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Chair

Mr. Pat Finnigan

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

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• (0845)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.)): Welcome, everyone.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we will commence our study on mental health challenges that Canadian farmers, ranchers, and producers face.

We welcome this morning the following witnesses: Mr. Alain d'Amours, the General Director of Contact Richelieu-Yamaska, Mr. Martin Caron, First Vice-president of the Union des producteurs agricoles, and Mr. Pierre-Nicolas Girard, a mental health consultant who will be talking to us via video link.

Mr. Girard, can you hear me?

Mr. Pierre-Nicolas Girard (Consultant in Mental Health, Union des producteurs agricoles): Loud and clear.

Hello everyone.

The Chair: Hello.

Each of you will have the floor for six minutes and I will be watching the clock.

Let's start with Mr. Caron.

Mr. Martin Caron (First Vice-President, Union des producteurs agricoles): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and members of the committee.

I will speak first and then it will be Mr. Girard's turn.

I will start by quickly describing what is the UPA, the Union des producteurs agricoles. The UPA represents 41,406 farmers and 30,000 forestry producers in Quebec. Our network is comprised of 12 regional federations as well as 26 affiliated or specialized groups.

Psychological distress is a real problem in the farming sector, indeed it is a huge problem. The ever-increasing need for investments and the heavy regulatory burden are some of the many factors at play.

Farmers are grappling with financial uncertainty. I believe everyone here knows about the ongoing NAFTA negotiations, which will have repercussions. Another source of distress is the lack of workers, as well as finding a work-life balance with conflicting work and family obligations.

We have to look at the problem holistically and take into account farmers' working conditions. This is very important. The psychosocial and healthcare services that are offered to this group will also have to be adapted.

We are making three sets of recommendations. I will start with the first and then Mr. Girard will talk to you about the two others.

These recommendations are primarily about prevention and are based on socioeconomic factors as well as health promotion measures.

On the prevention front, we recommend programs that will support the transfer of farms to the next generation. This is very important for tax planning purposes, and something must be done.

We propose developing a recruitment and training strategy in order to have a competent workforce, which includes foreign workers.

We also recommend simplifying administrative documents. As you know, the complexity of government programs means that our members are spending more time and energy filling out paperwork. In many instances, people give up.

We also would like to see compensation measures that are tailored to the realities of farming and limit the economic impact of commercial accords on farm business margins.

Moreover, we hope to see a risk management program which would deal with climate change. In Quebec right now, we're suffering from a drought. We need programs that are current and provide help and advice.

Finally, we need a national professional training and support strategy for farmers. These two aspects are also very important.

I would now ask Mr. Girard to continue.

Mr. Pierre-Nicolas Girard: Allow me to introduce myself. I have been with the Union des producteurs agricoles for 47 years, 43 of which as a permanent member. For the last four years I have been working as a consultant on mental health issues.

Over the course of my career, I have regularly seen cases of terrible mental distress and farmers with suicidal thoughts. Sadly, some of these thoughts were put into action. This has been my motivation in continuing my work with the UPA.

Mr. Caron mentioned our three sets of recommendations. We based them on various studies on the farming sector that are available for consultation, should you wish to do so. The main one is *Enquête sur la santé psychologique des producteurs agricoles du Québec*, a study on farmers' mental health conducted in 2016 by Ginette Lafleur and Marie-Alexia Allard. The authors examined 78 cases of farmers who had taken their own lives; more than half had sadly been diagnosed as suffering from mental health problems. We concluded that we must improve access to services and tailor them to farmers, which brings me to our second set of recommendations.

Let's go back to the recommendation on improving psychosocial and healthcare services. The community as well as the healthcare sector have to understand the realities of farming. To that end, we suggest that the Canadian Mental Health Association develop a program for farmers. As you can see, our recommendations are always based on the realities of farming, such as lifestyle, work hours, and the unending pressure on our members to be more productive.

We are also recommending a prevention strategy based on promoting health and a better work-life balance. This year, we have chosen to promote work-life balance. Agriculture is a vocation, and farmers are passionate people who regularly work more than the recommended amount of hours. They are often forced to, of course, but they also do it because of their passion. We seek to promote a better work-life balance for farmers.

Then there's the issue of public healthcare and psychosocial services across Canada. Access to these services is fairly good in our cities and suburbs, but in many regions in Quebec, and I presume elsewhere in Canada, it is quite difficult to get decent services.

• (0850)

The Chair: Mr. Girard, I have to interrupt you unfortunately, because your time has come to an end. Thank you very much.

We now go to Mr. D'Amours, who is representing Contact Richelieu-Yamaska.

Mr. Alain d'Amours (General Director, Contact Richelieu-Yamaska): I will try to be brief.

Mr. Pierre-Nicolas Girard: Could I perhaps speak again during the round of questions?

The Chair: There will indeed be questions and you will have the opportunity to respond.

Mr. Alain d'Amours: Contact Richelieu-Yamaska is a crisis intervention centre serving the entire population. We are in the Saint-Hyacinthe region, which is home to many farmers.

Over the years, the public image of farmers has changed. In the past, they were thought of as people with little education, and later as people with a lot of money. Now, farmers are considered bothersome because their machinery is too slow on the roads. All that to say that the public image of farmers is not very positive, which definitely plays a role in their distress.

Let me give you a few examples of what we see at our crisis intervention centre. When someone calls us, it is because they are at

the end of their rope and are contemplating suicide. People call us to say they can't take it anymore and that death is their only way out.

Consider for example the man who got his arm caught in his machinery. For a farmer, losing an arm is very serious, because they feel they can no longer work. The man went to the hospital and killed himself there. No one was able to intervene. His wife had to come to terms with this, and I worked with her. To top it all off, she could not even attend his burial because she had to milk the cows.

It is a different kind of work, a different world. That is what you have to understand. That is what the public has to understand. That is what the health system has to understand. It is the system that needs to adapt to farmers, and not the other way around. Farmers work a lot. They call us when they can, and we have to answer when they call. We have to help them when they call, help them find other solutions.

Someone told me that his great-great-grandfather had given some land to his great-grandfather, who left it to his grandfather, from whom he inherited it, but he was going to lose it because he had run out of money. Suicide was his only option because there would be insurance money. It is not easy coaxing someone away from the edge of the cliff. This person was going to lose not only his farm, but also his identity, and he would become a failure to his family. That gives you an idea of what we are dealing with.

There are other examples that people do not think of. In our area, we just have volunteer firefighters, and they are often farmers. Someone in Saint-Hyacinthe fell into a manure pit recently and died from it. It was his fellow farmers who pulled him out of the pit. Imagine their shock! They pulled their friend out of a manure pit. Is there a worse way to die? They were in a very sorry state.

All these people go through traumatic events. They need help. We have been able to help them, but we need structures and the resources to meet their needs quickly so we can help them deal with their suffering before their distress is too great. These farmers are hurting and they are often at risk of suicide.

In cases of suicide in farming communities, it is not just the deceased, but everyone around them that suffers. I have talked to farmers' sons and daughters, and it takes a tremendous toll on them. In farming, the father is often seen as the role model and the strong person in the family. The children say that if their father could not tough it out, they would also have to commit suicide since they are weaker than him. It is that self-perception that we have to address in our work. It is difficult. We need to work with the health networks.

Next week, you will be meeting representatives of Au coeur des familles agricoles, an organization we work with. In many cases, we start working with their clients when they become suicidal. We are equipped to do that, we can accommodate them or see them at home; we can support them. Once farmers reach that point, it is borderline. The suicide rate among farmers is 20% to 30% higher than in the rest of the workforce, which proves that it is a different world.

I will stop now so you can ask your questions.

● (0855)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. d'Amours.

[English]

Now, from the University of Guelph, we have Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton.

You have up to six minutes. Thank you.

Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton (Associate Professor, Ontario Veterinary College, University of Guelph):

Thank you for the invitation to speak with you today.

I'm Andria Jones-Bitton. I'm an associate professor at the Ontario Veterinary College at the University of Guelph, and my area of research focus is farmer mental health. I understand that some of you in the room are farmers.

I think we've known about the issues with farmer mental health for generations, but they haven't been talked about because of the culture in agriculture and the taboo in the agricultural community. For various reasons, that's now changing, and the agricultural community is talking.

You now have a prime opportunity to act, because we can't have a sustainable food system in Canada if we don't have sustainable farmers. I genuinely believe the federal government can help strengthen Canadian agriculture, and I would like you to consider three recommendations: one, support a Canadian network for farmer mental health; two, provide a federal funding stream for farmer mental health research; and three, support evidence-based training programs for agriculture and Canada's agricultural and veterinary colleges.

Why do I make these recommendations? Out of growing concerns for our farmers, I conducted a survey of farmer mental health in 2015. This was originally intended to be a small pilot study of Ontario livestock producers, but because of requests from other provinces and other commodities, we extended it nationally. This speaks to the desires of Canada's agricultural community to talk about farmer mental health. The survey measured five mental health outcomes using validated psychometric scales, and over 1,100 farmers from across Canada in all commodity groups participated.

Regrettably, our anecdotal concerns were confirmed. Forty-five per cent of our farmers scored in the high stress category; 58% met the scale's definition for anxiety, and 35% met the definition for depression. Burnout was also a concern in our farmers. Burnout is measured on three subscales: high emotional exhaustion, high cynicism and low professional efficacy. Finally, resilience is a state of being that promotes wellness and decreases the impacts of stress. Unfortunately, two-thirds of our farmers scored lower than the U.S.

general population. This leaves them highly vulnerable to the effects of chronic stress, anxiety, depression and suicide.

Poor mental health in farmers is a concern for the individual farmer, but it extends beyond that. It also impacts farm families, their livestock, their production and their businesses. We don't yet have specific estimates of the impacts of mental health on farming outcomes—this is something my team is working on—but extrapolating from what we do know, we can expect it to limit farm production and be a major barrier to growth and innovation. Canada wants to boost its agricultural exports from \$30 billion to \$50 billion to \$75 billion, and innovative technologies will certainly help with this, but we will absolutely need healthy farmers to achieve this goal.

Poor farmer mental health is also a threat to animal welfare. Our research confirms that farmers who are mentally unwell are often unable to adequately care for their animals, even though this is important to them. Major animal welfare incidents are related to mental illness.

Canada boasts a strong reputation in agriculture, and people like Canada's agricultural brand. We need to support farmer mental health to protect this reputation. We also need to consider the high risks of burnout. Burnout results in high job turnover and poor retention. You've heard farmers complain about the inability to retain good farm help, and younger farmers share doubts about taking over the family farm, because they've watched their parents struggle for years.

We need to increase farmer wellness and resilience. Farmers experience a huge range of stresses, and we won't ever be able to completely eliminate the stresses that farmers experience, but we can help farmers build their resilience to boost their ability to bounce back from challenges and thrive. Resilience is a skill that can be learned, and benefits of wellness include improvements to health, productivity and retention, but we need to make sure that we are providing evidence-informed training programs that work. If there's one thing I've learned from my work with farmers, it's that you usually get one shot, and if we waste farmers' time, we risk not getting them back to the table.

● (0900)

We don't have a national strategy in place for farmer mental health in Canada. This leaves our farmers and our ag sector highly vulnerable. Interest in farmer mental health is growing across Canada. We must avoid duplication of efforts and maximize our resources. A Canadian network for farmer mental health would allow for coordinated efforts across the country.

Through participatory action research, it would produce practical research that farmers actually want, effective training programs that farmers will actually use, and would help implement wellness and training curricula for students in agricultural and veterinary colleges, so that we can train people early. To do this, we need to create a transdisciplinary network across all provinces and territories and produce the resources that are specific for agriculture and delivered by people who know agriculture. By doing this, we help strengthen our farmers, our agricultural sector and help them be poised for growth and innovation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Jones-Bitton.

[*Translation*]

We will now begin the question period.

Mr. Berthold, you have six minutes.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all very much for your testimony. We do not have much time and parliamentarians have a lot of questions about this. That is why we wanted to leave more time to ask you questions.

I have two quick questions for you. Would it be possible to get a copy of your presentation? I see that you are reading from your notes. It would be helpful for us to have them too, since we did not have time to hear your full testimony. We would appreciate it if you could send them to the committee.

Mr. Chair, based on what I have heard this morning, the importance of this study, and the importance of talking about the mental health of farmers, all the committee members will agree with me that this study should be televised so we can discuss it in front of Canadians. Would it be possible to do that for the rest of the study? People beyond the farming community need to hear about this. We have to explain to all Canadians the problems that farmers face.

Returning to your testimony, Mr. d'Amours, you said that the public perception of farmers is not improving, unfortunately. We have a unique opportunity to focus on farmers and their problems.

Mr. Chair, would it be possible to take the necessary steps for this study to be televised?

The Chair: Of course, we will do that. It has to be requested every time.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I think the subject warrants it.

Mr. d'Amours, you are nodding in agreement, but tell me why that would be helpful.

Mr. Alain d'Amours: In cities such as Montreal, people buy their food at a grocery store. They do not think about the people who worked to grow those fruits and vegetables or to transport the meat to the store. They do not think about that. So farmers are seen as not being very useful to society, which is completely untrue. Yes, we need to raise awareness of this.

● (0905)

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Girard, do you agree with that?

Mr. Pierre-Nicolas Girard: Yes, especially since I have noticed over time that consumers are open to hearing about farmers' problems. We have had booths at fairs and the interest we saw was incredible. Most consumers have a rather idyllic concept of what it is to be a farmer. They think about beautiful farms and nature, for instance, but behind that image in many cases are families who are under stress and in distress.

It would be an excellent idea to televise your debates and discussions in order to inform the public, especially about the experiences of the witnesses appearing before you.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you very much.

Mr. Caron, you have listed a number of factors. There is shared jurisdiction for mental health. Mental health services are under provincial jurisdiction.

Among the problems and factors you listed that add to farmers' stress, many fall under federal jurisdiction. You talked about farm transfers, labour strategies, administrative streamlining and compensation measures. We have been waiting for such compensation measures for a long time, in particular as regards the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and our partnership with Europe.

How can politicians' actions and government decisions have a real impact on the daily lives of farmers?

Mr. Martin Caron: That quickly affects the daily lives of farmers. Young people also invest. Investment in farming is currently in the millions of dollars. Millions of dollars are invested and people still hope to recoup their investment through revenues. Yet changes including climate, political and economic changes have major impacts.

That is why we have to think about this. We have to recognize that looking after producers and farmers means looking after our food supply in Canada.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Caron, I have just six minutes. Your presentations were so relevant that I could ask the three of you questions for hours.

You talked about adapting the system to farmers' realities, but how can that be done?

Mr. Alain d'Amours: I can give you some examples, specifically in Quebec.

Mr. Pierre-Nicolas Girard: I can also give some examples.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Okay, we will hear from each of you in turn.

Mr. Alain d'Amours: Let me give you an example. In Quebec, we have created farming sentinels. We train people in farming communities, such as milk distributors or others, to detect distress among farmers. We are already seeing that these sentinels are useful. People call us and seek help sooner. It reduces their distress. This initiative could be expanded across the country.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Girard, would you like to add something?

Mr. Pierre-Nicolas Girard: When you read our document, you will notice a number. Among the 78 suicides recorded in recent years, 67% of those people had been diagnosed with a mental health problem.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Really?

Mr. Pierre-Nicolas Girard: That means that those people, in the days, weeks or months leading up to their suicide, had been diagnosed by a specialist, either a psychologist or psychiatrist, in the health network.

Why is it that these people are primarily at the farms when they have been diagnosed with burnout or another problem and have been given a prescription and advised to take rest at their farm?

Mr. Luc Berthold: That is not possible.

Mr. Pierre-Nicolas Girard: Indeed, you know very well that it does not make sense.

We are saying that mental health services have to be adapted to farmers' realities. So farmers diagnosed with a mental illness should not be told to rest at their farm along with their hundred or so cows.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Girard. I have to interrupt you again.

Thank you, Mr. Berthold. Further to your request, can you move a motion? We will then seek consent.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I will draft it and move it in a few minutes.

The Chair: I will then ask for consent.

[English]

Do we have consent that it's when available, because there are only two

[Translation]

television crews. Once they are available, we will make a request.

[English]

Are we all good with that? Okay.

[Translation]

Thank you.

All the documents will be available, but we still need translation. Those in French have to be translated into English and

[English]

The English ones will be translated.

[Translation]

They will be distributed to everyone.

Mr. Drouin, do you have a question?

• (0910)

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): I have a question about this.

Will we ask the witnesses who have already appeared if they agree to our discussions being televised? I expect we will be hearing from people who have had mental health problems. I would like to know if the clerk can ask them.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That is a valid point.

Let us return to the question period.

Mr. Poissant, you have six minutes.

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (La Prairie, Lib.): I want to thank all the witnesses.

You know that it's a subject that affects me deeply. I was once president of Au coeur des familles agricoles.

I'll try to get straight to the point, since I want many answers to large number of questions, just like Mr. Berthold earlier.

People who come from outside the agriculture world aren't familiar with the business. People often ask farmers what makes them different from entrepreneurs.

We spoke earlier business transfers. The same thing applies to entrepreneurship. The labour force and work-life balance are also issues in other businesses.

For the benefit of the committee and the public, I want to know what makes you different from entrepreneurs.

Mr. Martin Caron: I'll say a few words.

I'm a dairy and grain farmer in Louiseville. Like my father, I was born into the farming business. You must understand that our business is our baby. Our land is our baby. There's an emotional aspect, which has already been mentioned.

This emotional aspect sets us apart. We were born and raised among the animals, on the land, and so on. It's very much a family bond. When farmers say that their business is their baby, the reason is that they're willing to ask a veterinarian to come when one of their animals is sick. When mechanical issues arise or the soil needs our attention, we do what is necessary. However, when it comes to mental or psychological health, the farmers come second, since they prioritize their business, their baby. This aspect makes farmers different from other entrepreneurs. It affects us deeply.

We spoke earlier about the intergenerational aspect. When a farm has been around for four or five generations, we want to continue to operate it. We left our mark on the land, and we saw our parents and grandparents do the same thing. We want to follow their lead, and we hope that another generation will take over.

That's why it's important to properly adapt the services and programs.

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: Thank you, Mr. Caron.

As you know, yesterday a farmer and his employee died in a fodder silo. When accidents of this nature occur, do you meet with the affected families?

Mr. d'Amours, you said earlier that the entire community is affected by these tragedies. Is anything done in these situations?

Mr. Alain d'Amours: We're currently implementing mechanisms. In a way, it's part of our mission. We're working with the Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux, or CISSS, in Montérégie-Est, in Saint-Hyacinthe. I gave you an example earlier of a death in a manure pit. We were able to meet with the firefighters quickly. Spending even one night with the image in mind is terrible. It can lead to trauma.

With regard to your question, I would say that an important distinction must be made. When workers call me because they're in distress, they then return home. Farmers, on the other hand, are at home. The circumstances are completely different. I can't tell farmers to return home to rest. Farmers are home, and that place is the source of their stress.

We must take a different approach. Our methods must be adapted to the environment. That's why we provide training courses specifically designed for the agricultural sector. It must be understood that farmers and their spouses and children are in their home environment for 24 hours a day. We can't tell farmers to rest at home. It doesn't work.

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: Okay.

My next question is for Ms. Jones-Bitton.

As a researcher, you know that Canadian farmers are not the only ones who experience distress. This must be the case all over the world. Have you heard of organizations in other countries that work with farmers? How do these organizations operate?

[English]

Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton: Yes. One of the leaders in this area is in Australia, the National Centre for Farmer Health. They focus on both the physical and mental health of their farmers.

The discussions we've been having around suicide are really important and absolutely need to be included, although it's a little bit too late. We need to focus more on preventative measures as well, on getting to people before they reach the point of suicide. We need to be focused on positive psychology, on building wellness and resilience as well so that we don't get to the point of depression, anxiety or burnout. I have great respect for Dr. Susan Brumby, who is with the group in Australia. I think she's a leader in this area. I think that organization would be a great model for Canada to follow.

• (0915)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: Ms. Jones-Bitton, you spoke earlier about a training program for people who visit farms and do prevention work. I would like you to elaborate on this program.

[English]

Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton: My team and I have just finished developing a mental health literacy training program specific to agriculture. We are piloting that. In two weeks, we will start the first of five pilot sessions. We believe strongly in evidence-informed programming, so we're doing pre- and post-assessments to make sure that the training actually works. The program is called In the Know, and we will be training farmers, agricultural service

representatives, agricultural government personnel and people who are in regular contact with farmers to recognize the signs that somebody is struggling.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Jones-Bitton.

Mr. MacGregor, you have six minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to everyone for coming today.

Dr. Jones-Bitton, I'd like to start with you.

The research you presented has very stark figures. When you were presenting, I became curious.... A lot of the stress that farmers go through is related to the changes in the market. There are so many unknowns. Are you aware of any research that has compared farmers who work in supply-managed sectors to other sectors? I'm not saying our supply-managed sectors don't have stress, but is there a certain amount of relief from some of these factors just because of the system they operate in? Are you aware of any research with respect to that?

Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton: Yes, my research has looked at that. Briana Hagen is our Ph.D. candidate, and she's finishing up those analyses.

So far we've looked at stress and resilience, and we did look at different commodity types within that. There was one commodity group that was at a significantly greater risk of high stress, and that was our pork producers. We do need to keep in mind that the survey was done just after PED, so it might be related to that.

In the other research we've done, we haven't actually seen a huge difference in supply-managed versus not.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Okay.

Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton: I think that's because we're not comparing high stress to low stress. It's like the baseline in farming is here, so the differences are not that stark.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: For my next question, I want to open it up to everyone, because I think it's very important to get testimony in.

When you look at the jurisdictions that we have in agriculture, both the federal government and provincial governments have a role to play. At first glance, the noticeable strength of the federal government is that because it covers the entire country, it can stop the effect of a patchwork quilt and ensure there is some kind of continuity amongst all jurisdictions.

I'd like to have your feedback on some of the strengths of what the federal government can offer in this field. Also, on a practical level, how do we ensure that these types of programs are actually reaching farmers effectively? As has been stated, they work very long hours alone. What are some of the practical ways that we effectively reach them and let them know that there is a support network available?

Who would like to start?

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Caron: Thank you for the question.

All things considered, we must ensure that the programs are well adapted to farmers. There must be a federal and provincial network. It's not enough to invest in programs. The programs must also be adapted to the real risks.

Risk management is having an increasingly significant impact on climate, economic and political issues. We're currently seeing this in politics concerning the NAFTA negotiations. There's a great deal of stress in farm businesses, and the programs must be adapted accordingly.

In terms of mental health, our recommendation is in line with Ms. Jones-Bitton's recommendation concerning research and investment. An investment isn't an expense. We must invest and establish a national round table to discuss mental health, in which organizations such as ours would participate, to ensure that the services meet the needs of farmers.

• (0920)

[English]

Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton: I think what my colleagues have discussed has been very important. I think it's really important, and the way to get farmers involved is through participatory action research. You have them at the table at the beginning, and you develop your priorities with farmers at the table because, otherwise, you're right that you're not going to get there.

Our farmers said that they're not coming in for two days. We already have a great program that's two days. We asked how many hours would be good for them. Now we have a four-hour version and an eight-hour version.

You bring the farmers around the table. They're there. They're ready to speak. It's just that nobody has bothered to ask them.

Absolutely, as Monsieur Caron has said, we need custom, tailored approaches.

Our colleagues in Manitoba have a rural call-in line. The first two questions they are asked by farmers when they call in are, "Is this confidential?" and, "Are you a farmer?"

Too many people have built up the courage, in their words, to go and seek help, and then they get told something like, "You need to go home and take two weeks off." They don't come back. We lose them at that point because people don't understand agriculture.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Monsieur d'Amours, do you have anything to add?

[Translation]

Mr. Alain d'Amours: Yes.

The federal government should elevate the image of agriculture and emphasize the importance of farmers. The public has a negative image of farmers, which causes farmers a great deal of distress. The federal government could elevate the image of farmers across Canada and show that farmers are there to help the public and that, without them, there would be nothing to eat. It's that simple. However, the public doesn't have this notion at all. The public doesn't understand why farmers are different. Farmers are different because it's their environment, it's their life. They're different for many reasons. That's what should be done.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

We'll now give the floor to Mr. Breton for six minutes.

Mr. Pierre Breton (Shefford, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank everyone for being here today. We know how serious this issue has become. It's a concern at home, in the constituency of Shefford.

Mr. d'Amours, you live in an area next to my constituency. Thank you for being here today.

My first question is for Mr. Caron.

You're the son and grandson of a farmer. We haven't conducted a study on the subject, but perhaps studies have been conducted in the past. What has changed? Did you witness any distress that your grandfather, grandparents or father may have experienced? What has evolved? Are things better or worse? What changes have brought us to where we are today? Give us some insight.

Mr. Martin Caron: First, before I became a vice-president of the UPA, I was a dairy and grain farmer at home, in Louiseville, in the Mauricie region. I'm really a man of the land.

I had contact with people. I was one of the first to take sentinel training to be able to identify mental and psychological health issues and other issues. A network was quickly established around me. I've seen farmers, veterinarians, inseminators and people involved in the field do tremendous work.

One change is that agriculture has become global. I'll give you two very concrete examples. First, grain prices are set by the Chicago Stock Exchange. They're not set at the local level. Second, tariffs are imposed on pork producers, which has a major impact on the price of pork. There's a shortfall of about 50%.

Mr. Pierre Breton: You said there's a global impact, and that before, the market was more local.

Mr. Martin Caron: Exactly.

Mr. Pierre Breton: That's an important point.

Mr. Girard, you've worked in agriculture for a long time, and today you're a consultant. I imagine that you work with farmers. What about young people in all this? Many young people who come to see me are in distress. They don't come to see me because they're in distress, but they talk to me about their distress. I refer them to someone who can help them.

Tell me a bit about the situation of young people. Are things worse for this segment of the population than for older people? Is the stress experienced by young people different from the stress experienced by the previous generation? Tell us about it.

• (0925)

Mr. Pierre-Nicolas Girard: Obviously, certain young people who aspire to take over from their parents are increasingly reluctant to do so, given the image of the occupation.

I would like to add a few comments to your first question.

Mr. Pierre Breton: That's fine.

Mr. Pierre-Nicolas Girard: The industrialization of agriculture makes a difference. I was born on a farm and I worked on the farm. In those days, we worked 12 hours a day, we slept, and the next day we were in great shape. Today, with all the means of communication available, farmers are connected to their farms for 24 hours a day. In many cases, they can no longer take weekends off because they're needed at their business. This reality causes stress.

There's the economic aspect. I've met many farmers in their sixties who want to transfer their businesses, but their businesses are worth two million, three million or four million dollars. The property has increased in value and the business's profitability does not allow for this type of investment. I agree with the people who said that the federal government, for example, had a role to play through its measures and programs.

I'll give the example of the federal government's initiative—

Mr. Pierre Breton: Be brief, Mr. Girard, because I want to ask Mr. d'Amours a question.

Mr. Pierre-Nicolas Girard: Okay, go ahead.

Mr. Pierre Breton: No, continue. I'll give you a few more seconds.

Mr. Pierre-Nicolas Girard: We created agri-environment investment programs. This has helped us change our approach to agriculture and take greater account of the environment over the past 10 years. I suggest that we do the same thing for the health of farmers.

Mr. Pierre Breton: That's interesting.

Thank you, Mr. Girard.

Mr. d'Amours, you drew my attention to an interesting point, which is the image of farmers. I don't know whether this relates to the recognition farmers may receive. Farmers are their own bosses. I don't think that they have any other bosses. They're self-employed. I've noticed during meetings and visits to farms that no one tells farmers that they're doing a good job, except for the people who say that the food produced by the farmers is fresh and who show interest in purchasing the food. I imagine there's the issue of educating the public.

Tell us about this major lack of recognition of farmers.

Mr. Alain d'Amours: The issue of public recognition goes even further. I'll give you a basic example. When I go grocery shopping with my son, he has no idea where the vegetable we're purchasing comes from. Yet I live in the country.

Mr. Pierre Breton: It grows in the grocery store.

Mr. Alain d'Amours: Exactly. It grows in the grocery store and milk enters the world in the grocery store.

Among farmers, there's also the parent-child relationship. A father came to see me. His son wanted to expand the farm and use new technology. However, the father told me that he couldn't handle this and that, as a result, they were falling behind. The father even started contemplating suicide. He thought that, if he left, his son would take over the entire place. Even this image—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. d'Amours. I'm sorry to interrupt you, but you may be able to continue later.

Mr. Pierre Breton: He didn't finish his story, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'm sure he'll have the chance to finish it.

[English]

Mr. Hehr and Mr. Cooper, thank you for being here with us this morning.

Now, Mr. Longfield, you have six minutes.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, everybody, for your presentations and your commitment to this topic.

Andria, back in May, I met with you in Guelph, and you were talking about the work you'd done on research. Since then, you've launched the In The Know program.

In this morning's discussion, there was an interesting comment about "Is this confidential? Are you a farmer?" I heard the same question when I was working with veterans in Guelph. The veterans say you can't understand the path they've come down as a veteran unless you're a veteran.

In 2017, we committed \$5 billion over 10 years towards mental health with the provinces and territories. We've also committed money to veterans, to indigenous services, in terms of mental health.

You mentioned to me about a national centre of excellence that could be focused on farms. Could you expand on that a little and whether we involve farmers in their communities, maybe through their churches or their associations? How can we reach the farmer through the places where farmers normally gather and have those types of discussions around mental health?

• (0930)

Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton: I think I heard a couple of things there.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Yes, there were.

Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton: One is that there definitely is a need for custom tailored supports. We can't just take existing models and apply them to farmers for numerous reasons that have been discussed.

The stresses that farmers face are unique. Yes, other small business owners—not that farming is a small business in a lot of cases—experience stresses as well, but I would argue not to the extent of the different types of stresses that farmers experience. It has come up a couple of times that people don't understand agriculture.

One of the things that struck me, which I frankly wasn't expecting when I did the national survey, was that farmers feel scrutinized. They feel attacked by the public, anti-agriculture groups, people who don't understand farming who are speaking out openly. You can make fun of me as a professor, and I can go home and I have a whole bunch of other stuff to my sense of identity. Farmers don't have that. Their occupation is their identity; it's their culture, their history, what have you.

Yes, we absolutely need tailored resources. How do we reach them? I think the best thing to do is to ask farmers that question. I think the sentinel program in Quebec is fabulous. I've only just recently learned of it. It's things like that.

We have things going on in Manitoba that are great. If I may say, we have things coming out of Guelph that are great. We need to better understand what everybody is doing, so we are not leaving anybody unprotected and unprepared.

I think it's really important that the provinces come together and that there is federal leadership in this so that we can take a systematic approach to it.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Great.

Mr. d'Amours, in your work with communities, are there groups where you've had success in reaching the farmers through where they gather?

[Translation]

Mr. Alain d'Amours: Yes, because the sentinel program has slowly expanded. We started around a kitchen table where farmers would come to meet with us and discuss their needs. They guided us. Many people would come to see us, people who transported milk, and many others.

We did this, and then we went to these individuals' homes. With the Association québécoise de prévention du suicide in Quebec, we created an agricultural model that was truly adapted to farmers. The people understand what farmers experience and will therefore intervene in a very different way. The results are conclusive. We're finding that farmers feel more comfortable talking with us. As the gentleman who's himself a sentinel said, he'll go to see the person and he'll talk to the person. He'll sense that the person is experiencing something difficult and will advise the person to consult someone who can provide help. We reach out to people in their environment and apply their way of thinking to encourage them to use the services provided. You'll agree with me that this works well.

[English]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Mr. Caron, I'm thinking of the farmers I saw over the years when I used to travel the Prairies going to different mines and mills, working on solutions for farming equipment as well. They would get together at the truck stops. I'm thinking of one in Colonsay, Saskatchewan, that I used to love to drop in to because you could see all the farmers gathering. They

were comparing what they were doing with fertilizer. They were comparing what the market was doing. They were talking about things at home and whether somebody hadn't gotten onto his field because his wife had him doing something else. There were always these little stories.

With regard to the gathering of the farmers—I'm thinking maybe in terms of you and your dairy experience. Dairy farmers probably don't gather the same way as do grain farmers, for example. I'm still trying to see how the federal government, with the Canadian Mental Health Association, Health Canada, the Mental Health Commission of Canada.... We have these large organizations, but the reality is that farmers have a way of gathering and communicating, which we need to find a way of connecting in through these large organizations and then through the provinces.

● (0935)

The Chair: Mr. Longfield, unfortunately....

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I thought you said a minute and a half.

Okay, thank you.

The Chair: It wasn't quite a minute. We're going to have to move on. I'm sure they'll have time.

Mr. Shipley, go ahead for six minutes.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Thank you very much.

Thank you, witnesses.

Ms. Jones-Bitton, you mentioned three scores: 45% with high stress, the second one which I missed, and 35% with depression and burnout. What was the second one?

Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton: For anxiety, 58% met the scale's definition for classification of various degrees of anxiety—mild, moderate or severe.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Caron will agree, I think, with this, being on a farm. As well, those of us who were involved back in the 1980s will have some understanding of the sort of stress that comes with it. Stress actually drives us. Is there some sort of a definition of what you would score as high stress?

Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton: Yes.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Without it we do not have effective, efficient producers, but there's some sort of a tipping point and everyone is different.

I have a friend with a large farm, and I'm convinced that he never wants to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton: Right.

Mr. Bev Shipley: It's just what drives him, but that's not for everyone.

Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton: Right. There's a great model that looks at a curve. The middle bit is nice. It's yellow or orange in colour. That's where stress drives us and our production is high. We're focused. We're motivated. We want to get going.

There's a green area that's low stress. That's bad. Low stress means our production is low because we're not motivated.

The problem is too many of us are living over in the red zone. In the red zone we have fatigue, exhaustion, anger, anxiety, and burnout. If you look at production levels at that point, our productivity is actually lower.

Your friend who thrives on that high stress, I would say, is doing well with that. Unfortunately, too many of us are in that red zone and are not.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Social media plays such an integral part of our life it seems. Much of that is by choice. A lot of it, on the other hand, on the business side, is how we operate. That's how we keep track of markets. That's how we keep track of what prices are in terms of our inputs. That's how we monitor innovation and technologies we're moving, and we talk. The downside of that, though, is the social media stuff that everybody's on. Is there any evidence of what role that plays?

Farmers get targeted based on the inputs that we use to grow our crops and how we grow our crops, how we raise our animals. We get targeted by certain animal rights groups and individuals who are brutal, not only on our farm but as we transport it. Is that part of anything you have talked about in your pilot project, how we deal with that?

Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton: I think there are two sides to that. Farming can be a very socially isolating occupation. In some respects, social media is great for farmers. Ag Twitter is alive and well.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Yes.

Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton: People support each other through ag Twitter. In those respects, I think that's great. People throw out a problem, and they instantly have solutions. They throw out that they're having a bad day, and they instantly have support.

On the flip side of that, though, is that dark side that you alluded to. I was honestly struck in our survey by how powerful that negative aspect of social media has become and by these anti-agriculture groups that, quite frankly, are spreading lies. They're buying public support with those lies. That's a real insult to farmers and what they do for us.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. d'Amours, when you're talking to people, is this something that ever comes up in terms of the negative effect social media may have? There's a productive side of it, but there's a dark side too and it is that continual attack. We want to hear what they're saying. Well, actually, we don't, but there's something within us that drives us to want to see it.

Do you hear that when you're talking to farmers?

● (0940)

[Translation]

Mr. Alain d'Amours: We're starting to hear about it. Facebook and other social media have an impact on both the public and farmers, and also on the farmers' children. Bullying threatens farmers' children and adds stress.

Stress can be positive as long as there's an answer. However, the farmers I meet who have reached the point of considering suicide no longer have any answers.

When a farmer tells me that his wife will leave him, that she will leave with the children and that he'll lose his farm, he no longer has a solution. He's experiencing stress that's no longer positive, because he's hit a wall.

We must be careful. When we say that stress can indeed be positive, it's true. However, when a person hits a wall, the person's stress becomes unhealthy.

[English]

Mr. Bev Shipley: The foundation of what we strive for is to give people hope.

The Chair: Mr. Shipley, that's your time.

[Translation]

Unfortunately, that's all the time we had.

It was very interesting. As a farmer, I was able to identify with all aspects of the discussion. I don't know whether that's why I went into politics, and I don't know whether that's a good thing or a bad thing.

Thank you, Mr. Caron.

[English]

Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton: Sorry, I was delayed there. I'm not sure that was a better choice.

The Chair: There's still a lot of stress here.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Caron, Mr. d'Amours, Mr. Girard, and Doctor Jones-Bitton.

It was a very nice session to start our study.

We'll have a change of witnesses. We'll take a two-minute break and come back right away to welcome the next group of witnesses. Thank you.

●

_____ (Pause) _____

●

● (0945)

[English]

The Chair: We'll get into our second hour of our study on mental health for farmers.

With us this morning we have Mr. Ron Bonnett, President of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture.

Welcome again, Mr. Bonnett.

Also joining us by video conference, we have Groupe Leader Plus Inc.

[Translation]

Pierre Beaulieu is the Chief Executive Officer of Agriculture.

Mr. Beaulieu, can you hear us?

Mr. Pierre Beaulieu (Chief Executive Officer, Agriculture, Groupe Leader Plus Inc.): Yes, I hear you very well, thank you.

The Chair: Welcome, Mr. Beaulieu.

Our third witness is also appearing by video conference.

[English]

Lesley Kelly from Do More Agriculture Foundation will be joining us shortly.

[Translation]

We'll start.

[English]

You have six minutes, Mr. Bonnett, to give your perspective on mental health from the Canadian Federation of Agriculture.

Mr. Ron Bonnett (President, Canadian Federation of Agriculture): Thank you very much to the committee for taking time to discuss an issue that I think hasn't been discussed nearly enough for a number of years.

I don't think I need to give you much background on the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, but just so you know, we do represent farmers from right across the country.

As you know, agriculture is a unique, high-risk industry that requires dealing with volatility and uncertainty beyond your control, and often operating in remote, isolated locations. Whether it's markets, weather, disease or cash flow challenges, producers bear immense burdens and have learned from previous generations and broader societal expectations to deal with these burdens quietly on their own.

That is why I'm so pleased to be here today. Talking frankly about mental health challenges in public forums like this is one more step in the long process of breaking down the barriers that prevent farmers from talking about stress, anxiety and mental well-being in the same way we do about physical health. In an industry with so much opportunity, and such a wonderful sense of community and entrepreneurship, we can and must do better in helping those amongst us in dealing with mental health stress.

Personally, I've actually dealt with my own struggles on this front. In the early 1980s when my wife Cathy and I were early in our farming career, we were hit with the extremely high interest rates of that period. While I did not recognize it at the time, looking back now I realize I was getting very close to a period of depression. I could not sleep. It was difficult to make decisions. It seemed like my world was spinning out of control.

We were lucky. We had an agricultural extension person who recognized that a number of young farmers were in the same place. He set up a series of meetings where we were given the tools to help us cope financially and the conversations to help us walk through the

issues. In my mind it is an example of how home, business and family are all connected in addressing mental illness issues at the farm level. The early intervention, mostly from a business perspective in my case, was likely responsible for avoiding what could have been a much more serious issue.

More recently in my role at CFA, I've heard very clearly from farm leaders across Canada that too many producers continue to suffer in silence, until it's too late. In response, our organization coordinated a symposium this February on mental health in agriculture, bringing together mental health practitioners, researchers, producers and industry representatives from across Canada to discuss two key topics: first, building a common understanding of farmer mental health; and second, reviewing the state of mental health initiatives taking place in Canadian agriculture.

We heard the same concerning statistics that Dr. Jones-Bitton presented earlier today, alongside stories of lost productivity, suicidal thoughts and animal welfare issues arising due to untreated mental health issues. Following that, we heard from service providers and farm groups across Canada on the measures they've taken, including farm support lines, mental health first aid and access to paid-for counselling.

It was great to see diverse, exciting projects across Canada targeting this issue, but we noted four key takeaways.

First, mental health support needs to begin well before suicide prevention. Suicide is unfortunately far too prevalent, but it is an extreme outcome that's avoidable with earlier intervention. We can't wait until it's too late.

Second, farmers need support services tailored to the farm sector. Calling in and speaking with someone who has no knowledge of what farming entails can lead to further isolation and be perceived as a lack of meaningful support.

Third, many of the initiatives were provincial in scope, with little knowledge of those activities outside the province. At CFA, this is a point of concern because it highlights the missed opportunities to build on best practices and truly ensure farmers across Canada have access to the supports they need.

Finally, initiatives are struggling to find sustainable funding. Across the board, we heard that they were struggling to maintain their services. Many were questioning whether they could continue to provide their services, while wishing they could do more. Increased funding for mental health supports, both federally and provincially, are critical.

At the conclusion of this symposium, we were pleased to announce an MOU with the Do More Agriculture Foundation on two fronts.

The first was a new CFA award, which we will shortly be unveiling called the Brigid Rivoire Memorial Award for Best Practices in Mental Health, which will celebrate individuals and organizations making a difference in mental health through a donation, promotions to tell their story and an award given out at our annual meeting.

• (0950)

As many of you know, Brigid was executive director at the Canadian Federation of Agriculture from 2001 to 2015. She was always known for wanting to help others in need, and was a very caring and giving person. She passed away in 2017, just as CFA was developing this program to help spread awareness of and address mental health issues in agriculture.

The second commitment with Do More Agriculture was to raise funds for research in agricultural mental health, which we continue to explore.

The fragmentation I mentioned earlier is one of the reasons we're still exploring how to support research in this area. It's difficult to assess where funding should be directed, what research is under way, and where dollars are needed. That's why CFA would join Dr. Jones-Bitton in calling for the Government of Canada to support establishing a Canadian network of farmer mental health to coordinate efforts, ensure practical research is undertaken to develop meaningful supports and ultimately see agricultural and veterinary colleges adopting curricula on mental health wellness and resilience.

• (0955)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bonnett, but I have to cut you off here. I know you have your hotline number, and we'll make sure you have a chance to—

Mr. Ron Bonnett: I'll build the rest in later. I know how this works.

The Chair: Yes, you can fit it in. You know how this works. You've been here before.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Beaulieu, you have six minutes.

Mr. Pierre Beaulieu: Hello. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to your committee.

I want to thank the member of Parliament for Shefford, Pierre Breton, who responded to my letter in less than 24 hours by giving me a call, which I truly appreciated.

My name is Pierre Beaulieu, and I'm the Chief Executive Officer of Groupe Leader Plus.

Let me tell you a bit about my background. I grew up in the business world. I spent 10 years in the family bakery and 10 years in an automotive parts distribution company with Esso and Chrysler Canada. I led the Groupement des chefs d'entreprise du Québec for 30 years and other groups in New Brunswick and Europe. Under my leadership, the number of members rose from 130 to 2,000, and the number of groups increased from 10 to 235.

My personal mission is to bring together leaders to help them develop their full potential in a spirit of mutual support, in order to build a more sensible, focused and prosperous society. I retired from the Groupement des chefs d'entreprise du Québec in 2014.

When I was in charge of the Groupement, farmers asked us to help them form groups. However, the farmers didn't have the same concerns as manufacturing and distribution SMEs. When I retired, farmers asked me to establish groups that would enable them to work together, help each other and grow as people. Groupe Leader Plus was created three years ago. Its mission is to bring together and support farm leaders, the next generation of farmers and farm owners, and to help them make progress with their four responsibilities as leaders.

The first of these four responsibilities is to develop the business on five levels. These levels are growth, human resources, operations, financial success and sustainability, and the business's entire network.

The second responsibility is to structure the business in five ways. They must think, plan, organize the business, coordinate meetings—an unusual but increasingly common activity for farmers—and control the business.

The third responsibility is to ensure the continuity of the business throughout the five stages of their career. These stages are entrepreneur, managing director, general manager, CEO and chair of the board. The creation of these stages is one thing that has greatly helped the next generation in Quebec SMEs. The stages enable the heads of businesses to properly establish their place, then leave their place to the next generation, as planned.

The fourth responsibility is to achieve a successful balance in the five areas of their life. These areas are their professional and social life; meaningful relationships; physical, psychological, intellectual and spiritual health; personal finances; and well-being and recreational activities.

The Groupement's self-help groups focus on these four responsibilities.

Each self-help group has 10 to 12 business leaders—or aspiring leaders—who meet five to six times a year and who commit to helping each other and sharing their experiences and expertise, in order to improve their leadership and make progress with the four responsibilities of a leader. All members agree to accept each other and they commit to working with each other. All the groups receive the services of a professional coach. The coaching sheds light on the experiences and expertise of participants at each stage of the meetings, in order to promote mutual help and help participants make progress as leaders or people.

Coaches never act as consultants, and they involve experts as needed. Group Leader Plus develops a network of consultants, management and group tools, and a library of experiences for its members. At each thematic meeting, we summarize the experiences of the people around the table, which then helps the entire province. A meeting lasts four hours. It starts with a round table discussion, where each person has equal speaking time to describe how things are going for them, their family, their team and their business.

•(1000)

Moreover, during meetings, this period is always the longest, since it takes about 90 minutes of the four hours.

In the second part of the meeting, members can consult the group regarding a difficulty related to a project, a relationship issue or an administrative challenge. For each topic, members can consult the group to find out what their colleagues would do in their place. It's very useful, since they have direct access to people's opinions. They then commit to making progress and holding other meetings, and we follow up on this.

The third part of the meeting always focuses on a main theme, which we determine at the start of the year. In fact, we're planning strategic challenges for the next two to three years, and we can develop a program that covers the strategic challenges of each member. We deal with topics such as human resources management or family relationships. We then seek a consensus on best practices.

The fourth part of the meeting is an evaluation period, and a time for participants to commit to making progress by the next meeting—

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, your speaking time has unfortunately expired. I must give the floor to the next speaker. Thank you.

[*English*]

Now, from Do More Agriculture Foundation, we have Ms. Lesley Kelly.

Welcome, Ms. Kelly. You have six minutes to give us your opening statement.

Ms. Lesley Kelly (Co-Founder, Do More Agriculture Foundation): Good morning, everyone. Thank you for the opportunity to present before you today.

Mental health is near and dear to my heart. I'm Lesley Kelly. I'm a farmer in Saskatchewan. I've been part of the Bell Let's Talk campaign, and both my husband and I have been very vocal, both online and within our networks, in sharing our mental health journeys. Not only am I an advocate for tackling the stigma around mental health in agriculture, I'm also a co-founder of the Do More Agriculture Foundation.

Who is Do More? At Do More, we are championing the mental health and mental well-being of all of our Canadian producers. We are trying to change the culture in agriculture so that all producers are encouraged, supported and empowered to take care of their mental well-being. Agriculture is an amazing industry. It's one that is built on deep rural roots, hard work, resilience, strength and community, but in order to uphold that image, those traits can also be our industry's weakness, as they become barriers for speaking up and seeking help.

Producers are among the most vulnerable when it comes to mental health issues. Stress, anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion and burnout are all high among producers. At Do More, we see four barriers.

The first one is our culture. The ag industry is amazing but it is built on strength and perseverance, which also could be our weakness. The culture in ag is that a farmer should suck it up,

tough it out and usually never show any emotion, and that if you ask for help, you are considered weak.

The second one is awareness. Many of us don't even know what mental health or mental illness really mean. This is a huge unknown, especially for an industry that has never been encouraged to talk about it.

The third one is isolation. As farmers, we spend a lot of time in rural and remote locations, usually on our own, often in a piece of equipment, which is not conducive to seeking professional help or having a conversation with someone.

The fourth one is the lack of resources. Our access to resources is limited because those resources are usually found in urban centres, and there may be a need to travel a fair distance to utilize them. At Do More, we are looking at how to make these resources accessible to our producers.

We also note two gaps. The first is finding farmer-specific resources. Resources for farmers are very limited. We've only identified a few. One we've identified is the farm stress line in Saskatchewan. The second one is navigating resources beyond your family doctor. If you are trying to find resources once you've visited your family doctor, it is very difficult to find them.

At Do More, we're focusing on three pillars in order to achieve our goal of championing the mental well-being of our producers.

The first one is awareness: awareness, education and breaking the stigma. These are the first steps in making a real and lasting impact for our industry. We strive for an industry where producers understand what it means for them to truly be healthy.

The second one is community. Community is more than just a physical place. Community is also a sense of belonging and being a part of something more. We aim to create community, where people can connect and also find resources that are relevant and accessible to them.

The third is research. Research is the backbone to creating further resources and ensuring they serve our industry. We want to ensure that more research can be completed in this field by supporting, sharing and funding both present and future research and working with our close partners, such as the University of Guelph and Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton.

How far have we come in the past 10 months? We launched in January of this year, and so far we are in the process of implementing a board that represents many sectors within the agriculture, mental health and geographical areas. We are in the midst of obtaining charitable status. Two weeks ago, we launched our community fund. It's a pilot project. We had enough funds for 10 to 12 communities to receive mental health first aid, and right now we are at over 80 applications. This demonstrates both the need and the want for our rural communities to get these skills.

We will be having an awareness campaign come November. It focuses on changing the language around mental health. We've been establishing partnerships with mental health service providers and community resources and creating industry partnerships, such as those with the CFA, Bayer and Farm Credit Canada. We've also been presenting at agriculture events and trade shows about mental health in agriculture and Do More.

Our ag industry is an amazing one and our producers are our greatest assets, but right now our greatest assets need help. They're hurting.

● (1005)

On behalf of Do More, my farm and my family, we need an industry-wide approach, and more help, awareness, support and resources to our Canadian producers.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Kelly.

Now we'll start our question round.

[Translation]

We'll start with Mr. Berthold.

You have six minutes.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you Mr. Bonnett, Mr. Beaulieu and Ms. Kelly.

Mr. Bonnett, you held a symposium on mental health.

[English]

Did you map all of the groups who help farmers around Canada during this symposium, and is it available for us?

Mr. Ron Bonnett: We can provide a report. I'll ask Scott to provide you with some information from our office.

It was one of the first conversations we had with that many people around, and I think we managed to identify the fact that, as I said in the presentation, there's a lot of activity taking place in isolated areas, but no one is connected to it.

I think Kim referred to that too. It's taking a look at the resources out there and how we can share and better utilize them.

I can provide some of that information to you.

Mr. Luc Berthold: As the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, I think you have a role to play in that area of sharing this information.

I thank you for that, Mr. Bonnett.

Mr. Ron Bonnett: Thank you.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Ms. Kelly, I really appreciated your words. I have participated in a few events with Do More Ag. You're doing a great job, and you've arrived right on time.

How will you change the language of mental health for farmers? What do you mean by that?

Ms. Lesley Kelly: It's knowing the things that we say in our everyday language that contribute to the barriers, like "Suck it up", or "We don't have time for this." We've been told online, after my husband and I shared our story, that if we can't handle the stress, we shouldn't be called farmers and we can't be farmers.

What we're doing is outlining those barriers, the things we say every day that we might not even know, and providing people with the options or ideas for how to change that: "How can I help? You matter. You count. I'm listening. I'm here for you."

It's giving people other options to think differently, and knowing that your language can make a huge impact on someone.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Are you aware, both of you, about any bullying or something like that in the ag sector between farmers, or between citizens of a city and farmers?

● (1010)

Mr. Ron Bonnett: I think it's a culture of isolation.

As Kim said, the attitude is, "Suck it up." I think the big problem is that because they're afraid of being viewed as soft, farmers are reluctant to come forward. It goes back to that cultural issue.

This is not just our generation; this is something that's been passed on through generations. You just deal with it yourself and pull yourself up by your bootstraps. All that language that Kim was referring to is what's part of the culture I think.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Kelly.

Ms. Lesley Kelly: When we shared our story online, we had an immense amount of positive reinforcement and encouragement, but there were pockets of name-calling and bullying. We were called "weak" and "insane". It came in different spots, but this is something that we haven't talked about. It's an unknown for some. It's uncomfortable and for some it's awkward. You do get that bullying.

The positive thing we've seen in the last 10 months of sharing our story is that before, we felt we were alone, but now, people are sharing that they're not going to stand for that and that's not called for.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Bonnett, mental health is under many jurisdictions, including provincial. We tried to find a way for the federal government and the ministry to participate in that.

What are you suggesting?

Mr. Ron Bonnett: As I said, we'd support the idea of a centre of excellence and mental health, with an agricultural focus, again, pulling that information together. There are going to be shared jurisdictions between federal, provincial and municipal governments that provide services.

The other thing we are doing is working with Canadian crisis centres to take a look at special training for people on crisis hotlines that would be operated nationally, on a 24-7 basis. Those people would have specific training on agriculture. I think one of the big concerns with some of the existing crisis lines is that you call in, and as we heard in the previous presentation, they advise you to just go back to work. Well, you have a crop in the field or you have cattle to feed. You have all of these things to do. You just can't go back and leave things alone. You have to deal with them. So having trained people on those crisis lines, I think, would be a good start. If we could do that nationally and have it available in both languages, and if we do the promotion on it, then I think people would know there's a place where they can actually get some help.

One of the things we have to look at is the broad interventions that have to take place. The idea is to get someplace before you reach the point of suicide, so make whatever interventions are needed, whether it's financial assistance, whether it's just the ability to communicate or things like that, so that you don't get to the point of suicide.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: That's fine.

[English]

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Drouin, you now have six minutes.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Thank you to the witnesses who are here.

It's a subject that I think is a non-partisan issue. It's been a long time coming and we do need to talk about it.

Mr. Bonnett, I was just at a local Ontario Federation of Agriculture meeting in my riding. I know that the OFA is starting to talk about it, and I'm assuming that's because of the leadership of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture.

I know you've had a symposium. What have you identified as the key factors to move forward on this? How would the federal government assist either the CFA or other organizations to move ahead with addressing mental health?

Mr. Ron Bonnett: One of the key factors is the need for coordination. I was sitting here this morning when I heard about the sentinel program. That's an extremely good example out of Quebec. Are there ways it can be replicated in other provinces? It's all about coordination.

Ms. Kelly also mentioned in her presentation the need for research. Is there a need for research specifically looking at agriculture? That leads into the call for a centre of agricultural

excellence, a national centre, and also to improving the crisis hotlines.

Those are some of the things that can be done.

The other thing that might be an opportunity is to have some ongoing symposiums for caregivers so they can gain a better understanding of what's working, as well. It's very easy to have a conversation with organizations about some of the needs, but unless you can involve some of the caregivers in that discussion, it's not going to help at the ground level.

• (1015)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Great. Thank you.

Ms. Kelly, you've raised a lot of important points, one about language. Are you talking to farmers about stigma? "Hey, I think I need some help" and "Where do I go if I need some help?" Have you had those conversations with other farmers, and what are they saying in terms of the crisis line? Does it respond? Is that a connector to them, or do they say, "Well, I'd like to talk to somebody who is specialized in that"?

Ms. Lesley Kelly: First, when they come to me and ask for help, I give them kudos. Asking for help is the hardest thing they can do, and they're courageous for doing it.

What I'm hearing from a lot of producers is that they need help but they don't know where to go. At Do More, we're trying to coordinate and find more local and regional resources for them. Right now we're at a provincial scale. On our website, we have provincial areas. A producer who has livestock can't drive four or five hours to get help. That is definitely a huge barrier.

Mr. Francis Drouin: When we talk about isolation, have you noticed a difference between younger farmers and their fathers, for instance? The younger farmers are probably on social media, but it is some form of isolation, as well—thinking that they're connected but they may not be connected. Have you noticed that difference between the two generations?

Ms. Lesley Kelly: Well, I was under the notion, when we first started that, that the younger generation, people like me, would be more open to starting this conversation, but it's been the older generation that's said, "This is the time to start talking about this. Thank you for opening that door wide open." We were at an event where we had a panel about mental health, and it was the older generation who stood up first. One individual stood up and told us he didn't have enough fingers on his hands to count how many farmers he'd lost to suicide. That was the most impactful thing anyone has ever said to me. That was at the onset of when we started our discussions on mental health.

Mr. Francis Drouin: You spoke about culture. Do you find that farmers are receptive to changing that culture?

Ms. Lesley Kelly: Five years ago, I would say, it was maybe not so much, but now, yes, we've identified that we are in crisis and that we need as much help as we can. More producers are even going to mainstream media and sharing their story to get more help.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Do you think the federal government should start a campaign of some sort to fight that stigma, through the Canadian Mental Health Association or whatnot, for organizations such as yours?

Ms. Lesley Kelly: Are you referring to a marketing campaign or an advertising campaign to help?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Yes.

Ms. Lesley Kelly: Our campaign is starting in the fall, but I really feel that we need to get our ducks in a row before more awareness or more marketing campaigns can be done. If people notice that someone they know needs help, or that they themselves need help, then we have to direct them to the right resources. If they have a bad experience with the resource, that can inhibit them from seeking more help.

Mr. Francis Drouin: That's very true. I think that's what Dr. Jones-Bitton said before, that the first connection is extremely important.

Ms. Lesley Kelly: Yes.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I'm running out of time. I only have 10 seconds left, and I don't want to ask you a question that you can't answer in 10 seconds.

Thank you very much for your time.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

[English]

Mr. MacGregor, you have six minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Chair.

Ms. Kelly, perhaps I can start with you. First of all, I think what you're doing is amazing. The work you're doing is really important. I know it's been a tough journey, but I think it's very valued.

There are other professions where that kind of culture and stigma exists. Our veterans come to mind, as do the military and first responders. In my short tenure as a member of Parliament, I've met with a number of veterans, active service personnel, and first responders. They have successfully initiated a culture shift within those professions. PTSD is not something that's whispered about in the corridors anymore. It's actively talked about. I have a number of personal friends who serve as first responders. Being first on the scene, witnessing a motor vehicle accident, those kinds of things weigh down on you.

With the work you're currently engaged in, have you learned any best practices from other organizations in terms of how they have dealt with this issue of mental health and the stigma, the tough "go it alone" approach and so on, that you can apply to farmers?

• (1020)

Ms. Lesley Kelly: We've been working closely with those in sports. We feel that sports is also really relatable. We have found that starting at the grassroots in talking has been huge in creating that culture shift. It can't come from the coaches or the leaders. It has to come from individuals, those who are viewed among peers as being the leaders, speaking up.

That's what we found, especially in sports. Having them talk about it and be there to encourage others to share their story has been huge in creating that shift.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: When we started this study in June, one of our first witnesses was from Farm Credit Canada. They talked

about some of the programs they're doing and just the efforts they're making to reach out to farmers. Do you have any comments on what Farm Credit Canada is currently doing and on anything we should be expanding that is working really well from the federal government's perspective?

Ms. Lesley Kelly: Farm Credit Canada has been a huge partner for us, not only in support through funding but also with the resource of time. They helped us to build our website and stuff like that.

They partnered with us on our community fund. It was a pilot to bring mental health first aid to communities throughout Canada. We were hoping that we would get 10 to 12 applications. We now have more than 80. That just shows the need and the want. This has totally gone beyond all our expectations. We hope that more partners, more support, can be attributed to getting mental health first aid to our producers.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you very much for that.

Mr. Bonnett, if I can turn to you, one of the greatest stresses is financial in nature. Right now we have a situation evolving with Canada's pork producers, a consequence of the America-China tariff war. The prices of pork have dropped considerably. I know there are a number of producers who have given up on their operation. You can only imagine the amount of stress they're going through.

We have a case in point happening right now. Can you talk to me about what is currently going on for our pork producers, what we learned from this current situation and how we apply this study?

Mr. Ron Bonnett: Getting into the whole financial discussion, even my own case, it was finances that really started me down the road to stress. Pork producers and some of our grain producers are seeing price drops now. It's the side result of what's happening with the trade wars. We are actually actively working right now on looking at our business risk management programs to try to ensure we have effective risk management programs in place. The government has agreed to a review over the next year to really take a look at it. One of the things we want to identify is what is different now from the way it used to be. Market volatility, I think, is one of the things that is really cropping up now more and more as some of these trade agreements go into place.

You mentioned the financial stress. I think what it does do is that it raises the question of how we ensure that we have proper training in place for our finances, like farm credit or the banks. Do they have training to identify (a), that we may have a problem here that's broader than just a financial problem and it could have implications, and (b), what we put in place to deal with that? Veterinarians who are visiting farms may see animal care issues as a result of the financial stress. It's getting back to that whole idea of how we build the awareness of the issue, but also build the training so that we have appropriate responses. Even me, if I went to a neighbour, I don't know if I'm quite prepared to ask the right questions. I think a lot of work can be done so that we can have the support network from the finance people and from veterinarians, but also from neighbours. That's where I think farm organizations can get involved by having some training programs in place that help us respond, like the sentinel program in Quebec that was mentioned. I think that was one of the key ones.

• (1025)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bonnett.

Mr. Peschisolido, you have six minutes.

Mr. Joe Peschisolido (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I'm going to be sharing some of my time with Monsieur Poissant.

Ron, I'd like to begin with you.

You talked about the fragmentation of our system, in providing meaningful help to farmers in need. Can you talk a little bit about what you think the federal role could be in providing services to bridge the gap on this fragmentation?

Mr. Ron Bonnett: I think that would get into identifying what some of the best practices are within the different provinces. Resources are always going to be a question. How do you focus on targeted resources to take that role in identifying best practices and coordinating some of the responses? Then the final thing, I think, is doing some national research on mental health from an agricultural perspective to determine the types of tools that have to be put in place. By doing it at the national level, then that can be shared with all of the provinces so you have a better impact at the farm level.

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: Ron, thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Beaulieu, can you provide a brief explanation of the four responsibilities of leaders who participate in self-help groups? Can you elaborate on the issues that they address?

Mr. Pierre Beaulieu: Groupe Leader Plus was created three years ago, and it consists of about 150 people in groups of 10 or 12 farmers. Their meetings help them make progress. First, they can learn to speak clearly and express their emotions, and they can ask colleagues about best practices. We can invite specialists to help farmers resolve common issues, such as issues related to funding, human resource management or any other subject.

The meetings help build ties among the 10 to 12 leaders in each group. There's a sense of trust, and everyone can count on the group members' discretion. The leaders are no longer in their family or village. They're among people like them—leaders—and they look forward to getting together. It's always very difficult to reach them

one by one, but the fact that they can meet in groups makes them love these meetings, where the attendance rate is almost 100%. We can therefore follow the development of the leaders and their issues. In my groups, it's not uncommon for one or two people to start crying. It's wonderful because they're finally able to express themselves and they feel understood. I think it's an excellent way to achieve efficiency.

If a group member needs to consult a psychologist, we put the member in contact with a psychologist. If a group member needs a financial advisor, or if the entire group needs to talk about a specific topic, we invite a specialist and give the specialist an hour to answer people's questions. After the specialist leaves, the leader or group has obtained the desired expertise and has established a link with the specialist or therapist, which allows for continuity. In addition, the group supports the member who is experiencing difficulties, and the others ask the member how things have been since the last meeting.

I think that everything you're saying is fantastic. There was a great deal of loneliness among SME entrepreneurs, but there's ten times more loneliness among farmers, who have difficulty communicating within their families. We're in the process of addressing the lack of meetings and seeing what other services we could provide. Participants pay a \$900 contribution out of their own pocket—the government doesn't cover it—to attend five or six meetings, and they pay it willingly. I can tell you that I have no bad debts to report.

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Poissant, the floor is yours.

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: I want to thank the witnesses who came to meet with us.

Mr. Bonnett, I remember that the interest rate was 22% when I bought my first land in 1981. I can understand the stress experienced in those moments, especially since my first harvest was destroyed by hail.

The previous witnesses told us that the general public did not really understand the work of farmers. Our government has established a program to restore public trust, and I believe that you're one of the people involved. I would like to know how the work is progressing.

• (1030)

[English]

Mr. Ron Bonnett: I just caught part of it, but I think one of the things you mentioned was regaining public trust and how we make sure that we have the proper tools in place for farmers from a mental health perspective as compared to urban centres.

I think one of the things that's been mentioned several times is the difference between a farm operation and a regular urban dweller or another business. With farming, the home, the family and the business are so tied together that you can't escape it. It's there all the time.

Some of the public trust issues about the way we're caring for our animals and the type of crop inputs we're using were mentioned earlier. We are doing quite a bit of work now with a number of partners, whether they be the retail sector, processors or some of our input suppliers, to try to get information out there.

There's a whole awareness campaign that needs to be put in place and we're working on that and moving it forward to ensure that there's good information about farm practices out there, which will help stop—and I heard it mentioned earlier—some of the almost bullying tactics that are used by anti-agricultural groups.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bonnett.

Now we have Mr. Longfield for six minutes.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

To continue the discussion around the connections across Canada, Mr. Bonnett, I know you did a symposium last year on this. My office also coordinated a round table on May 1, where we had all parties involved. We had the Canadian Mental Health Association, and the Mental Health Commission of Canada. We had some psychologists, and we had university researchers.

Something that came out of the discussion that we had at our symposium was the connection between addiction, including binge drinking, and mental health. It was a surprise to me, since I thought that what binge drinking combined with the use of drugs does in terms of suicide and mental health outcomes was an urban issue around young adults. In your symposium, did you make any connections between mental health and addiction to illicit drugs and alcohol, or is that an area that didn't come up?

Mr. Ron Bonnett: We didn't have a lot of discussion about that. An observation of my own is that, quite often, if you get addiction issues, that might be in response to the mental health issue—

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Right, self-medication.

Mr. Ron Bonnett: —and stress. It's a coping mechanism. That's what happens. People go in that direction.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: How about you, Ms. Kelly? Are there any connections that you've seen?

We've seen some provincial governments making that connection between mental health and addiction, but federally we haven't had as strong a connection on that yet.

Ms. Lesley Kelly: I don't have any stats on alcoholism in rural Canada, but from my observations, too, it is a coping tool. It is part of a culture where, if you are alone, in isolation, on a farm, one way to cope with it would be drinking. I feel that is a huge factor.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Right, thanks.

Mood Disorders Society of Canada was facilitating our discussions. Mood Disorders Society of Canada has been working on a digital mental health platform through the University of British Columbia and the University of Alberta, connecting APEC nations together, the Pacific nations. They have funding from China. They have private funding going into the project.

We don't have rural broadband. In terms of access to digital services, whether those are appropriate or not, have you had any farmers talking about digital mental health services?

The question is for Kelly or Ron.

Ms. Lesley Kelly: For us, support through digital services would be huge because farmers are far from getting access to resources and we feel that a digital resource, whether that's access to peer support or professional help, would be of great benefit.

• (1035)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Right. Thank you.

Ron.

Mr. Ron Bonnett: I think it might be of benefit too, but I don't think you can underestimate the value of a human voice, and that's where I think a call-in line is critical. We are still feeling beings. We're not strictly digital beings. It's an additional tool, but I think you still have to have that one-on-one type of conversation that takes place. Maybe the initial call is with a hotline, but after that, you're going to have to have the resources at the local level to deal with it one on one.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Right. Thank you.

Recently, Minister Petipas Taylor announced \$378 million for the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, for 405 projects across the country. There's money going into health research, but the rural piece is one that seems to be missing. Do you know of whether those connections are being made through either of your organizations to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research? Is that something that the federal government needs to try to move up the ladder in terms of importance?

Ms. Lesley Kelly: As far as I know, we have not been connected through that initiative.

Mr. Ron Bonnett: Specifically, I think that would be something that would likely fit in under a centre for agricultural excellence—doing the research in identifying the types of things that need to be done for rural and agriculture. Agriculture is a specific subsector of rural, but having that type of research available....

One of the things I haven't mentioned either—and you brought up universities—is that there could be a role for the federal government in helping universities develop an appropriate curriculum, one that could be shared across agriculture universities or veterinary colleges, taking a look at the mental health aspect of agriculture. Frankly, that's something that has been overlooked.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: The people visiting the farms could identify problems with the farmer as they're going about their work.

It was interesting to hear that Bayer was also interested in this area. They have people going to the farms as well.

Mr. Ron Bonnett: Yes.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I have a very brief amount of time left.

I started a business in 1986, so I was just at the tail end of the interest rate crisis. Eventually I got the business to a point where I could join a mentor group. I got to the point where I could have a private mentor who was working with me every month.

The people who go through the start-up phase don't have access....

I'm looking over to Groupe Leader Plus.

Pierre, do young start-ups get access to the types of groups that you have, or is that something they need assistance on?

The Chair: We're basically running out of time. Sorry about that.

Mr. Shipley, for six minutes.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Thank you very much.

Ms. Kelly, let me express my appreciation and thanks for what you and your husband have done to step up and be a voice. There is a generational thing here. If you could look around the table, you could find those of us who were impacted in the 1980s, and likely the generation that is more impacted now.

I forget whether it was you or Ron who said that in that generation some of the older guys—farmers, I should be saying, because in our case it was both my wife and I—were stepping up and saying, “You need to be doing something now.” I’m going to be honest with you, back then it was more reactive than on the preventative side.

Quite honestly, what we’re trying to do on this preventative side is to build hope for people. Sometimes just walking alongside someone becomes such a help before we get to that serious stage.

In terms of the federal, provincial and local coordination, how is that working? Is there an openness at all levels to come together and coordinate? We’re talking about funding, resources and research.

Let’s start with you, Ms. Kelly; and then Ron may have a comment.

• (1040)

Ms. Lesley Kelly: In terms of coordination and getting access to resources and starting those conversations, when we approach partners for the opportunity to work together, we haven’t had any push-back. It’s just the awareness that Do More is out there, and that mental health and agriculture is a priority.

Mr. Bev Shipley: How do you find professionals who know agriculture? I think that might be part of it. We’ve talked about that. If you don’t understand it, the academic agriculture is a little hard to listen to sometimes.

Ms. Lesley Kelly: Finding resources that are ag specific is very hard. We’ve only been able to find a few, and that’s more attributed to the farm stress line in Saskatchewan. I feel that is definitely a gap that we need to strive to have help with.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Ron, is there a place for us, that group that went through some of those impacts earlier in the 1980s?

Mr. Ron Bonnett: I think there is. That’s part of the reason I included a few comments about our personal experience. If I look back and think about what we went through, I see there were a number of us who went through it. We’re on the borderline of getting into more severe mental illness. Some of us were lucky and had people who intervened at the time to help us through it.

I think there’s a role for our generation to assist in this by stepping forward and acknowledging that there is a need to provide the services. Some of the services were there when my wife and I were going through this. They are no longer there. There used to be local, agricultural field people who could provide that type of advice, and they knew the individuals. With the changing world, those people are no longer there. One thing I talked about was taking a look at the curriculum and training, figuring out how we can have mentorship programs. Lloyd, you mentioned mentorship programs.

I think there are a number of those issues.

One thing that I think has been helpful is there has been a broader awareness now of mental health issues, not only in agriculture, but in the general public. I think that’s helped farmers bring forward the discussion as well. It’s not something that we feel we have to bury and just absorb ourselves. I think there’s a role for both generations.

Mr. Bev Shipley: I really do want to touch on this whole social media thing and our children. I don’t know if you want to look at it going down the ladder or coming back up it, but the stresses on those farming in our rural areas are not the same as some of the stresses in other industries. We have the production of food, which everyone needs. Then there are these people from outside the sector who are advocating very strongly against us and mainly not telling the truth. The research in being able to help, I hope that is done very strategically because there’s nothing worse.... There was a report that came out where I found out there had actually been eight suicides and five of those had been children of parents. That is incredibly disturbing recognizing the industry that we’re in, which is to sustain life with food. Then we get into these situations with people who don’t have any idea about our industry. That is the key thing about getting the resources of people who understand our industry.

That may be more of a comment than a question, I guess.

How am I for time?

The Chair: You have about 20 seconds.

Mr. Bev Shipley: The 20 seconds doesn’t work except for the time to say thank you so much for coming out and being part of this discussion, one that has taken us up the generation, and one that is here talking about what has happened and how the next steps can be preventable.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Shipley.

If you would permit me one comment, I thought today was great. We looked at many aspects of mental health on the farm, but I didn’t hear too much about the whole family concept of it all.

I’m sure, Ms. Kelly, that you could probably talk about it, but on my farm I had my partner, my wife, who was my therapist, but I’m sure she felt the stress also, as did the children, although they don’t talk too much about it. I’m hoping that in the next few months we’ll be able to talk about that.

Following up on Mr. Longfield’s comment about addiction, we were at a corn maze farm last week and it was a second- or third-generation farm. We were walking along and my wife kicked something. It was a bottle of rum or something and it was still full. There was no label on it. It was an old bottle. That’s just to say this has been generational. I’m sure they used some form of alcohol as therapy.

Thank you so much, Mr. Bonnett. Of course, we have certainly heard from you before. Thanks for your wise comments.

• (1045)

[Translation]

I want to thank everyone for their contribution.

That’s the end of our meeting.

(The meeting is adjourned.)

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