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**Chair**

**Mr. Pat Finnigan**



## Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

Tuesday, October 16, 2018

• (0845)

[English]

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

[Translation]

We are resuming our study of the mental health challenges that Canadian farmers, ranchers and producers face.

[English]

With us this morning is Andrew Campbell, partner at Bellson Farms.

From Farm Management Canada, we have Heather Watson, executive director.

From the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, we have Keith Currie, president; and Peter Sykanda, farm policy analyst.

Welcome to all of our panellists.

We'll start with an opening statement of six minutes each.

Mr. Campbell.

**Mr. Andrew Campbell (Partner, Bellson Farms, As an Individual):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning. It's a great honour and pleasure to sit before you today and beside these three industry leaders to talk about such an important issue that unfortunately has been hanging over farms for decades.

On Sunday night, I was thinking a lot about coming from our farm in southern Ontario as I milked cows with my Dad. The kids worked on the job of moving hay with a pedal tractor. The sunset provided a glorious view outside. We had a good run on the soybean harvest, and I was thinking ahead of this opportunity to have a positive impact.

I was thinking how fortunate I was. But when it comes to mental health, many think that just being fortunate should be good enough. We get to work in and with nature's wonder. We get to work alongside our families, usually from home. We get to be our own boss.

But the same things that bring us those moments of joy can obviously turn. Is nature's wonder going to keep sending so much rain in the spring that planting is delayed enough to put a drag on crop yields? Will the heat wave make cows uncomfortable enough

that they'll eat less, which will lead to lower milk production? Are the 90 plus-hour work weeks having an impact on my job as a father and husband? Are the decisions I make this month going to bring severe enough losses that I risk not only my future on the farm but the retirement savings that my parents have which are almost solely tied up in that farm?

Balancing the good with the challenging is no easy feat. It can so often be tied to the finances as well as the risks that are completely out of our control. Any issue with weather and the crop yields are impacted. Less yield equals less income, despite you paying most of the expenses up front. A trade war between two foreign countries means lower grain prices, again impacting income. Add in interest rates, trade deals, growing conditions in Brazil, milk prices in Wisconsin, meat demand in Asia, steel prices for equipment, and on and on and on. Things that we can't control in agriculture lead to those sleepless nights spent worrying about whether or not we'll be able to write all of the cheques by the end of the year. If the stress over finances isn't enough, tie in the guilt over whether the priority of the day should be family, farm or off-farm work. Finally bring in the stigma. It's challenging enough in the general public, but so much more present in rural areas where the culture of the farmer is somehow supposed to be the strong and silent type no matter what.

Those are the problems. What are the solutions?

First, there are quite a few things that are working. The fact that there are programs to help share the costs in business and in financial planning, as well as succession planning, are critical. Without a plan, without someone there to help guide a family through difficult discussions, the stress climbs exponentially. Having lived that firsthand, I know that the ability to share those costs is one step to at least easing one of the many stressors.

Strong risk management programs and insurance programs add to a relief that even if things turn tough, at least there's a backstop to help prevent the loss of the entire farm. That for us and many others includes the home in which we raise our family. That adds to the pressure.

Addressing the stigma and seeing more and more associations and organizations—and obviously this committee—bringing the issue to the forefront lets people know they don't need to live with a facade of the strong and silent type. I hope the move to push that stigma away continues to grow. However, there are things that need work.

In a world where services and communications continue to move online, we need to make sure farmers keep up. I know how beneficial it simply to be able to talk to the kids or a neighbour while spending days in isolation in a tractor cab. But you have to have the connectivity in the most rural of places to help a farmer talk.

Obviously, there can't be a mental health professional in every rural community, especially one that has experience in farming. To be able to have that video chat instead helps farmers keep the discussion within the privacy of their home, something they're concerned about. It helps to save them what could be several hours of travel. It makes it easy for them to accept the help—or at least easier anyway—but they need to have that connectivity.

We all need to be mindful of our words. I've been told online that I'm a murderer. My wife has been asked why she would ever be with someone who rapes animals. There are commercials and marketing labels that brag about their superiority in the market saying the way that I choose to farm is leading to many of the problems that people have with their health.

We even have some who relentlessly push agendas pointing to my family as somehow greedy and selfish for just wanting to break even at the end of the year. When you hear that over and over and over again, you may know it's not true, but it wears on everyone in the business. Negativity breeds negativity.

We can all focus on the words of encouragement and on working to push people up. As one who has been through tough times, I know that a helping handout or simply a "How can I help?" can go so far for an individual.

● (0850)

That being said, at a big picture level, this is an issue that we can't solve in one meeting. It's going to take work; it's going to take investment; it's going to take all of us moving in the same direction if we are going to save lives, save families, and save businesses. All of those are at stake with these discussions

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to your questions a little later.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Campbell.

Now I understand, Mr. Currie, you're going to give the opening statement for six minutes.

Thank you.

**Mr. Keith Currie (President, Ontario Federation of Agriculture):** Good morning. My name is Keith Currie. I'm president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and with me today is Peter Sykanda, our lead policy adviser for farmer mental health. On behalf of the OFA and the 38,000 farm families we represent, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about this important topic.

Interest in providing awareness and support for mental health challenges to our farming community is at a record high. We are very pleased that the agriculture committee is taking the time to study this very critical issue.

The OFA strongly supports developing initiatives and taking action to tackle mental health issues in our community. Ultimately,

our goal is to collaborate in breaking down the barriers that exist for farmers in need—and from there, to foster the development of long-term mental health resiliency.

You have already heard a great deal about these barriers over the last few weeks, so I know you will appreciate that the barriers are complex, multi-faceted and interconnected.

While things are better than they used to be, the barrier of stigma is still very much prevalent in rural communities. The perception remains that mental health challenges are one's own and not to be discussed openly. We can begin to break down this barrier with greater communication and awareness about mental health challenges within the farm community—starting the conversation and allowing individuals to comfortably seek help without fear of judgment.

There is the barrier of accessing resources. We hear from our members and from current research that farmers need and appreciate resources that are tailored to the realities of farming, staffed with people who speak their language and understand the unique culture of farming. We need research, training and mental health advocacy throughout the whole agricultural system, which would include but not be limited to farm input suppliers, farm advisers and government inspection agents, just to name a few. These are the people who are most frequently in contact with farmers and ranchers and who farmers most often reach out to.

We strongly support the work being done by Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton and the University of Guelph, and we know from Andria's research that women farmers are experiencing higher levels of mental distress than are male farmers. Continued research, development and distribution of materials focused on specific challenges of women farmers are also urgently needed.

There are limited mental health services and practitioners in rural areas. While crisis telephone lines are important, continued research and innovation are needed with regard to mental health services that provide timely and evidence-based services for farmers and rural residents.

Finally, a critical barrier is that of sustainability. In the past, mental health programming and services have been made available for farmers during various crises due to market collapses and other tragic events. However, these interventions don't last, and support withers once the problem has subsided or the temporary funding has ended. We need a strategic, long-term, sustainable approach to tackling ongoing mental health issues. Addressing mental health cannot be limited to crisis events. It is a real issue in the day-to-day lives of farm families.

A great first step in addressing many of these barriers is to establish a Canadian network for farmers' mental health, with a central hub located at the University of Guelph. Properly supported, this network would provide a long-term, sustainable approach to coordinating academic and practitioner expertise from across the country; conducting participatory action research and knowledge transfer from those who know farmers best; and extending evidence-based, peer-to-peer awareness training programs tailored to the needs of Canadian agricultural communities. This network would create a strategic approach to addressing existing and emerging issues, providing a path toward long-term mental wellness and resilience among Canadian farmers.

The opioid crisis: we would be negligent if we did not take the opportunity today to highlight the relationship between mental illness and the use of addictive substances. Recent research sponsored by the American Farm Bureau Federation highlights the severe impact opioids and substance abuse are having on rural areas in the United States. We have no reason to think the potential outcomes in Canada could end up different.

There are, of course, different causal pathways explaining the relation between mental health and substance abuse problems, including using substances to self-medicate diagnosed or undiagnosed mental illnesses. Unfortunately, access to effective, affordable treatment for substance abuse problems is often limited for our rural communities.

Treatment for concurrent mental health and substance abuse disorders will require a great deal of support and a collaborative approach to research, training and empirically supported interventions by specialists. Given the connection between substance abuse and mental health disorders, we urge the committee to respond to these two issues jointly.

• (0855)

I would like to close by thanking those in our agricultural community, like Andrew, who have bravely stood up to have their voices heard and to help break the stigma. We hope their inspiring message will allow many others—who are stressed, depressed, isolated, struggling or afraid—to seek the support they need.

We thank the committee members for their time and look forward to any questions that they may have.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Currie, for your statement.

Now, Ms. Watson, you have up to six minutes.

**Ms. Heather Watson (Executive Director, Farm Management Canada):** Mr. Chairman and honourable members, thank you for inviting Farm Management Canada to speak before you today on matters concerning mental health in the Canadian agricultural community.

We are the only national non-profit organization devoted to cultivating farm businesses management excellence for all farmers across Canada. We do this by developing, delivering and connecting farmers with business skills development programming and learning opportunities. We are very pleased to speak to today's topic as we see an inherent symbiotic connection between mental health and farm business management.

Farming is unique. It is unlike any other business. The family home and memories are rooted, literally, on the farm and in the business. Farmers cannot simply pick up and start over when times are tough. Farmers are facing risk and uncertainty like never before from Mother Nature to changing markets and regulations, many of which are outside of their control. Public trust and social licence are now putting more pressure on the farmers.

Stress is the human response to change, especially changes that cause worry, frustration, confusion and a sense of losing control. Our farmers are incredibly stressed. Stress can burden us to the point where it threatens our physical and mental health. Physical signs include an increased heart rate, headaches and trouble sleeping. Mental signs include difficulty concentrating and making decisions. Emotional signs include feeling anxious, agitated or depressed. Behavioural signs include restlessness, compulsive behaviours and cutting corners. Cutting corners increases risk, including in terms of farm safety, labour management, animal health and welfare, etc.

When it comes to farming, the effects of mental health go beyond the individual. The business must keep going. The team must be led. The animals must be fed, crops managed, and the cows milked. We must consider not only the mental health of the farm manager but also that of the farm team as well as how the manager and team are equipped to support positive mental health. Hence, there is an inherent connection between mental health and managing the farm.

We recently completed a study with colleagues at Agri-Food Management Excellence, looking at the impact of CTEAM, which is a national farm business training program. Participants come away with a strategic business plan for their farm. We asked the alumni to report on the impacts of the program: financial impacts including profit and debt management; business impacts including a process for decision-making, performance measurement and network of experts; and personal impacts including confidence in management decisions, the ability to prioritize and provide clear direction and to understand personal dynamics to better manage people and communicate. Interestingly, results revealed that in the eyes of the participants, personal impacts far outweighed business and financial impacts.

Farm business management practices help reduce risk, increase certainty and increase confidence. Through the business planning process, farmers create a vision and learn to set realistic goals. They also learn how to say "no." They assess the risks and opportunities they may encounter along the way and put measures in place to mitigate and manage what is within and what is outside of their control. Planning solidifies the farm team, creating a support network including family, business partners and advisers. The plan provides a guiding light to weather any storm.

It is in this way that farm business management facilitates mental preparedness, reducing stress and the physical, mental, emotional and behavioural consequences thereof.

We're excited to explore the connection between mental health and business management further. As a first step, we're hosting "Healthy Farmer Healthy Farm", a panel discussion at our upcoming Agricultural Excellence Conference to focus on the importance of personal capacity and growth to achieve business success. We also plan to commission a national study within the next year. We will be seeking partners to provide the necessary matching funds to secure support from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

We're pleased to see mental health in the spotlight. We were part of a national initiative in 2005 to focus on mental health in agriculture. The initiative included forming a Canadian farm stress network. Activities included a dedicated website and informational brochures. Proposed activities included a national stress summit, a national strategy, and a national farm stress line along with agriculturally sensitive, peer-to-peer and professional support services for farmers and their families. The work of Au Coeur des Familles Agricoles in Quebec was being considered as a model for national expansion. ACFA, who I think you'll be hearing from on Thursday, provides house calls to check in on farmers before they reach crisis and a safe house for farmers and their families overcome by stress.

Unfortunately, sufficient funding could not be secured to continue the work of the network. Perhaps some of the ideas could be reconsidered.

Our recommendations in summary are as follows.

One, we recommend forming a national community of practice; establishing a national network to guide and monitor efforts; supporting the development of national endeavours including a mental health summit, farm stress line and resource centre; and supporting the collection and analysis of data relating to mental health incidents in rural areas.

Two, we recommend increasing access to relevant help. Allocate more resources to establish rural mental health workers in the field; equip mental health professionals with a better understanding of farming; and train and educate regarding positive mental health for farmers for themselves and employees they manage. The mental health first aid training is a great initiative.

• (0900)

Third is the recognition of youth. Half of all mental illness begins by age 14. We should support initiatives geared at improving mental health support for young people.

We're not afraid to say it: We believe that farmers deserve special treatment. Farmers are not only feeding you, me, and the world, farmers are the heart of our economy, environmental stewardship, public health, and community development. They need our help, and we must act.

In an ever-changing and increasingly complex global marketplace, the business-savvy farmer is positioned to confront change with confidence and seize opportunity, carving out a steady path for sustainable growth and prosperity while maintaining positive mental

health. Albeit a lofty goal, business skills development and training must be recognized as a catalyst for positive mental health and an essential complement to risk management.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members and guests.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Watson.

With that, I'd like to welcome our committee members, and we will start our questioning round.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Berthold, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

I want to thank the witnesses appearing before the committee today. It is a very thought-provoking subject. Every witness provides a bit more food for thought.

If I may, Mr. Chair, I would like to point out that, Ms. Fayah Najeeb is with us; she is a participant in the University of Toronto's Women in House program.

• (0905)

[*English*]

She's with us today. I hope that all of our discussions will help her, so she can go back to Toronto with good ideas about agriculture.

Welcome.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Campbell, I think you have put your finger on something quite important: all the factors that farmers have to deal with in their work. These are realities that the average person is unaware of.

Could you elaborate on this and tell us why global markets and the weather impact farmers more than they do on people who work for a company and collect a regular paycheque every week? Tell us exactly how you feel as a farmer when you hear the weather forecast, for instance.

[*English*]

**Mr. Andrew Campbell:** Well, that would depend on the given day. That's challenge number one. As you pointed out, I don't think it's necessarily one factor.

The challenges I face, which I know others do as well, are the compounding factors. If the weather is rainy, we usually accept that, because eventually it has to rain. But if the price is going down at the same time as the interest rate is going up, at the same time that you have to replace a piece of equipment that's now 25% more expensive, all of this starts to snowball.

Eventually there gets to be one issue that's a breaking point. For each individual farmer, that breaking point is probably different. The fact that this happened in their life—it probably isn't just that; it's probably everything that has snowballed up to that point.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Who do you call right now when things are not going well?

[English]

**Mr. Andrew Campbell:** Honestly, part of it is that you sleep on it, or unfortunately maybe you have a stiff drink at the end of the day. Something along those lines is certainly one of my coping mechanisms, whether it should be or not.

As I said before, I remember we were—

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** I want to know who you call.

**Mr. Andrew Campbell:** The one example would be, here I am trying to work some muddy ground, being more stressed, and I call the neighbour who I see doing exactly the same thing across the road. We sit and visit back and forth, probably not talking about the crops at all. We'd open with that, but then we'd talk about the kids.

It's just something to take your mind off things. That's really the only mechanism I've found. I wonder who else is doing the same stupid thing I am, and I find out how they're coping.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** In other words, there is a network of farmers with the same problems who can help you. But are there any resources to support you through especially difficult periods?

[English]

**Mr. Andrew Campbell:** I don't know of any resources. I have no idea. I could not tell you what those resources are.

As I said, the resources are ones we've built in our community of a friendly group of farmers who you trust and talk back and forth with. That's basically all we tend to have.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** When there is a crisis or difficult situation, though, all the members of the network are dealing with it. You are all dealing with the same problem at the same time.

[English]

**Mr. Andrew Campbell:** Yes, absolutely.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** In other words, you ask people who are as depressed as you are to help you deal with a depressing situation.

[English]

**Mr. Andrew Campbell:** Yes, that is exactly how we do it.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Mr. Currie, what is your organization's role in addressing this problem?

**Mr. Keith Currie:** Well, I can actually speak from practical experience because not only do I represent the organization, I also farm. Andrew is correct that we tend to bottle it up.

I'll expand a bit on what he said. He's working with three generations on his farm. I'm of the eighth generation on my farm.

There's a sense of disappointment that we also experience. We don't want to be failures. We have to get past that stigma first to understand that it's okay; that yes, weather plays a factor; that as farmers we're price-takers, not price-setters, so we are affected by markets that we have no control over; and that we are affected by governments that do things that affect our market—things we have no control over.

I know that Andria Jones-Bitton presented to you a couple of weeks ago. We've been working extensively with her. She represents a group of people. She's a veterinarian by trade. The veterinarians, the feed dealers, the people who come onto our farms on a regular basis tend to be folks who our members talk to, so we're starting to reach out to those associations to ask how we can work together to let our members know that it's okay to be not well, that it's not their fault and not their problem.

I have personal experience, with my own daughter suffering from anxiety for years, and she's been dealing with that. You know, there aren't a lot of places to go.

● (0910)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'm sorry. I have to mind the time. Perhaps you'll have the chance to finish. Don't feel bad if I cut you off.

**Mr. Keith Currie:** I get that at home all the time.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Drouin, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Andrew, I just want to say that I attended one of your conferences or speeches at the Canadian Young Farmers' Forum two years ago, in 2017. I thought the perspective you brought with posting one picture a day and that lesson that you learned....

I'm wondering if you have had those conversations with our previous generations about the different pressures that apply to farming today and the mental stress that can be harmful to somebody who is, you know, 10,000 miles away from somebody who is trolling them on Twitter or on Facebook. At the same time, are young farmers reaching out to you through social media to seek support and saying, "Hey, I'm not feeling well today. How's it going?"

**Mr. Andrew Campbell:** I actually do get quite a few messages from people who are basically being attacked online. That's probably the one I get most commonly. They've put themselves in a space to try to do their best at helping a consumer understand what they're doing, why they're doing it, how they're doing it, and all of that. Unfortunately, if someone comes along and—as I've stated before—says some pretty nasty things, usually, most people swallow that and realize that's a troll. If all of a sudden there's a coordinated approach by some type of an organization, then every time you hit refresh, there are a dozen new messages telling you what a terrible person you are.

That wears on a farmer, and all of a sudden it leaves them in a tough position where they think, “I want to do good. I want to help people understand what I'm doing, but, guess what, whether I take a picture or not, the cows are still going to make milk, so do I really need to put myself out there?” Just trying to at least have that conversation about how we got through some of that, how we continue to get through some of that.... It's by no means any level of professional help, but we hope it gets them through what is usually a tough couple of weeks.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Great. Thanks Andrew.

Mr. Currie, with regard to stigma and how we approach that conversation with farmers, is OFA planning on organizing or providing training to some of their OFA directors or regional directors? I ask this because they do interact quite often with their farmers. We know that on the high school side there have been grassroots movements that have been started to say, “Hey, I don't think this person is feeling well, so I'm going to connect him with that mental health specialist.”

**Mr. Keith Currie:** Yes, we've actually recently done some training of our MSRs. We also have an individual whose title is capacity coordinator and who is working with our MSRs and our county federations. We're in the early stages of it, and it's a sensitive area. Not everybody is always forthcoming on there being a need for them, even though it's probably there. We're doing as much work as we can with our limited abilities, to make sure that our staff are at least trained to understand or to try to recognize when someone has an issue. Perhaps then, they can try to coordinate with them about where they need to go, whether it's to a family doctor or a nurse friend, whoever might be a better expert in that area. Yes, we are doing that kind of work.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Thanks.

Heather, welcome to the committee. I know the training and the sessions you provide through your organization. Especially recently for me, I'm in dairy country, so I get farmers who will call me every day or month saying, “The price of milk went down.” But then I also have farmers who will call me and say, “Well, over five years we're doing pretty good.” It's like the stock market, and my financial planner says, “If you're too stressed, don't look at the stock market every day. Look at it long term.”

Knowing that, different farmers will absorb the stress levels and impacts differently, and I think financial stress is a major cause. How does your organization deal with that? Do you talk about mental health when you give sessions?

● (0915)

**Ms. Heather Watson:** Yes, I think inadvertently we've started talking about mental health more. Perhaps we didn't call it that. We've done a lot of work on transition planning and succession planning, and we did quite a big project over the last two years in getting generations of farmers from the same farm coming together and learning together. What is it that's negatively impacting the farm? What's stalling the transition process? Where am I stuck? You realize through this that a lot of it is about going inside yourself and thinking, for example, “what am I comfortable with as a risk level? What are my biggest fears?” Then it's about putting measures in place to provide some sort of certainty and some sort of “control” over what's going on. It's looking at all the scenarios that your farm faces. Which ones can I mitigate by putting certain practices in place, such as business planning, or having regular conversations with the family, or having business-focused conversations? And, then, what things are out of my control, and what can I do about that? If the weather is out of my control, I've thought about the scenarios that I could face. What's my comfort level with this? We've planned as a farm team and as a family. What is our comfort level with this scenario, and therefore what are our different options should this arise? So, if milk prices dive or commodity prices shoot up, whatever it is, you've—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Watson.

We have Mr. MacGregor for six minutes. Thank you.

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

Thank you, witnesses, for your testimony today.

Mr. Campbell, I'd like to start with you. In your opening statement you were talking about the organized campaigns of negativity that go after farmers. Social media has been both a blessing and a curse. It allows you to make that connection with many people who are in your profession. We as politicians certainly understand the campaigns of negativity, but I think the difference is that we in some ways expect them. We know that when we take a political position there will be people out there who disagree with this. The difference with farmers is that this is not just your job, this is who you are. It's your identity. I think what we've heard in testimony in previous days is that there's not enough understanding of the worth that farmers bring. There's a disconnect between the work that farmers do and the end product that ends up on store shelves.

In the context of government being able to do collectively what we can't do individually, do you think there's something that we can recommend to the federal government in trying to promote the value of farmers to bring that understanding to the general public, to help you out, to give you that worth?



**Mr. Andrew Campbell:** The conversation that I know has been had around the table before is about that public trust element. I don't necessarily think farmers need that recognition of "Aren't you great? Good for you." I don't necessarily think they're looking for that pat on the back. They're just looking to not be attacked. I think that's really what it comes down to. Are there more ways that we can build that public trust so that when a consumer goes to the store and chooses an item—and that's fine that they can choose—they don't necessarily do it because they think this other one is going to kill them or lead to some kind of a problem? Can we just build more trust in the food system? In the agricultural community, I think that would probably go a long way for a lot of farmers.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Are there any practical steps that the federal government can take, some kind of a campaign, to help you out with that?

**Mr. Andrew Campbell:** Probably there are, and there are probably even ways to fund ones that are already going on. There are a lot of organizations across the country that are doing that; even commodity by commodity we realize this is a problem. There's probably funding there, but I think it goes even beyond that to saying, "We believe in these tools, these technologies. We have branches of government that have approved these." Whatever that is for government, to just be there and stand up and say, "This is safe. We do believe in this technology. We do believe in these tools" would be a huge statement in itself.

● (0920)

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** That's perfect. Thank you.

Mr. Currie, I'd like to move to you. As a representative of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, from Canada's most populous province, you certainly have far more farms than I have in British Columbia. One constant we have heard about is the variables that are beyond farmers' control, and among them is the weather.

Last week the IPCC released a report that shows that under our current trend, we are heading towards pretty catastrophic climate change and will see the effects in droughts and floods and an increased frequency of storms. Going forward, this means that a child born today who inherits the family farm in 20 to 30 years is going to be right in the centre of that.

In the context of how those increasingly uncontrollable variables are going to affect farmers' mental health, are there any comments you want to offer?

**Mr. Keith Currie:** We've always had to deal with the weather. Farmers look at it as just part of doing business. To go back to Andrew's comments during his presentation, it's what happens right now that really stresses us out. We know that weather's coming, but until it actually hits us head-on, we don't assess it as being part of a problem.

We've been very good at adapting over time to whatever we need to adapt to, but as Andrew pointed out, it's a compilation of many factors, weather being one. It certainly puts the most immediate pressure and stress on us, but it's just a turning point from all the other stresses combined.

We're going to have to continue to work with farmers to make them understand that the weather is changing and is going to keep

changing and that they need to be prepared and, through their farm practices, as ready as they can be for those changes.

That's about as far as we can go, because we honestly don't know what Mother Nature is doing. She doesn't give us a direct line to her to let us know what's going on, so we have to try to get people to be ready for the fact that changes are coming and mentally prepared to handle them.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** How prevalent is the topic of mental health now within OFA? Also, so that we're not all operating in silos, in what ways can the federal government help augment what you're already doing so that we're working together and pooling our resources?

**Mr. Keith Currie:** That's a great question. Thank you.

It has been very prevalent of late. We've had workshops the last two years at our AGMs that have been standing room only. We've actually had to turn people away who wanted more information, wanted to know where they can go, whom they can see, and whether they are normal. It's important for people to know that it's okay for people to talk about it; that it's an illness, it's not your fault. I think breaking those kinds of stigma is an important step that we can take.

Funding the work that Andria Jones-Bitton is doing at the University of Guelph for perhaps setting up her network would be fantastic, because now we have a central point for people to go to and to start from. There are folks such as Heather as well.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Currie.

Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. Longfield, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.):** Thanks, Mr. Chair, and thanks, everybody, for preparing and coming to talk to us about this. It's always good to have Guelph in the room.

Keith and Peter, thank you for coming.

I want to build on what Alistair was just discussing. With joint jurisdiction, the OFA has sent a letter to the Ontario provincial government asking for support. The Canadian government has provided \$5 billion for mental health with the health accord. We didn't have a health accord with the provinces and territories for a long time; we now have one.

Is the money getting through to the province? Are we measuring success in the right way? What is the joint jurisdictional challenge that we face as a federal government in delivering services to your organization?

**Mr. Keith Currie:** I'm going to turn to Peter.

**Mr. Peter Sykanda (Farm Policy Analyst, Ontario Federation of Agriculture):** Thank you very much. That's a great question.

In terms of measuring whether or not we're successful in this area, as we mentioned in our opening statement, this is a very multi-faceted and complex issue, and no two farms are the same. To know what success looks like in measuring how we're impacting mental health will require continued research.

We're hoping that in working with Andria and other folks, we can build a network that will coordinate the expertise across the country. Many people are doing great work across the country, and we'd love to see it come together in a strategic, coordinated, and, particularly, long-term way. We want to see that happen.

In the past, as we mentioned, there has been crisis intervention, but we want this to be a long-term effort and not a shotgun approach in which people are doing different things all over the country.

● (0925)

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** Are you working with the local health integration networks? We have the Waterloo Wellington LHIN in Guelph and the surrounding areas. Is that the strategic partner you're talking about?

**Mr. Peter Sykanda:** That would certainly be one we'd love to work with. Again, from the Mental Health Commission of Canada to other folks at the University of Waterloo, there are great resources all over the country that we'd love to be able to bring together. Certainly we need to learn a lot from the agriculture standpoint, which again requires more research. We'd love to see a better approach to that.

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** That's great. Thank you.

Andrew and Heather, I have a joint question. I was thinking about when I started my business in 1986, and I can barely remember 1987. It was a very stressful year as I tried to get things going. I was thinking of my grandfather coming to Canada in 1920 as a blacksmith and starting up in rural Manitoba, going to all the farms to try to get his business going, and then the 1930s hit. He ended up in the Brandon sanatorium for six months. My grandmother had five kids. She was alone on the farm, and there was no income coming in. There was no social support, so they were eating squirrels and whatever they could get by with.

Heather, in your presentation you mentioned the impact on women. Women are as much a part of the farm as are the men on the field. Could you comment on the impact on family?

Andrew, we'll get to business start-up if we have time.

**Ms. Heather Watson:** Yes, most definitely. I think Keith would agree on the women's side. I think we need to recognize that women face different challenges. Men face challenges, but they're different. They're holding the weight of the world on their shoulders. The woman is often the mediator in decision conversations, trying to make everything work, the family as well as the business, trying to keep it all together. There are lots of conversations on farms about widows as well and the resources available to them. I think it makes absolute sense to carve out a space for women, and maybe with the research that Peter and Keith are talking about, figure out what is mental health, and what women's role is in agriculture on the farm and what that means.

I think that's worth unpacking, because I think there's a lot there and a lot of resources we could put into it, but I think it's a very specific piece we need to delve into quite deeply.

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** My wife, Barb, was the one who got me through my business, and now she's getting me through this next career. If you don't have stability at home, you don't have stability.

Thank you for that.

Andrew, I'm trying to think in terms of my experience. It wasn't farming. I didn't have access to what happened in the markets. I was able at least to go and find new customers and I could charge the price I wanted to. What you're facing is a lot of uncontrollable variables. Then you have some that you can control. There are only so many hours you can spend on the fields, but working with experts to try to improve your productivity, do you look at what you can control versus what you can't control and try to separate those in terms of stress management?

**Mr. Andrew Campbell:** Yes, certainly. Heather also mentioned planning some of those things that you can control. One thing we did early on around our farm was to have that discussion, one, in terms of direction so that we are all paddling in the same way, but then, two, about how if we can't control the price, maybe we can control the production. Maybe we can control different areas. So how are we going to focus on that? Certainly that stresses you out a little, but usually you have the plan.

I find that usually a lot of those outside factors stress you the most, because you just don't know how to deal with them.

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** And your personal mission is one of the grounding things: You're feeding Canada.

**Mr. Andrew Campbell:** Yes, and it feels really good, but at the same time that adds to the pressure to say that if I don't get all the cheques written this year, what am I going to do next year? I'm not going to be doing that. I have to work to feed the family.

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Longfield.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Breton, you have six minutes.

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

Thank you for your excellent testimony this morning, ladies and gentlemen.

Certain studies have pointed out that farmers rarely seek professional help to deal with anxiety, stress and mental health issues.

My question is very simple, and it is for Ms. Watson: why is that the case and what are the potential solutions?

● (0930)

[*English*]

**Ms. Heather Watson:** That's a very good question. Why aren't farmers consulting more than others are?

Perhaps it goes back to what Andrew was saying earlier. There's this stigma about the strong and silent type. Agriculture just keeps going. Also, we're 2% of the population. When you're looking at priorities and you're looking at where the major issues in the population are, often agriculture gets overlooked because it has always been there, and hopefully it always will be there, because we need to eat.

I think now is the time to stand up and say.... As I said in my speech, agriculture is different. Farming is different. We say that all the time, and we're not shy to say it because we do think it's completely different. As Alistair was saying before, the risks space and the compounding risks are things no other sector would ever see.

I'm not sure why it hasn't been looked at before, but I'm really excited that we are looking at it now. I think we can make some huge, positive waves by addressing agriculture specifically, and women in farming specifically and just unpacking all the bits and pieces.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** Mr. Currie, do you have an answer or parts of an answer?

[English]

**Mr. Keith Currie:** I think part of the problem is that, because we're all individual business owners and we work on the landscape, we don't interact with a lot of people, so these problems get compounded because we think we're all by ourselves all the time. We do go to the coffee shop, and we brag about our new equipment, and we lie about our yields. We talk about our grandkids, but we don't talk about our issues back on the farm. I think that's part of the problem, because outside of family, we spend so much time by ourselves, so we haven't felt comfortable in saying, "I have a problem. I'm under pressure here, and I don't know what to do about it." I think that's a big part of the problem.

To Heather's point, I'm so happy that now there's a federal committee looking at it. We've had a lot of conversations. Twitter has been fantastic from an exposure standpoint. I don't understand the bullying aspect. If you did that across the street in a place where you work, you'd be charged with harassment, but it's okay to do it online. I don't understand why there's a difference, but we have to deal with that as well. Again, we're dealing with it on our own, so there's that individual pressure of whether we are alone, and we don't know.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** A young farmer who is a friend of mine told me that he went to see his doctor because he was not well. His doctor told him he would need to get away from work to feel better. Like the vast majority of farmers, however, his house is right on his farm. He was willing to stop working, but at home he could hear all the noises of his farm and saw the employees and tractors moving around. That was obviously not the answer.

We need to find other solutions for our farmers, such as respite houses away from farms. It is not like someone who works at a factory or for an organization who leaves their workplace completely when they go home. It is completely different for farmers.

Mr. Campbell, as a farmer, can you tell us the three main triggers of stress or mental health problems among farmers?

[English]

**Mr. Andrew Campbell:** Probably the number of hours in a day is one. Certainly you talk about taking that break, taking that vacation time, or even taking the time to go out to visit with somebody else. Certainly there are times of the year when there is no way I can leave the farm because all I would do is sit there and shake with the stress of talking about my stress with somebody else.

Certainly that creates one pretty enormous challenge: Where is that priority, and what should I be doing in a day?

I think the biggest one, though, remains the financial aspect. So many of the problems that we have—whether they be weather, crop prices, the price of equipment, or whatever—always go back to, at least in the back of my mind, that it's going to mean less income. Where am I going to find more income somewhere else this late in the year? That really probably is the biggest factor for most, and that financial aspect probably is tied to most of the issues. Can you make it to the end of the year and into the next?

Third—at least around our place—is probably still that succession, that family dynamic. It's really easy to say we'll separate the business side and the personal side, so whatever you say on the business side, we won't take it personally at supertime. Well, that doesn't always work very well. The ability to manage the family relationship at the same time as the business relationship with exactly the same people can certainly create stress.

●(0935)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Campbell.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Breton.

[English]

Now we have Mr. Shipley and Mr. Dreeschen.

**Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses. I just want to say thank you to Andrew Campbell for stepping out—he's a neighbour. With regard to that #farm365, I can only imagine the stress that comes when it's not just you but your family receiving those comments, many of them from animal rights organizations or those who think we're poisoning the world by growing good crops. I just thank you for doing it. Now you're out helping us advocate as farmers and talking about Fresh Air Media. That's what yours is, I guess.

I just want to say thank you to all of you for coming out.

I really do want to touch on, though, the impacts that are happening. We've had individuals here who have talked about the situations. It isn't just the individuals. A few of us can remember back to the eighties. We know very much the stress that goes on, not just for the farmer but for those in the whole family. I agree with my colleague that our wives, our spouses, carry that same load.

Heather, you talked about the stress on women. They do carry it differently. They really do. I can't speak for everyone, but we tend to take things up here a little higher and they tend to dig in, because the kids are closer and they feel that responsibility.

How do we reach out? Do we know organizations?

Keith, you have the OFA. How do we reach out for professionals who are not just academic professionals but actually professionals who have some life experience on the ground and actually understand what some of those situations are? Maybe they've walked through them, or maybe they have had family who have walked through them. Are those people available?

**Mr. Keith Currie:** They are not available en masse, no. I think we have to continue to talk about it. We have to continue to advertise that there's a desperate need for that. The comment about going to the medical doctor who wanted to remove you from the farm or from the workplace is a fair one, because it happens all the time, because the medical field is not trained to deal with mental wellness. We need more input into getting training for them to understand it and say, "I don't know how to fix it, but I know where to send you to get some help." It's a collaboration; it's the whole system. We need resources for the farm communities, but we need resources for the medical community as well. When we combine those efforts, then I think we'll start to see the improvements we need. It's not going to happen quickly, but if we don't start, it's never going to happen.

So I think collectively we need to sit down. As Peter said earlier, we need a long-term strategic plan on how we're going to tackle this and accomplish this. We can go to our members on the ground and have a conversation with them, but we need the medical field to be able to do the same with their colleagues, as well.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Are there any other comments? We understand the professional, academic side. What about the use of young people who come up through 4-H, the advanced leadership program, Canadian Young Farmers' Forum and junior farmers? Have there been contacts and working relationships in coordinating come-alongside projects with these organizations?

**Mr. Keith Currie:** I know we certainly have been reaching out both on the provincial side and on the federal side, through the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, but it's still all over the map. We really need to start to hunker down and figure out how we coordinate all these like voices so that we're spending the resources wisely and we're all going through this together and we're not trying to reinvent the wheel all over the place.

• (0940)

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Is there something federally that we can help with, in that coordination, whether it's through Agriculture Canada or through Health Canada? And if there is—that may not be a fair question to ask you right now, but if there's something that any of you can forward to us in terms of your thoughts on bringing that together, I would very much appreciate it.

**Mr. Keith Currie:** I'll turn it over to Heather in a minute, but I think Peter hit it by starting with some research in this area. We have to have the research to understand what exactly we need, and then we can go forward with putting things in place.

**Ms. Heather Watson:** Yes. I would just add quickly that I think we need a platform to keep the conversation going on a national

level, but with regional integration as well—somewhere the health experts, the mental health experts and the agriculture experts can actually come together. Maybe it starts with a summit or something, but a place where you come together and talk about the different pieces that we need to unpack and then come up with a strategy to address those.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Andrew, where does your social media come in on that?

**Mr. Andrew Campbell:** As Heather mentioned, just creating that network is probably one of the really important things we can do. Using that as a tool, it is really quite easy to say here's that resource or at least here's that organization that will find you the resource you need. I think the big challenge for a young farmers' forum, a professional doctor, or anybody is to point out and ask where to go. Well, if we have one umbrella, maybe that's a beginning point.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Can we as a federal government help on the prevention side? With that being on social media, can we actually promote agriculture and the healthy lifestyle? I'm not sure we're actually doing enough of that.

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, Mr. Shipley, we're out of time.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** If you can help us with that, it would be great.

**The Chair:** I'll allow that.

We have very little time. I'll allow a question from Mr. Peschisolido, who is next.

**Mr. Joe Peschisolido (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.):** Okay. I have one question.

**The Chair:** It has to be not too long.

**Mr. Joe Peschisolido:** Thank you for coming here today and doing two things for us: telling us about your personal experience and telling us how it relates to public policy.

I love the term "symbiotic relationship" between the farm management practice and health issues. Can you elaborate a little on that?

**Ms. Heather Watson:** I know we're almost out of time, so just quickly, farm management brings confidence, and confidence helps with positive mental health, making decisions, knowing what's in your control and what's not in your control, and knowing you're doing the best you can with what you have.

On the opposite side, negative mental health or not-positive mental health can cause difficulty making decisions and difficulty knowing whether you're doing the right thing for the right person at the right time.

There is a connection between positive business management practices and positive mental health and between not-so-good mental health and not-so-good business practices. Not-so-good business practices can perhaps have some negative consequences for mental health, because you're not quite sure where you are and where you're going.

I like to focus on the win-win of the two scenarios, if we can.

**Mr. Joe Peschisolido:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Peschisolido.

To the panel—Mr. Campbell, Ms. Watson, and of course, Mr. Currie and Mr. Sykanda—thanks so much for being here. It will certainly help us in our study. Have a good, safe trip back.

We will break for a few minutes and come back with the next panel. Thank you.

- \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_
- 
- (0945)

**The Chair:** Welcome to the second hour of our study on mental health for farmers and agriculture.

In this second hour, we have with us Mr. Murray Porteous, past national labour chair of the Canadian Horticultural Council and vice-president of Lingwood Farms Limited. Welcome to our meeting.

We have the president and chief executive officer of the Mental Health Commission of Canada, Ms. Louise Bradley. Thanks for being here, Ms. Bradley.

Also, by telephone, we have the president of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, Mr. Ray Orb.

We will start the opening statements.

Ms. Bradley, do you want to get us going on the opening statements? Thank you. You have six minutes.

**Ms. Louise Bradley (President and Chief Executive Officer, Mental Health Commission of Canada):** Thank you very much.

I'm delighted to be here this morning to talk about a topic that I, along with the Mental Health Commission of Canada, am quite impassioned about.

We have long understood that to get to the heart of addressing mental health and wellness of Canadians, we absolutely have to look beyond the health care sector. We need to understand that when we say “mental health”, it cuts across all jurisdictions—and I mean all jurisdictions. I would be happy to give you an example of what another country is doing in that regard. That's why the Mental Health Commission of Canada has prioritized working with unconventional partners, and chief among those are the workplaces.

When we first began to champion the national standard for psychological health and safety in the workplace about four or five years ago, we had to get employers to reimagine the concept of what a workplace is. We also had to remind our stakeholders that workplaces don't begin and end with office buildings—they simply do not. We've done a great job at helping to support a range of workforces, from first responders, to trucking companies, to health care providers, to help them put employee mental health on the agenda.

We've had some pretty good results. So, where am I going with this? Well, farmers, producers and those mining our natural resources are equally people at work—hard at it, in fact. Rural Canadians are some of the toughest, hardest-working people anywhere in the world. But, as we've seen from our efforts with first responders, being tough isn't the same as being invulnerable, so

we need to step up to the plate collectively and take a look at what's happening across our farming communities.

We need to give some serious thought to how we are supporting their mental health, because the challenges they face are complex and layered. Their chosen jobs are replete with realities most of us would find quite daunting. It's an around-the-clock job, 365 days a year, and profits are reliant on the vagaries of weather, the supply chain, trade agreements, and other factors far outside the realm of their control. And there are very high levels of stress and isolation. Compound to that is stress with a lack—and I mean a lack—of access to mental health care. Let's remember that access to services is scant and often unavailable in most communities across this country, and that stigma is hardly a thing of the past in communities where everybody knows everyone else.

These reasons just scratch the surface as to the need to examine where a pan-Canadian responsibility lies in bridging the gap that too often sees agricultural workers and producers suffering in silence before resorting to suicide.

Addressing this may seem a daunting task, but back in the seventies, when Canadians were dying in car accidents, we didn't throw up our hands and say there's really not much we can do about that; it's too hard a problem. In 1971, seatbelts were made mandatory in all new cars. Legislation was enacted to make sure we used those seatbelts. We've seen even stricter evolution over car-seat requirements. Grassroots organizations and groups like Mothers Against Drunk Driving have lobbied hard to raise awareness about the dangers of impaired driving.

These and many other practical measures taken together actually save lives. In the same way, we have to build a practical framework to address the mental health of farmers, and we need to build better broadband infrastructure. Investing in e-mental health programs is not only wise but is the way of the future.

- (0950)

We should be making evidence-based distance mental health skills training, such as that provided by the Strongest Families Institute, widely available right across the country.

Taken together, these efforts would give farmers the opportunity to seek help where and when they need it, at a time convenient to them, and in the privacy of their own homes. It can be done.

We need to implement suicide prevention programs, such as the one the Mental Health Commission of Canada is promoting and now doing in three provinces in rural sectors. It's called Roots of Hope. It addresses such things as means restriction, provides resources such as walk-in mental health services when needed, and creates groups of like-minded people to share stories and act as peer supporters.

In 2015-16, the University of Guelph did a study co-authored by Andria Jones-Bitton, which revealed that of the 1,000 participants engaged in agriculture, nearly 60% were to be classified as suffering from anxiety.

●(0955)

**The Chair:** Ms. Bradley, I'm going to have to ask you to conclude, if you can.

**Ms. Louise Bradley:** The Mental Health Commission of Canada can play a supporting role in this. I will stop there.

There are solutions; there are answers; and we do not need to have our farmers suffer and die unnecessarily.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Bradley. You'll have a chance with the questions later on.

**Ms. Louise Bradley:** Yes, thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Porteous, you may take six minutes.

**Mr. Murray Porteous (Past National Labour Chair, Canadian Horticultural Council and Vice-President, Lingwood Farms Limited, As an Individual):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman and committee members, for allowing me to appear here today.

I've never been more nervous making a presentation. This past year has been extremely stressful: we've survived two tornadoes, which struck four of our nine farms; I had a knee shattered in June, which I'm hoping to have back to normal by January; but the worst part was undergoing an integrity audit through Employment and Social Development Canada.

I've been involved in the seasonal agricultural worker program for many years and have represented Canada in international negotiations for the program for the past six years. I'm the past chair of the labour committee for the Canadian Horticultural Council. When the ESDC first introduced the concept of having an integrity audit process, I was very supportive of it. I said we need to have integrity in the program; we need to ensure that workers are protected and that people follow the rules; and there need to be consequences for those who do not. We get a bad reputation as the agriculture industry when somebody doesn't comply and misuses workers. I've been very supportive of it, but right from the start I said that the integrity audit process needs to have an appeal process whereby you can have people who actually understand agriculture look at a situation and decide whether there is a real threat or not.

Second, it needs to be timely. In horticulture, timing is absolutely critical. Asparagus, when it's hot, will grow eight inches a day. I have to harvest it at between seven and twelve inches. That means that most days when it's warm, we harvest every day in asparagus; some days we harvest twice. I need to make sure we have workers available.

If the government decides, as they did in my case, that someone is not going to have workers, I'm out of business. That had serious impacts not only for my business but also for my family members.

Last October I was informed that I was going to go through an inspection, as they called it. I thought, well, okay; they have a random audit process, and that's fine. I was expecting this at some point; they're very thorough. They said, no, it's a risk-based audit. Right away that triggered some panic in me, because a risk-based audit means you are suspected of serious violations of the program requirements. You could be suspected of, for example, sex trafficking, imprisonment of workers, non-payment of workers,

violence against workers, deplorable housing conditions—any one of those things.

What surprised me is that they wouldn't answer when I asked them what I was being suspected of. I'm right in the category with all of that. My neighbours all know that I'm under inspection, and so they obviously start saying that I must have done something really wrong, because that means they can stop processing your applications for workers for next year.

The government is so slow in working that I have to apply right now if I want workers next spring to start harvesting asparagus. Any delay in that process really screws me up. It used to take the government ten days to process those applications. We're now talking about several months for them to process them. When you add in an integrity audit process, who knows where the end line is and whether you'll even have a workforce.

When they came and said in October that they were going to do this integrity audit, I was very relieved to hear them say they would not stop processing my application in the meantime. What I didn't know was that they were lying to me: they did stop processing my application. I didn't find that out until two months later.

Maybe I shouldn't say lying, but they weren't telling me the truth. There's a difference. There are different silos within the ministry. Communication isn't really good, and one hand doesn't know what the other hand is doing, and when they find out, nobody has the authority to overrule anybody else. As a farmer, you thus end up as a victim.

I thought, okay, I'm well organized; I'll submit everything they've required. I did that in November. I started experiencing health effects in October when they told me I was going to have an inspection. My resting heart rate has been 48 for the last 40 years, up until October, when it dropped to 40, which I thought was odd. Then one night while I was sitting watching TV with my wife, I said, "I don't have a pulse." She said, "That's ridiculous. Check somewhere else." But no, I didn't have a pulse.

What would happen was that my heart rate started ranging between 33 and 190 as a resting rate, and then it would reset for several seconds and wouldn't restart, so I was experiencing blackouts and things like that.

Anyway, we started going through this process, and we didn't know what we were accused of. You're guilty until you're proven innocent, because they're not going to process your application until you're cleared, which means you could be out of business right away. I farm in partnership with my brother-in-law and my father, and we also employ my son. My father is 81 years old. He started worrying about whether he's going to have enough money for his dotage when he gets old so he withdrew his member loans from the company.

•(1000)

I can't blame him for doing that. It's the prudent thing to do. When the bank realized that we had no guarantee that we were going to have workers this spring, they started to become nervous as well. We had less working capital because of my Dad withdrawing funds and also because our business was growing, so we had to increase our operating loan. The bank required an appraisal of all of our assets and then renegotiated our financing. That was okay. That was a little bit stressful, maybe, but we had hope that this integrity process would go tickety-boo. There's nothing wrong here. There's nothing to look for.

I was assured in December that I would know within days, not weeks, that I had my approval. That was the beginning of December, and I received my approval in about the third week of February. In the meantime, calls weren't answered, emails weren't answered, and we kept going through ridiculous questions. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada staff even suggested we move closer to town because there were more unemployed people there to hire.

**The Chair:** Mr. Porteous, I'm going to have to ask you to terminate. You'll have another chance with questions as we go on. Thank you so much.

**Mr. Murray Porteous:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Orb, you have up to six minutes to do your opening statement. Go ahead.

**Mr. Ray Orb (President, Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities):** First of all, it's a pleasure to be here today.

My name is Ray Orb. I am the president of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, known as SARM. We have been the voice of rural Saskatchewan for over 100 years and we represent all of the 296 rural municipalities in our province. As an association, we are mandated to work in agriculture, which is an important sector and a way of life in this province.

Going back to 1911, we reported that there were 95,000 farms in Saskatchewan, and the crop area going to wheat was 5.3 million acres. In 2016 we counted 34,500 Saskatchewan farms and 11.8 million acres of wheat planted, more than double the area that was reported in 1911. The landscape has changed over the course of the last one hundred years. There are larger farms yielding more production while at the same time there are fewer farms and fewer farmers, and this has all had a hand in creating additional stress for producers.

Farming and ranching have unique occupational hazards and stresses, with strong traditions of being independent occupations. The Agricultural Health and Safety Network was founded in 1988 in Saskatchewan by the Canadian Centre for Health and Safety in Agriculture along with SARM and originally with six rural municipalities in the province. It actually provides support to improve health and safety on the farm. According to the Agricultural Health and Safety Network, farmers are exposed to a great deal of physical health risks, along with long strenuous labour and poor working conditions inhibited by weather and time of day. Due to the nature of farming, farmers and their families are susceptible to high levels of stress, depression, anxiety and suicide.

Long hours in the field, unpredictable weather and often low commodity prices are all common concerns for producers in Saskatchewan. If you mix those things, for example, with a prairie fire that destroys homes, crops and livestock, you have the perfect recipe for stress coupled with disaster. That's exactly what happened last year in the southern half of our province, in the fall of 2017, as we saw hundreds of livestock perish and close to 35,000 hectares of pasture land lost in a fire that swept through the Burstall and Tompkins, Saskatchewan, area last October.

I had the opportunity to hear first-hand from farmers and ranchers as we toured the area to witness that devastation. We met with several ranching families who have been devastated by the grass fires. Many of them have lost a good part of their livestock herds, their pasture and their livelihood. When I asked how they would recover, they said they had faced adversity before and pulled through then, and they'd pull through now.

As an association, we hear producer frustrations about land prices, taxation policies and the lack of safety net programs with regard to their operations. As a retired farmer myself, I realize it's impossible to alleviate all the stresses of farming and ranching, but it's imperative that we have mechanisms in place to support our producers in times of need.

According to a 2016 study from the University of Guelph, Canadian farmers are more stressed than those living and working elsewhere. The survey found that 45% of respondents had high stress; 58% of them were classified with varied levels of anxiety, and 35% had depression. As well, 40% of the respondents agreed that they would be uneasy about getting professional help. This demonstrates that there still is a stigma associated with mental health treatment, especially in the agriculture industry.

If you look at a report on how to feed the world by 2050, it indicates that by that time the world's population will reach 9.1 billion. Food production must increase by 70%. Annual cereal production needs to reach three billion tonnes, and annual meat production will need to increase by over 200 million tonnes.

To ensure a sustainable food system, we need to ensure we have healthy producers, and we need to look at the ag industry holistically. We need to equip our producers with all the tools they require to be healthy, productive and successful. This should include safety net programs that address disasters, such as prairie fires as a result of extremely dry conditions.

•(1005)

We need to have forage and pasture insurance available to farmers that is affordable, timely enough and adequate to protect farmers from disasters. Sometimes it's also necessary that programs be modified, such as the livestock tax deferral program that permits livestock producers to spread income over a longer period of time when they are forced to sell part or all of their herds.

On behalf of Saskatchewan's rural municipalities, we thank the standing committee for the opportunity to lend our voice to this important conversation.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Orb.

Now we'll start our questioning round.

To start us off, we have Mr. Dreeshen for six minutes.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, all of the witnesses and also the witnesses who spoke earlier.

It's difficult for me to figure out exactly where to start in this.

I am a farmer. Right now we have our crops under snow. When you add that, and when you take the regulatory burdens that are associated with it, such as those of the Canada Revenue Agency and the added stressors they have there.... I believe, Mr. Porteous, you mentioned the integrity audit, and how you are suspected of being something that you aren't. There's exactly the same situation with the CRA and with the other concerns that people have. It's just so frustrating.

We have groups, such as Do More Ag, that are out there talking about things. What we need is a "do no more harm" from governments and other groups, like anti-farm associations. We heard earlier about the attacks we've had. It's something that is so critical. I think of all of the different things.

As Canadians, we'll apologize for anything. Other people around the world understand that. We see that happening in our oil and gas industry. All of a sudden we are afraid to take our natural resources to tidewater, where the rest of the world is filling in the gap. We lose because of that. Our forestry has had the same types of attacks from Greenpeace, and so on. Our agriculture groups are having the same issues as well, as we deal with GMOs and all these associated non-tariff trade barriers.

That is the attack. For the people who are watching and for the members we have here, these are the attacks people are talking about when they say that this is where the pressure is as far as agriculture is concerned.

Ms. Bradley, you spoke about the need for appropriate training for mental health workers, but I believe that one of the things we heard before is that the medical profession doesn't understand. You can't simply say, "Go away from the farm. Stay away for a while." That doesn't work when you live where your work is and where your family is. I think that becomes one of the critical things for training, to make sure we have a group of farm folks who have that.

Look at retired farmers. They're the ones who understand all of this. There's a pool of people you can also talk to and work with.

Ms. Bradley, can you think of any strategies that could allow that to be part of it?

Mr. Porteous, perhaps you could fill us in about some of the concerns you have with regard to government intervention, if there is enough time.

• (1010)

**Ms. Louise Bradley:** I do think there are strategies, in fact.

I mentioned one program that the commission is promoting and is now running in three provinces. It's a program called "Roots of Hope". Training is an important component of it, but you have to

bear in mind that it is one component. The philosophy around this particular program is that the answer lies within the community.

We didn't come up with this on our own. We learned this from 22 countries in Europe, and to a similar degree from Quebec, where the suicide rates dropped between 20% and 25% within two years.

There are specific components within that program. We currently have three provinces doing it, all in rural communities.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** Thank you very much.

I'm mindful of my time, so I apologize.

**Mr. Murray Porteous:** Thank you.

I don't know any other government program that's run this way.

On March 1, I received notice that ESDC, for their investigations, were going to enter farms without the permission, knowledge or consent of the producer. Whether or not the producer was present, they would go where they wanted and inspect what they wanted.

Later that morning I received a communication from them that they would also be seizing farmers' computers. That's when I had my heart attack.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** I think one of the concerns we have is we talk about farm workers and the employees and so on, and how important those are, and we have all of these programs, but the person who owns that farm is also working on that farm. You have situations where—and in Alberta we're at this stage now—if you have a certain number of people then there's a chance to do unionization, and isn't that going to help your operation?

These are the other sorts of issues that are coming at us because of the government not understanding what the farm is like. That's one of the situations you have.

Nobody understands a 90-hour work week. When you go and tell people that, they think you're full of it. Nobody understands that's exactly what you have to do.

Then they have other added stresses. It's one thing to deal with the weather, but it's something else to have somebody say, guess what, you're causing global warming so therefore we should be taxing you a little bit more, and I'm sure that will help.

If there's any time left, I'll let you rant [*Inaudible-Editor*].

**Mr. Murray Porteous:** When we raise the concerns about food safety, biosecurity and protocols that we have to adhere to, we're told, "We don't care. That's just an excuse. We're going to do our job."

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** You have fifteen seconds.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** That's okay.

I need to take my blood pressure pills.



**The Chair:** Mr. Peschisolido, go ahead for six minutes.

**Mr. Joe Peschisolido:** Mr. Chair, thank you.

I'd like to thank Madam Bradley, Mr. Porteous, and Mr. Orb for presenting through teleconference.

I'll begin with Mr. Orb.

You outlined some of the issues involved with mental health, and some of the situations. Can you elaborate a little bit on what you view as the role of municipalities? Mental health challenges are a multi-faceted issue with the federal government, provincial government, and municipalities. Can you elaborate a little bit on what you believe municipalities can do to deal with this issue?

**Mr. Ray Orb:** I think that's a fair question. I mentioned that we have a lot of municipalities in a province like Saskatchewan, and those municipal council members are in direct contact with the rural people. I think we're lobbyists, in the sense that we're trying to lobby the provincial government, and in some respects the federal government, for more doctors and better emergency services in rural Saskatchewan. The trend is that the doctors and the assistants, those kinds of medical labs and emergency centres, are moving into the bigger centres. We don't have good access to those. A farmer suffering from mental health concerns has to travel further to a city centre. That puts more stress on the farm.

It's an ongoing challenge, and something we're trying to work on through the physician recruitment agency in Saskatchewan. It's really been a struggle.

•(1015)

**Mr. Joe Peschisolido:** Thank you.

Madam Bradley, you talk about a lack of access to mental health help. How can we change that? Also, I noticed that in your presentation you were cut off a little bit. If you would like to elaborate on other issues as well, please feel free.

**Ms. Louise Bradley:** Thank you very much.

Lack of access to services is a huge problem among the farming community and anyone right across Canada but particularly those in rural settings.

The program I mentioned, called Roots of Hope, is something that.... Yes, it is important to have trained professionals, but in some of the smaller communities where we are seeing that program being rolled out right now, there's a thing called peer support work. Not everybody needs a highly paid clinician. There is a time and a place for that. But certainly having access to peer support....

We have to be more innovative. In a country the size of Canada, we can't build mental health clinics on every single corner.

I mentioned e-mental health. Those services can be accessed online or even by telephone if need be. It has seen great success in areas within Canada, as well as in other countries.

I mentioned Strongest Families, which has a huge program that can be accessed 24-7 at home. We know that cognitive behaviour therapy for anxiety and depression is not only as effective online as it is in person but sometimes even more so.

I think we have to rethink the way in which we are delivering services, in order to get these important programs to people, particularly when they are feeling suicidal.

**Mr. Joe Peschisolido:** One theme we've heard at this committee over and over again—and I believe it was either Mr. Campbell or Mr. Currie who said we don't get the language of farmers—is that the mental health industry and everyone involved don't get it. How can we change that?

**Ms. Louise Bradley:** As I mentioned, I think looking at peer support is one way in which people are definitely speaking the same language. I mentioned we've also had a great deal of success with first responders. I think each group has its own language, if you will. The way we have modified mental health first aid for veterans, for first nations in northern communities, I think can be adapted to the agricultural community. The time, the effort and the money have to be put into developing it, but it can be done.

**Mr. Joe Peschisolido:** Mr. Porteous, I feel for what you went through. Could you help me and the committee understand this audit process? I'm assuming it's from Service Canada.

**Mr. Murray Porteous:** It's the integrity branch of Employment and Social Development Canada. It's the stopgap, if you will, for making sure that everything is done in compliance with regulations for hiring foreign workers.

I'm discussing my case, but as national labour chair I was also in contact on a regular basis with several other farmers experiencing exactly the same thing. When they found out I was coming to appear before this committee, they suggested I not do it because they know that the government holds all the cards and ESDC could take reprisals against me and my business for speaking out, and they wouldn't speak out.

**Mr. Joe Peschisolido:** How do we change the deck so they don't have all the cards?

**The Chair:** You're out of time.

Thank you, Mr. Peschisolido.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Porteous, I'm very disturbed by the testimony we heard from you today. This is a study on mental health, but what you went through manifested itself in physical terms. I'm very sorry. I know you were nervous appearing before the committee today, but I hope you view this body as a committee of parliamentarians who are very interested in the subject, and I think we are all united in trying to find ways to make the system operate better.

In this case, we potentially have three ministries involved—Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship; ESDC; and Agriculture Canada. I've dealt with the federal government for many years now. Before I was a parliamentarian I worked for an MP as a caseworker. I have seen what happens to constituents when federal ministries are not doing their job properly. Often it's a problem of communication. They work in their individual silos. They are not aware of the holistic aspect of the problem. I'm worried this might be the case here.

If the government is causing this kind of stress for farmers, we need to fix the system. This committee needs to send a clear message to the minister.

We understand the problem. I don't want to dwell on that. I want to move forward to constructive solutions. With all your expertise, what recommendations can this committee make to the federal government to make the system better so we are looking after farm workers? Because that's a very valid concern, but we also want to make sure that farmers have access to that labour pool, and that they are not suffering from the same kind of stress you went through.

• (1020)

**Mr. Murray Porteous:** I can think of four cases offhand that are exactly the same as mine, involving the same timing and so on. When the investigations of all four of them were completed, they found absolutely nothing that any of the farmers had done wrong, but they had interrupted their businesses for four months in that process.

If there's not a major concern—and I don't believe there was in any of them because mine wasn't as a result of a complaint.... I was told by a senior official that it was the senior officials himself who registered the complaint against me, but I can't get that in writing because they are blocking the freedom of information request.

You need to have a system that doesn't assume you're guilty until you're proven innocent. If I were a rapist, I would have more rights than I do as an employer, because rapists are assumed to be innocent until proven guilty. That's step one.

Step two is that you have to have somebody who understands agriculture making decisions about agriculture, because otherwise they don't know what they are talking about.

Step three is that you have to have a goal. If the goal in Canada is to grow the economy and grow agriculture as a major driver of the economy and grow employment.... Horticulture is a huge employer in agriculture. We can't get Canadians to do the number of jobs we need done. We need a reliable workforce, and the seasonal agricultural worker program works very well in filling that growing labour gap. If we're really serious about the sector, and if horticulture actually matters in Canada, it needs to be a priority. We have to have integrity in the system, yes, but don't destroy the system while people who don't know what they are doing are performing a check.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Ms. Bradley, you spoke about your experience with first responders, veterans and members of the armed forces. Those are certainly branches that have had their own challenges with stigma. Is there anything you've learned from how...? I've talked with first responders and their culture used to be very stoic, but now it's something they talk about. Are there learned

lessons from how you made a breakthrough in those sectors that we can apply to agriculture?

**Ms. Louise Bradley:** Yes. I think each time we do an adaptation of two of our training programs, The Working Mind and Mental Health First Aid, we learn something we can pass on to the next one.

I think my biggest learning throughout all of this over the years has been with the issue of stigma. I'm not talking about stigma for farmers, although that is a very real thing. We have all kinds of evidence that if we made the right investment and created programs that could address the mental health of the agricultural community as well as elsewhere that they would work, but we're not paying attention to that evidence. It leads me to believe—and we are now starting to study it more at the commission—that there is the issue of what we are calling structural or institutional stigma.

There is all kinds of evidence to demonstrate that if we did the right thing, it would work. We simply aren't doing it. We have to reach a crisis, and I believe that we are in a crisis situation right across the country in terms of suicide. Our rates stayed the same for over a decade but are now climbing. Never mind all of the deaths by opioid overdose that aren't actually suicides. We are not doing anything nationally. It is happening piecemeal across the country to address this crisis situation.

Stigma on many different fronts has to be addressed. The answers are there. We simply are not putting the time, money and effort into developing the answers.

• (1025)

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Thank you. I will yield my remaining 10 seconds.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

Now we have Madame Nassif.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nassif, you have six minutes.

**Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for their presentations today.

My question is for Ms. Bradley.

In Canada, we do not currently have a mental health strategy for farmers. We know that farmers' mental health problems can lead to even more serious problems, and sometimes even to suicide.

We also know that depression in the general population, not just among farmers, costs Canada \$32.7 billion per year. Problems with anxiety cost \$17.3 billion per year.

Do you have similar data to share about farmers specifically?

[English]

**Ms. Louise Bradley:** I can't give you those exact figures off the top of my head. I don't know them. But we have that information, and I will be very happy to send it on to the committee.

We do have a national strategy for mental health. That was developed in 2012, and my fervent belief is that if we were able to implement the various components of that strategy, it would help all Canadians, including the agricultural community. That isn't to say that we don't need to put special efforts into the agricultural community. I think we do, in the same way we have with first responders. Access issues and the innovation required to provide mental health services apply equally in any rural community, in particular the agricultural community.

Does that answer your question?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Eva Nassif:** Yes.

What prevents farmers from asking for help for mental health problems, apart from the stigma and discrimination?

[English]

**Ms. Louise Bradley:** We simply don't have the programs. I mentioned one program called Strongest Families, out of Nova Scotia. It's being provided across the country in various sectors, yet there are huge communities that do not have access to it.

New Zealand does. It has a program for families—as one specific example—in which children are having difficulties. I can assure you that if there is stress and anxiety among parents and in their families, children feel it too. With this program they are able to access services in the privacy of their homes, so stigma isn't an issue, and they are able to do so at times that are convenient for them.

That is one example of a program that is not being provided right across the country, particularly in Ontario. It could do a great deal to help the plight of farmers with children who have difficulties.

Then there's the whole issue of e-mental health. That is another way, although I'm not aware of any program focusing simply on the agricultural community, but it could be developed. E-mental health is certainly a way of addressing that gap for people who work very long hours, as we've heard, and at very different hours.

• (1030)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Eva Nassif:** Apart from the problems we know of, such as long working hours, the shortage of temporary foreign workers, fires that destroy crops, and weather conditions, are there other factors that can lead to mental health problems for farmers?

[English]

**Ms. Louise Bradley:** To be honest with you, I'm not aware of any studies focused on what factors are creating this. I can tell you that isolation and poor or non-existent access to services deeply impact other populations, particularly in rural communities, and as far as the huge stigma goes, I cannot overemphasize the impact that has both with regard to governments providing services and in rural communities themselves.

One of the components of Roots of Hope I talked about is a training program within communities, plus a campaign. It allows people to talk and hear about mental health issues within the context of their own communities.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Bradley.

Mr. Longfield, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses.

I want to continue with Ms. Bradley. We had a round table earlier this year for which a lot of organizations from across Canada came to Ottawa. It was something that my office helped to coordinate. We looked at the connection between the Canadian Mental Health Association and the Mental Health Commission of Canada and others that are working. Could you maybe give us, for our report, the role that you see the Mental Health Commission of Canada playing, in terms of getting data, looking at measures of success or promoting mental health across the country? If you could do that in maybe 20 or 30 seconds that would be wonderful.

**Ms. Louise Bradley:** I'll try my best.

I really think that one of the key issues right now in Canada is suicide prevention. With suicide there is a direct correlation between that and the non-existent services. The impact of not having the right services is just terrible. The commission has reached out for a second time to the federal government. We appeared before the finance committee just recently, and we've been going province by province. If we can tackle the issue of suicide in rural communities across this country, we will do a great service to Canadians.

That is definitely an issue that the CMHA and the commission are partnering in and collaborating on.

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** Great. Thank you.

You mentioned first responders. Last week we had a witness from Alberta who was also a volunteer firefighter. Because of his role in volunteer firefighting he also got stress from what he saw. Quite often he was the first on the scene.

Does the network of volunteer firefighters present an opportunity for us to help them and have them help other people? Is that something that's active, or something that's a future possibility?

**Ms. Louise Bradley:** We have actually trained thousands of first responders, including firefighters right across the country, for that specific reason. We use a self-assessment tool that was formerly called the Road to Mental Readiness and is now called The Working Mind. It addresses the issue of first responders having to deal with huge tragedies, including death, on an ongoing basis.

One police officer told me it saved his life. He went home to his wife and said, "I believe I'm in the orange category." She said, "No, you're not. You're in red." He got help and it saved his life. It was because of problems dealing with his work situation.

•(1035)

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** Mr. Orb, I can't help but think about Humboldt and the situation that your province has gone through, how it has been pulling people together, but also how it's an ongoing issue. It's beyond the headlines.

Could you give us a short update on how the province has reacted to the tragedy in Humboldt this year, and whether there are lessons the rest of the country can draw from that?

**The Chair:** Mr. Orb, can you hear us?

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** My time is ticking. I will share my time with Mr. Breton. He has a lot of farmers in his community. I know he supports the dairy industry.

Over to you, Pierre.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** Thank you very much, my friend.

[English]

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** Sorry, would I be able to get an answer from Mr. Orb, either in writing or some other way? Thank you.

Back to Pierre.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** Ms. Bradley, there are American studies that confirm what we are hearing today, namely, that being a farmer is one of the most stressful occupations in America.

Has the Mental Health Commission of Canada conducted similar studies on suicide and psychological distress among Canadian farmers? Are there comparable studies in Canada, or do the U.S. studies also apply to Canada?

[English]

**Ms. Louise Bradley:** The Mental Health Commission of Canada has not engaged in any particular study of that nature. We certainly have done a great deal of work on suicide, which is something that is insufficiently addressed in every sector across the country. I have no reason to believe agriculture would be any different. In fact, it's likely worse, but we have not focused any studies on agriculture in that regard.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Breton:** Thank you very much for talking about training and prevention for our farmers. That is one of the keys to success for our Canadian workers. As we heard this morning, it is not always easy for farmers to complete that lengthy training, since they often work 80 or 90 hours per week.

I know I am out of time. That said, this is an interesting discussion that should be continued to find solutions for training and prevention for our farmers.

Thank you for your testimony.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Breton.

[Translation]

Mr. Berthold, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Thank you very much.

[English]

Mr. Porteous, I want to thank you for your testimony today. It was surely difficult for you to be here to talk about it and the fear of facing ESDC again. This is the kind of thing you must have in mind, but I thank you for that on behalf of this side and, I think, all of my colleagues.

Everyone here agrees that we must do something for farmers' mental health. We are a family. We are a group. All of us here want to do something, but do you know what? Since the beginning of this study I'm wondering why we don't address the buyers more, because a lot of people just don't know they are hurting you. They want to achieve their own goals. They want to achieve their work. They just don't know that they will hurt you the way they do. I think you have something to say about that.

**Mr. Murray Porteous:** In probably regrettable words, I mentioned that people don't know what they're doing. They're good people, but they have a box to tick and they don't see the overall picture. They don't understand that taking a three- or four-month window out of a business puts that business in jeopardy or the amount of stress that puts on the family, which is horrendous.

Better communication and an overall goal of what you're actually trying to accomplish, which actually sees agriculture as a priority, would be a big help.

•(1040)

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** We also heard this morning from environmental groups and supposed animal rights groups, people who do not hesitate to flood social media with all kinds of information against ranchers and Canadians. I think we will have to do more than simply talk about it here. We will have to go beyond the network of farmers and the mental health community to address these situations. We have to show these people that there are human beings involved, because people seem to forget that behind every vegetable or slice of meat, there are human beings who work hard and who go through different situations.

Ms. Bradley, the Mental Health Commission of Canada has not studied farmers specifically, but I think that is essential because they are in a separate world. As we often hear and I can see for myself, farmers do not go home after work because they live in their workplace.

Do you think the Mental Health Commission of Canada has a role to play and should it conduct studies specifically about farmers?

[English]

**Ms. Louise Bradley:** I think the short answer to that is, yes, there certainly can be. It has not been part of the mandate of the Mental Health Commission, but I can say that it is one that we would welcome. I believe we could do something to assist in that way, but up until now, it has not been part of the mandate of the commission.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** In talking with the representative from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture earlier, I was surprised to learn that people are apparently just starting to understand that there are problems among farmers. Yet I know very well that these problems go back a very long time. Perhaps they were hidden, not as visible. Now they are coming into full view. I am not sure if it is because of social networks or because we are talking about it more. It seems that the worse the problems get, the more we talk about them, and the more problems we are causing.

I was a journalist before, and we were told at that time not to talk about suicide because it encouraged other people to take that drastic step. What is your opinion on this, Ms. Bradley? Where are we at exactly? What should we do as parliamentarians? Should we talk about it or not?

[*English*]

**Ms. Louise Bradley:** There's no evidence to suggest that talking to somebody, if you have worries about them being suicidal, actually increases—in fact, it's quite the opposite. It is one of the components of the Roots of Hope, which is the program that I had mentioned.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** I understand not to talk with them, but in the media—

**Ms. Louise Bradley:** Oh, yes. Absolutely.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** —the idea that it gives some publicity to this final option. What do you think about that?

**Ms. Louise Bradley:** I think that contagion is certainly an issue when you look at some of the first nation communities and among youth, and that is a very specific area. The commission has produced a document called Mindset, which is a guideline for reporters, about how to report on mental health issues and on suicide in particular. There is a right way of doing this and a wrong way. We have done the research and there are very clear steps and ways in which reporters can report on this.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Bradley.

Unfortunately, that's all the time we have. I certainly would like to thank the panel, Mr. Porteous and Ms. Bradley, for talking to us today.

Mr. Orb, I understand, had a power outage, but we will forward your questions and try to get an answer from him.

Just before you leave, I have three little things I want to share.

Thursday, October 18 is the deadline to submit recommendations in relation to the study of the advancement of technology in the agriculture industry that can support Canadian exports.

Friday, October 19 is the deadline to submit travel proposals for the period of January to March 2019.

On Monday, there will be the draft report prepared by the analysts. It will be distributed to all by email.

Also, I want to thank Monsieur Berthold.

• (1045)

[*Translation*]

He mentioned that this student was here with us.

[*English*]

I hoped you enjoyed the session.

Thanks for sitting through it. Hopefully it was helpful.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

[*English*]

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** I have two over here.

**The Chair:** You have two over there. Okay, thank you.

Thank you so much for being here with us today.

Thank you all.

Until the next meeting, we are adjourned.





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