business with both of those partners is essential.

Dave Epp: Thank you.

P.E.I. was historically a large seed potato exporter, yet the data shows that P.E.I. is now a net seed potato importer. Has the minister met yet with the seed potato industry?

Where is P.E.I. from a seed potato export perspective?

Greg Donald: We've had had several meetings with the federal minister. He's my member of Parliament as well and obviously the minister. Seed is still is about 8% of our... Historically it's about 10% of our production on P.E.I. Most of that production stays right here in P.E.I. To this point, there hasn't been any change in the ministerial order that would allow seed potatoes to leave P.E.I.

Dave Epp: You talked about how P.E.I.'s farm incomes fell dramatically last year. Obviously, drought was a part of that. What are the other factors going on there? There are input costs, I assume, and also the importance of BRM programming.

Greg Donald: Absolutely, yes. With the drought last year, for many farms their yield was down 30% or 40%. There was uncertainty around tariffs, costs, labour and the list goes on. That was re-

flected in, I think, overall farm net incomes, which were down 30%. It was a disaster last season.

Dave Epp: This study is particularly on food security, and a part of that is food input security. P.E.I. is an island. Three major inputs from a fertilizer perspective are nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. That's the same for agriculture across Canada. Where do P.E.I.'s nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium come from?

Greg Donald: Krista might know specifically. I used to be in that business. These days I'm not an expert, but the vast majority of our fertilizer comes in on vessels, on ships, obviously because of where we're located and essentially from all over the world. Any changes in that supply or tariffs significantly impact our costs here in Prince Edward Island and, quite frankly, I think, right across the country.

Dave Epp: Yes, you're absolutely correct. Canada should be a net nitrogen exporter, yet we're a net nitrogen importer, particularly in eastern Canada. Obviously now we're starting to use Saskatchewan potash because we're the world's largest exporter of potash, yet historically that's come from overseas because of our lack of east-west transportation infrastructure.

What I want to particularly focus on is phosphorus. Going ahead, in terms of input security, the world's phosphorus sources—Florida, Morocco, Jordan and Saudi Arabia—are not, particularly now, the most stable places for that to come from. What would be your comments, particularly on phosphorus?

● (1225)

Greg Donald: Yes, we're very concerned about the cost of that product going forward. You didn't mention it, but sulphur is a critical component in the manufacturing of diammonium phosphate, and I believe what's going on in the Middle East is having a significant impact on that ingredient.

We're very concerned about nitrogen, but I think we need to be every bit as concerned not only about the price but the supply of phosphorus.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

I'm going to go now to the Liberals for five minutes.

Go ahead, Mr. Connors.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for coming out today. I want to start with the Community Food Sharing Association.

We're studying food security. What would be your definition of food security?

Tina Bishop: Food security is not necessarily always about food. There are a number of things. Income is basically the root of food insecurity in our province. People just don't have the resources to be able to purchase the food they need. We're seeing income levels at low rates, increased housing costs in our province and increased food costs, and that's all related to the number of people who are having to visit food banks in our province.

Last year, we had 185,000 visits to food banks throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. That's a number of rising demand that we've never seen in the history of food banking in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Paul Connors: We just heard another witness talk about food waste.

What is the situation in Newfoundland and Labrador concerning food waste, and do you think there are ways that it could be improved?

Tina Bishop: Food waste in Newfoundland and Labrador is certainly a concern for us. We try to do as much recovery of food as possible. We work with partners throughout the province, local grocery stores, retailers and farmers, to be able to recover as much product as we can. If we had the resources to be able to store that product and take those perishable items that are getting too close to their expiry dates, we could take that food and then transform it into other foods and other products that could be used for food banks throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

Paul Connors: Do you know of any limitations that would stop you from being able to do that?

Tina Bishop: The only limitation we have right now is our facility. The facility that we have is just not suitable. We don't have the space. We don't have the freezer space or cooler space, and we don't have the commercial kitchen that would be required to be able to do that kind of work.

Paul Connors: You distribute all across Newfoundland and Labrador. It's a vast area that you distribute to. You mentioned it in your opening remarks.

Could you give us a little bit more detail on what goes out and to how many communities?

Tina Bishop: We have food banks strategically placed throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, right from St. John's out to Port aux Basques, up the northern peninsula and all the way into Labrador.

We have a very large geographical area that we serve with 60 food banks in total serving numerous communities throughout the province. We still have some areas that are underserved. We'd like to be able to offer food bank services in those communities, and that's something that we're continuously working on.

One of our plans is to have a mobile food bank to be able to get into some of these smaller communities so that people can access the food they need.

Paul Connors: If there was one suggestion you could make to improve food security in Newfoundland and Labrador, what would it be?

• (1230)

Tina Bishop: Federal leadership in all of this is essential. Food security is tied to a lot of national issues, like affordability, income supports, supply chain stability and northern and rural access. All of this, with sustained commitments from the federal leadership on these programs, would help with food security in our province and, I'm sure, across Canada.

Paul Connors: Thank you.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Paul Connors: Quickly, what partnerships have you built with local producers and farmers in Newfoundland and Labrador to assist with food security?

Tina Bishop: We've just partnered with Reverend Marshall on his program, Sowing Seeds-Growing Community.

Reverend Marshall could speak a little about that.

Fred Marshall (Board Chair, Community Food Sharing Association Inc.): With very little time and an investment of less than \$1,000, we were able to put food on 10,000 plates in each of the last two years.

The Chair: Thank you.

The vote is probably going to happen in a few minutes.

MP Lemire, we'll add on the time we don't use afterwards.

Next, we have five minutes for the Bloc.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Bibeau, I found your testimony exceptional and well structured. You are proposing concrete solutions. Thank you for that.

Food banks and the various Moisson organizations across Quebec are providing a concrete solution. They're part of the solution. We know that students and seniors are relying on them more and more. Newcomers with whom the moral contract has been broken are turning to food banks more and more. Thank you for your daily work on this issue.

I had Food Banks Canada representatives in my office. I had a very interesting discussion with your colleagues from Gatineau and Mauricie. I visited organizations, along with my fantastic Lynda and my team. I also visited Ressourcerie Bernard-Hamel in Rouyn-Noranda, Abitibi-Témiscamingue, which does incredible work. They all told me about the importance of expanding their premises. In fact, everyone has plans to expand their premises. I suspect that must also be the case for your organization in the Eastern Townships.

Unfortunately, federal funding is not available. That was the case four or five years ago when I helped these people try to find a new space to move into. We turned to the local food infrastructure fund, which isn't adapted to food banks like yours. It allows for necessary expansion, but the production aspects included in the criteria are not suitable for food banks.

Should we review the program or make a new one? How can we finance the expansion of food banks? The need is there. You are the most concrete solution on the ground to prevent people from going hungry.

Christian Bibeau: There's no silver bullet. Across Canada, there are very significant infrastructure challenges. Obviously, if we can increase the envelopes used to help these organizations acquire the necessary infrastructure, that will be a major step forward.

Food Banks Canada's network is very structured, as is Quebec's, for that matter, and that of all the provinces. If we work with Food Banks Canada, it will be easier to reach organizations where they live. These are organizations that are accredited, credible and transparent in their operations. It could be very reassuring for a government to do business with the organizations in the Food Banks Canada network or, in our case, Banques alimentaires du Québec.

The issue, as we see it, is this: Can Canada afford to let 46% of all food produced be wasted? Isn't \$58 billion dollars' worth of wasted food enough of an argument to put the necessary resources into it?

There are many grand ideas and solutions, but sometimes the simplest solutions are the ones that produce the best results. Food waste in Canada can be combatted with a variety of simple solutions that can be implemented in each community with the help of the Canadian government to support us. We need solutions that will also enable us to get the food we need to feed people.

The project I was talking about a little earlier offers a worthwhile incentive for producers, for agricultural businesses. It's the tax deduction. In Quebec, if an agricultural business donates an animal, such as a cow, pig or chicken, through the Viande solidaire project, its tax deduction is 150%. If the same measure were adopted across Canada, it could encourage producers to donate this meat, which would otherwise be wasted, and turn it into an invaluable resource. Millions of kilos of food could be distributed in the interest of solidarity.

• (1235)

Sébastien Lemire: I congratulate you on your initiative. It is certainly worth encouraging and supporting.

Another aspect, as you know and mentioned, is the effect of expiry dates on waste.

There's also FoodHero, which I learned about at Ressourcerie. There are also the Liquidation Marie grocery stores, for example, which make a difference because products are sold at a lower price rather than being donated to food banks. That has a major impact on what can be redistributed to the people who need it most.

Also, it is more efficient for the government to go through you than to hand out a vote-seeking cheque that, in many cases, meets a very specific need but does not have the same impact.

I would like to know what other solutions there are to meet your needs in terms of the quantity of meat, in particular. What solutions are there for reclaiming products from supermarkets?

You talked about a tax credit. That affects you. I'd like to hear your opinion.

[English]

The Chair: You have seven seconds.

[Translation]

Christian Bibeau: We're going to do everything we can. That is our job, and we are committed to keep doing it.

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. Thank you so much.

At this point, we have five seconds before the vote's going to be called. I will suspend.

I hope our witnesses can wait 10 minutes, please, while we vote. I want to get one more round of questions in, if possible.

If you don't mind, we'll suspend for 10 to 12 minutes, and we'll be right back.

Thank you so much.

• (1235)

(Pause)

• (1245)

The Chair: I know that we'll get the results of the vote soon, but I was hoping that we could just go into the second round, with five minutes, five minutes and two and a half minutes, and then we'll call it a day.

We'll start with the Conservatives for five minutes.

Mr. Bexte, go ahead.

David Bexte (Bow River, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

Welcome, colleagues.

I appreciate the witnesses' being here today.

For the P.E.I. potato growers, you made some comments about PMRA and products for plant health or for pesticide purposes. I've introduced a private member's bill, called Bill C-273, the FARM act. It's directed at improving the regulatory circumstances for importing products into Canada from trusted jurisdictions and establishing a regime of these trusted jurisdictions so we could establish a 90-day process to grant a provisional licence.

We know that it takes up to six years to get new products registered in Canada, and at great expense. Even more importantly, there are a lot of products that just simply don't come to Canada because we're a relatively small market, and the manufacturers and inventors of these products will not bear the cost of registering, repeating and duplicating testing. I wonder whether you could comment at all on this.

How important is this to your industry? How important is it to enshrine it in legislation, as opposed to relying on provisions of Bill C-30 to just consider economics in their decision-making?

• (1250)

Greg Donald: Thank you for the question.

I think the question was, how do we feel about that, or what's the impact? It's costing us money, which hurts our competitiveness. It also increases the costs and, potentially, ultimately, the price of food to consumers.

The other thing I might add is that in Canada, the PMRA—I know it has a new name—requires both efficacy and health, safety and environmental data for registration. In the U.S., they don't require efficacy information, and that is also a major hurdle in Canada. Whether a product works well or not should be left up to the marketplace. We definitely support what you're proposing.

David Bexte: Do you have a list ready? I don't mean ready, but what would the top three things be that you wish you could have for your industry in P.E.I. but are not available right now?

Greg Donald: Do you mean crop protectants in particular?

David Bexte: Yes.

Greg Donald: I'd have to get back to you on that.

David Bexte: Okay.

Greg Donald: Definitely, there's the use of drones for applications. I don't understand.... It has been available in the U.S. for two years. I know that's not a particular product, but why is it that we're not able to use drones in Canada yet?

David Bexte: I appreciate that.

There was a report today in The Western Producer that, actually, in an international comparison survey, the delay or the time it takes in Canada to get products approved is 11.7 years. This is worse than just about every other country on the globe. Could you comment a bit on this for us?

Canada still maintains a 35% tariff on fertilizer imports, and there are alternatives in Canada. What would you like to see the Government of Canada do? They should drop the tariffs to zero because, especially in places like P.E.I., which are far from western Canada and sources of fertilizer, they rely on imported fertilizers.

Greg Donald: We agree. We very much support dropping the tariffs because it's essentially making us....

As Krista said earlier, we produce enough potatoes here to feed 25 million people their annual potato needs. We're already far from the market, so we have a lot of things that we have to overcome. The cost of production is, obviously, very important. Our competitors in other jurisdictions have access to fertilizer products at much lower costs, so we would definitely like to see those tariffs removed.

David Bexte: Would you say it's a very self-defeating program to have these tariffs in place?

Greg Donald: Absolutely.

David Bexte: How does it materially affect your competitiveness?

Greg Donald: As I said, we have only 180,000 people on P.E.I., so we have to export our product, not only throughout our own country but to the U.S. and other markets around the world, at great distances. Our cost of production is a significant factor, so if we have to pay more money for fertilizer, obviously it's going to be hard to compete against areas where they don't pay those tariffs.

• (1255)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Next, we'll go to MP Dandurand of the Liberals for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for being with us to tell us about their reality in terms of food uncertainty. It's very important. I also thank them for their work.

I'm going to direct my questions to Mr. Bibeau, whom I know well, as he works with agricultural producers and vulnerable people in my region.

Mr. Bibeau, that was some powerful testimony. I was watching my colleagues' reactions, and I saw that they were distressed by the statistics you shared with us. One of the things you said was that 46% of food in Canada is wasted.

You talked about a few initiatives to improve things. Could you tell us more about that? Do you have any other ideas to help us reduce food waste?

Christian Bibeau: Yes, the numbers are staggering. I would remind you that these figures are from a 2024 study conducted by Second Harvest, a Canada-wide organization. This issue is very serious and very concerning.

We're going to put other initiatives in place. For example, we want to establish a relationship with produce growers in order to recover ugly produce, the vegetables that produce growers can't sell on the regular commercial market. Again, that's a direct loss to farmers. We're going to carry out the same project for berry production, including blueberries, strawberries and raspberries. We're going to salvage the berries that would otherwise stay on the bush or fall to the ground. In other words, they would be wasted.

Among all the people we meet every year, including meat, vegetable and berry producers, I have never met anyone who was proud of wasting food. On the contrary, producers in Canada and Quebec are proud to feed their communities and do their important work. Upcycling products that would otherwise become losses for these people is also a way of recognizing the essential work they do every day to feed communities.

As far as the 150% tax deduction I mentioned earlier is concerned, it is not a silver bullet. However, it is a concrete solution for producers, for valuing their work, for recognizing what they do and for ensuring that food waste is reduced and redistributed to the people who need it.

Marianne Dandurand: There are two categories: there are vegetable farmers, whose produce remains in the fields, and there are meat producers, whose meat is not consumed. What distinction should we make? Does the tax credit apply in the same way? Do producers have the same need to ensure these products aren't wasted? I don't think the situation is the same for someone who leaves vegetables in the field as it is for someone who sends an animal to the slaughterhouse.

Christian Bibeau: You're right. There is obviously a distinction to be made between the two. Agricultural businesses that produce pork, poultry or beef, for example, often have infrastructure and operating methods that enable them to generate revenue, among other things. For these businesses, the tax deduction is very important.

For vegetable growers or berry growers, we often develop projects that provide compensation to these producers in order to give their products direct monetary value, since the tax deduction is less significant given that their income is lower. So it works on two levels.

What's important to us is to recover these food items and find the right approach.

Marianne Dandurand: I think the issue of labour also comes into play.

Christian Bibeau: This is indeed a challenge that exists in the agricultural sector as well as elsewhere. One of the areas we're focusing on is mobilizing communities, schools, businesses and citizens. We want them to lend a hand in the fields by volunteering their time to support producers, thereby helping them reduce their

production costs. What's more, it's a fully fledged community activity.

• (1300)

Marianne Dandurand: Thank you, Mr. Bibeau. I think that's all the time I had. Thank you for being here.

Christian Bibeau: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Bibeau, I'd like to continue with you, because I think it's important to discuss issues that highlight just how much food banks like yours are part of the solution. I want to put this into a broader perspective—namely, that programs are becoming less and less suited to the reality of people on the ground. We know that the profile of people seeking food assistance has changed dramatically. One in five people has a job. People are turning to food banks because rents are now too high.

We can pour billions of dollars into building housing, but the reality is that it will take time to get it done. In the meantime, people are feeling the impact of all this and are turning more and more to food banks.

What steps should be taken, in the very short term and the medium term, to reduce wealth disparities and reestablish an adequate social safety net?

Christian Bibeau: I reiterate that, in the very short term, combatting food waste—recovering the millions of kilograms of food lying idle in our fields or not being used to feed people—is a solution within the reach of Canada and the provinces. These are things we can do at the local, provincial and national levels. In my opinion, we have all the tools we need to take decisive action in this direction. Beyond that, we obviously need to support the construction of public housing. This is very important so that people can reduce the burden of rent on their income or their expenses.

There is also the issue of education to consider. How can we do that? First, we need to relearn how to cook. Second, education can help people escape poverty and, therefore, avoid falling into the cycle of poverty. Education gives people access to better-paying jobs.

Finally, there's the issue of supporting people, and that's what we're doing. Minimum-wage workers with children unfortunately have to rely on food banks from time to time.

Sébastien Lemire: I want to congratulate you on this. You're playing an important leadership role in this area. That's also the case at the Ressourcerie, here at our organization. Thank you for your commitment. I think your solutions will be studied with great interest.

Christian Bibeau: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much. That concludes our meeting.

I will put in a request to take half of our next meeting, hopefully, for the draft instructions.

MP Chatel.

[*Translation*]

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

In response to my colleagues, the committee invited the minister to the June 18 meeting. If the House of Commons is not in session

at that time, we will invite him during the first two weeks after Parliament reconvenes in September.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much for that update. Are there any questions?

I'd like to thank our witnesses for their patience today and for their commitment to agriculture, a great sector in Canada. Also, thank you for travelling from Newfoundland to join us here today.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

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