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Chair

Mr. Pat Finnigan

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

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● (1100)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC)): Good morning, everyone.

Welcome to the 128th meeting of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. As you can see, our chair, Mr. Finnigan, is absent today. I therefore have the honour of chairing this meeting as part of our study on supporting indigenous Canadians in the agriculture and agri-food industry. During the one and a half hours of this meeting, we will hear from a number of witnesses, whom I will introduce briefly.

From Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, we have Natan Obed, who is President and Canada's National Inuit leader, and Oana Spinu, who is a Senior Energy Policy Advisor. We will later welcome Chief Patrick Michell, from the Kanaka Bar Indian Band, who will testify by videoconference from Kamloops. We will also welcome Chief Reginald Bellerose of the Muskowekwan First Nation, who will testify by videoconference from Regina. From the Natoaganeg Community Food Centre, we will have Chad Duplessie, Manager, and Erica Ward, Program Coordinator, and they will both appear by videoconference from Fredericton.

Thank you all for taking part in this meeting. If I may, I will first invite the representatives from Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami to make their presentation.

Mr. Obed and Ms. Spinu, you have the floor for six minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Natan Obed (President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami): Thank you.

Ulaakut. Good morning, everyone. It's good to be here for this very important topic that links into our food security and our participation in Canada's economy.

I want to start by talking a little bit about who we are as Inuit. I'm the President of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. ITK represents the approximately 65,000 Inuit who live in Canada. We live in what is about 35% of Canada's land mass. We call this area Inuit Nunangat. We have four regions, all of which have settled modern treaties or land claim agreements with the Crown.

We have severe food insecurity. There is 70% food insecurity in parts of Inuit Nunangat. I believe that the lowest food insecurity rates in any one of our regions is about 54%. We have struggles in ensuring that we have enough to eat.

We also have a huge dependence upon our traditional foods. A lot of our traditional foods are harvested, especially in the marine environment. We also live in a climate that is very different from most southern Canadian climates. We don't have agriculture in the way that you might think of the Prairies or other parts in this country, where you can grow crops, harvest them and sell them to market. We are influenced very specifically by Canada's agri-food policies. This is why we wanted to speak with you here this morning.

The subsidies that are provided by the Canadian government and by provinces to the agri-food industry impact the types of foods that end up on our shelves in Inuit Nunangat, and influence the purchase price or the buying point we have. This, with the lack of subsidies for any alternatives, drives up costs for the types of food choices that we traditionally have had, and that we also want to develop.

We are able to produce food. We see that most specifically with the participation within fishing activities. Almost all of those fishing activities, especially for turbot and shrimp, end up in international markets, largely because we don't have the infrastructure within Inuit Nunangat to offload and process. We don't have the distribution systems to ensure that the food harvested in our homeland can then be distributed and purchased in our homeland by Inuit.

We also have traditional hunting systems.

We hope to reclaim some of our food sovereignty. That will require more subsidies and more interest in trying to figure out how Inuit can create the best possible conditions for a diet and for participation within the Canadian economy in the way that we would like to see, rather than the way that the Canadian government or southern interests would like to see.

For example, 82% of Inuit in Inuit Nunangat fish, hunt or gather wild plants. They do so for personal use or to share with their community. That is just a normal way in which we work with the world. In the past there have been considerations and attempts by governments to introduce things like greenhouses in Inuit Nunangat, or to try to spur our economy, but always with a north-south approach.

We bring that consideration here today, to say that if there aren't going to be considerations for Inuit within the billions of dollars of subsidies that exist from Agri-Food Canada, there should be a consideration for our homeland—35% of Canada—in the policies and the processes that enable us to participate in and to be supported by Canada when it comes to our economic development, how we eat and how we feed our communities.

● (1105)

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak before you this morning. I look forward to further questions.

Nakurmiik.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Mr. Obed, thank you very much for that presentation. I am sure we will have many questions for you in the next few minutes.

We will now move to the Natoaganeg Community Food Centre, joining us by videoconference.

Mr. Duplessie and Ms. Ward, you have the floor for six minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Chad Duplessie (Manager, Natoaganeg Community Food Centre): Thanks very much. As introduced, my name is Chad Duplessie. I'm the Manager of the Natoaganeg Community Food Centre. It's important for me to tell you that I'm of settler descent but have a long family history of working in indigenous communities, specifically Eel Ground First Nation.

We want to tell you a little bit about our community food centre, the role of the food in that program, the role of our community gardens in creating access points for the community for both locally sourced vegetables but also traditional proteins.

I want to let my colleague Erica introduce herself as well.

Ms. Erica Ward (Program Coordinator, Natoaganeg Community Food Centre): Good afternoon. First off, thank you for having us. My name is Erica Ward. I'm a member of Eel Ground First Nation. I'm Mi'kmaq, and I'm the Program Coordinator for the Natoaganeg Community Food Centre.

Eel Ground First Nation is a Mi'kmaq community in New Brunswick that neighbours the city of Miramichi, a suburban community with approximately 1,000 band members, of which an estimated 600 live on reserve. There are an estimated 230 homes in Eel Ground of which around 90 struggle to secure healthy food on an ongoing basis.

The Mi'kmaq people have lived on the banks of the Miramichi River for over 3,000 years and throughout history have utilized the abundance of natural land-based food sources such as fish, game and berries. Some of the earliest historical accounts of the Mi'kmaq drew attention to their living in unison with the land. They didn't till the ground but would hunt, fish and gather as the seasons allowed.

Mr. Chad Duplessie: The community of Eel Ground has been working to tackle the food security issue for about 12 years. It started out as a school food program, providing a healthy breakfast and a healthy lunch to the students on a daily basis. With that program, we've seen impacts on the kids' BMI, the students' school connectivity, their mental health, their healthy food literacy—their understanding of what fruits and vegetables are. In this day and age, some kids can't even name what a turnip is. We've been able to really have a lot of success there.

About four years ago, the community tried to take some of those lessons and put them to the community at large. That's when we developed the community food centre. What we started with was the food bank. We took the undignified food bank and we evolved it into a space where we have a multitude of programs, with three community gardens in the community. We do drop-in meals twice a week. One of those focuses on traditional protein, like moose. We've grown very quickly to a place that's very safe for people to drop in to and engage with their community, but also engage with healthy food and create access points to getting that healthy food.

● (1110)

Ms. Erica Ward: I'm just going to take you through some of our success stories regarding our programming.

This past summer we did a program that we named “Lettuce Turnip the Beets”, a pun on words. We brought community members out to our community gardens along with some local musicians from the community, and we had live music. There were children who would come and harvest whatever vegetables were ready or maybe weed the garden. Elders came out and showed their support in the garden. This was a huge success. We saw approximately 30 to 40 members of the community come out each week for approximately seven weeks and really engage and take part in the community.

We also do our drop-in meals, as Chad has said. We do them twice a week, and this is where we bring in a chef, and volunteers from the community will come and learn food skills as well as create more sense of community and serve these meals to community members. Last night we served a meal, and there were approximately 40 individuals who came and shared with us.

We're reintroducing traditional protein into the community. There was a little bit of hesitation with community members wanting game or cooking it. We're unsure of why this is. The University of Ottawa did a food security study that said that community members were only eating 1.5 tablespoons of traditional food a day, meaning traditionally harvested food. Many community members aren't keen to use moose and fish, but we use it consistently in our programming to really bring back those traditional values, and it's working. More community members are coming to our centre and asking for traditional game and traditional fish and different ways of cooking these meals.

Thank you.

Mr. Chad Duplessie: I just wanted to highlight quickly that we are a community food centre. We work with two national non-profits. Canadian Feed the Children is an organization that does a lot of international work but also domestic work with indigenous communities. They, primarily, are the funder and supporter of our school food program, again, a universal, free school food program for every student in the school. We also work with Community Food Centres Canada.

We're very proud to be the only partnered community food centre in New Brunswick and exceptionally proud to be the only indigenous community food centre in Canada. Community Food Centres Canada runs a national network of around 11 community food centres, many of which are in big urban areas. We've taken their model and really shrunk it down to service a community of 600.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Thank you very much, Mr. Duplessie. I have to interrupt you, since the time for your presentation has already run out. However, I am sure that you will have the opportunity to come back to the topic during questions.

We will begin the questions and comments.

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

[*English*]

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

There are certainly some very interesting discussions here this morning. I am a farmer, so I know how important it is for education with regard to the foods that we supply to all Canadians. Certainly, having spent some time, from a political perspective, dealing with northern affairs and aboriginal affairs and northern development, I've seen a lot of the things that have happened throughout the country. I'm very impressed with the way in which the education component has been presented with the Mi'kmaq in the Miramichi.

I was also a teacher for 34 years, so I see the disconnect that there is between agriculture and the general community. It's not just agriculture. It has to do with the diets people have. One of the key things that you could be looking at right now is the food shows on television, the cooking shows and everything.

That's what is happening in your communities, and I think that's an important aspect of it. I think a lot of us feel that it's getting away from us, that young people and even those who haven't been associated with it have kind of lost the knowledge about the foods that are there, and I think that's a critical component.

If you happen to be in an area where you haven't lost it because your traditions haven't changed, I think that's important, but it's also important to continue and to make people aware of it.

I know that, Mr. Obed, you were talking about food insecurity and the percentages that are there. Could you define what you mean by food insecurity so that we have that on the record? Then our discussions will be more pointed.

● (1115)

Mr. Natan Obed: Where food insecurity rates are referenced, 70% food insecurity is a number that is specific to Nunavut and Nunavut Inuit. It comes from the Nunavut Inuit health survey that was done in 2007-08. We don't have reliable data that is rolled up in a national level.

We know that food insecurity rates differ between Inuit jurisdictions: Nunatsiavut in northern Labrador, Nunavik in northern Quebec, Nunavut, and the Northwest Territories and Inuvialuit settlement region.

The Inuit health survey is the place where we get most of our food insecurity data, and that was compiled through a survey that was based on the USDA survey. It's moderate and severe food insecurity. Seventy per cent is the culmination of moderate and severe food insecurity.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: I think that maybe the important thing for us would be if we could get some definitions from different groups that are using that terminology. If someone could send it to us later, that would be good, because it would help in the study for us to know where we're at.

Do you have more information that you would like to share?

Mr. Natan Obed: Sure.

The severe food insecurity for Inuit means that we're lacking secure access to sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food on a regular basis. Moderate food insecurity means that over the course of a month a person might make food choices that are not in the best interests of themselves or their family to be able to get the proper nutrients, and perhaps that person even does not eat a meal, in order to help another family member.

Our food insecurity rates are unfortunately the highest in any developed country for an indigenous population that we know of. First nations and Métis food insecurity rates are also higher. It isn't a race to the bottom here. It's just what our rates are. It should be of great concern to the Canadian government.

There are programs in place, but like I said at the outset, you have almost $7 billion in subsidies that go into agricultural practices in this country, and then you have approximately $80 million that goes into the nutrition north program, of which 80% is utilized by Inuit communities. But this is not necessarily the way in which we would like to eat or the way in which we would like to participate in economic development in relation to food.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Getting to that participation aspect, you talked about specific subsidies and so on to help maintain the northern diet and the other types of things, and to have the opportunity to expand into the economic world, where you can be selling the product and so on. Of course, there are infrastructure issues and so on that are associated with that.

In the short time I have left, I think it's good to talk about what you see is needed and what you see that is practical, because we can put a bunch of money into something like that, but it has to be something that you would see could work on the ground. Could you perhaps flesh that out a bit for us?

● (1120)

Mr. Natan Obed: Just as an example, about 75 million kilograms of fish and seafood are harvested in Inuit Nunangat, directly adjacent to Inuit Nunangat waters. Virtually none of that is processed within Inuit Nunangat or distributed within our 51 communities. The infrastructure deficit is the first reason why, along with the lack of subsidies for a natural distribution chain within our communities. Unfortunately, we don't have the ability to overcome this without the infrastructure and the subsidies, because we don't have a road system. We rely on air transport and then, in the summer—

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: What would be practical...?

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Mr. Dreeshen, I'm sorry, but your time is up.

Mr. Drouin, you now have the floor for six minutes.

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

[*English*]

I just want to let you finish your comment. You said that you mostly rely on air transportation, and in the summertime....

Mr. Natan Obed: It's through resupply through marine transport.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Did you appear before our committee before?

Mr. Natan Obed: Yes.

Mr. Francis Drouin: You did, yes, and you're the one who enlightened me about traditional foods and their importance, about not just shipping what other populations would eat, but the importance of ensuring your communities have access to those traditional foods.

I'm just curious. Have you seen any programs that have worked within certain Inuit communities up north that have really developed? I know that you've talked about the 70% food insecurity, but is that prevalent in all of the Inuit communities, or is it more severe in some communities versus others?

Mr. Natan Obed: The general food insecurity rate is unacceptable across Inuit Nunangat and the rates are between 50% to 70%, I believe, depending on the region and community.

There are pilot projects. Amazing things are happening at the community level to promote food security, to carry on traditions among generations about how to harvest and share food. There also have been pilots around selling country food because that is our right as Inuit to sell country food.

The biggest challenges have been the sustainability of any of those short-term measures. Many of them have been provincial or territorial or even Inuit government-led pilots or small subsidies. I see a bigger opportunity at the national level because of the level of subsidy for agri-food generally, but there's a lack of consideration to date of indigenous or even Inuit-specific solutions to some of our food insecurity rates that are in line with our culture.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Can you name me one example of a successful pilot, for example, if the Government of Canada were to say agricultural policies will be opening up to help you further expand those pilots?

Mr. Natan Obed: One that comes to mind is "Going Off, Growing Strong", which is a project out of Nunatsiavut that links experienced hunters with the young population. They go off, they harvest foods, they fill community freezers and then those community freezers are accessed by elders and other parts of the community. It combines the ability for young people to learn new skills, but also for them to be a part of their society and their community in a way that overcomes the effects of things like residential schools and intergenerational trauma. It also has the very practical use of serving those in need with traditional foods in a way that is consistent with the sharing practices of the Inuit.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Do you feel that harvest knowledge has been lost within the youth population? I'm assuming that's why you have these education programs.

Mr. Natan Obed: It is harder and harder for us to transmit harvesting knowledge among generations, whether it's the effects of climate change and the changing patterns of wildlife or sea ice because of that, or whether it's the cost of being able to go off and harvest because we are now more dependent on skidoos and boats and gas and those sorts of things.

We still have an incredibly resilient culture and society. We are still very proud of the fact that it is almost universal that in our communities, there is that connection with the land and the push for us to continue to pass on the knowledge that we have to our younger generations.

● (1125)

Mr. Francis Drouin: That's great. Thank you.

Just for the folks in New Brunswick, you have this new program, Lettuce Turnip the Beets. I'm not asking if you're growing beets or not but....

Mr. Chad Duplessie: We're growing a lot of beets.

Mr. Francis Drouin: So it's combining beats and beets. The community gardens are working well. Will you be doing that again next year and will you be expanding next year?

Mr. Chad Duplessie: They work well when we have the labour. The labour is the biggest.... You need to ask people to volunteer, the people who are passionate about it. There's enough land that they're doing it in the backyards on a serviceable level, which is unique in a small community. We have a school that could be a purchaser. There's the ability to create a microeconomy to grow. That's a big part of it.

You need to have enough financing to be able to pay people to work and build those skills. Last year, the big difference-maker was that we hired a consultant to give us the techniques to do it in a no-till process. We treated the soil well and we saw the fruits of that labour at the end of the year, but we made a lot of mistakes getting there. Last year was the first year we had a garden and agriculture that could serve us.

Mr. Francis Drouin: The chair is about to cut me off but I want to ask you about processing foods. Do you have access to flash freezers and whatnot after the harvest is done, or are you still not there yet?

Mr. Chad Duplessie: We do through partnerships. We do a lot of preserving and we use a lot of that in the programming, obviously with schools especially.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Thank you, Mr. Drouin. You kept to your speaking time.

I also thank Mr. Duplessie for providing a short answer to Mr. Drouin's question. This helped us to stay within the allotted time.

You have all noticed that we have not heard from the representatives of two groups. There was a communication problem because of the time difference, and they will join us later in the meeting. If you don't mind, we will listen to their presentation later and then continue with the questions.

Mr. MacGregor, the floor is yours for six minutes.

[*English*]

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

Before I get to questioning our witnesses and to respect my Liberal colleague's time, I want to reintroduce the motion that I proposed on Tuesday for which the debate was adjourned. For the record, I will just read it out.

The motion reads as follows:

> That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food undertake a study on the current regulations prohibiting the commercialization of raw (unpasteurized) milk in Canada; that this study include hearing from witnesses regarding the current consumption of raw milk in Canada, how other jurisdictions regulate the sale of raw milk; and that the committee report its findings with recommendations back to the House of Commons.

You may recall, Mr. Chair and other members of the committee, that at the time I felt the justification for this study was that, first, it is an agricultural product, and second, we have most of the United States that lives under a jurisdiction where they do allow sale or distribution of raw milk, as do some of our biggest trading partners in Europe. These are France, Germany, Denmark, Italy and the U.K. The other reason too is that we all know that across Canada there are people currently consuming, buying and sharing raw milk in an illegal manner. I don't believe it's in our interest or the federal government's interest to shove this under the rug anymore.

In the interest of time and with respect to my Liberal colleague, if no one has any further to say on this motion, perhaps we could go directly to a vote so that this committee can express its will on the motion.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): After consulting with the clerk, I would like to point out that we must first obtain the permission of the members of the committee before resuming debate. If they allow, we can proceed to the vote on the motion.

Mr. MacGregor, you are asking to resume debate and to have unanimous consent to vote on your motion. We will proceed in the order of your requests, that is, we will first consider reopening the debate.

● (1130)

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: My understanding is that the debate was adjourned last time. Since I now have the floor, it is up to me as to whether I want to reintroduce the motion. I have done so. I've laid out my reasons. It's now open to other committee members as to whether they want to participate in the debate. If there are no further debates perhaps then the committee could voice whether it wants to move ahead with it or not.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Do the members of the committee agree that we should resume debate on Mr. MacGregor's motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Mr. MacGregor, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I think I've expressed my reasons. I don't want to hold up any more of the committee's time. If no one else wants to speak to this motion, perhaps then we could proceed directly to a vote.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Mr. MacGregor's motion reads as follows:

> That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food undertake a study on the current regulations prohibiting the commercialization of raw (unpasteurized) milk in Canada; that this study include hearing from witnesses regarding the current consumption of raw milk in Canada, how other jurisdictions regulate the sale of raw milk; and that the committee report its findings with recommendations back to the House of Commons.

We will now call the question, if no one else wishes to speak.

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Can I have a recorded vote, please?

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Mr. MacGregor is requesting a recorded vote.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 3)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Mr. MacGregor, we are back to you.

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I'll be brief, with respect to my Liberal colleagues.

Mr. Obed, I appreciate your opening statement, and I think when you talk about 35% of Canada, it's just an incredibly vast land mass.

I was just wondering if you've looked at other northern indigenous populations: Alaska, Greenland, Norway, Siberia. Are there any examples, best practices and so forth, from those jurisdictions that you can learn from?

Mr. Natan Obed: In Greenland, there is readily available country food in supermarkets in a way that we've never seen in Canada. I think part of that is the regulatory barriers of sale of country food in this country. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency licensing is mandatory, especially when any food is crossing interjurisdictional lines. There are only four licensed fish and meat processing facilities in the entirety of Inuit Nunangat. They are all in Nunavut.

The expense of that process then creates prohibitively high price points for country food when it enters into any sort of secondary store. What we have is an informal structure of food sharing or food sale of country food, when I think that we could do more to ensure there is a way to incorporate the intent of food inspection regulations, but also the knowledge and expertise of Inuit who, for over a millennia, have been eating country food and can understand safety in that process.

There is still that disconnect between the respect for us as people now, but also the respect for our society and our practices, in the way these mechanisms of governance work.

● (1135)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I'll yield the rest of my time out of respect for my colleagues.

I'll just tell our witnesses that we would welcome a more fulsome briefing on this subject with your points of view, so that we can incorporate it into our study and our recommendations. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Thank you very much, Mr. MacGregor.

I now give the floor to Mr. Peschisolido for six minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Peschisolido (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): Mr. Chair, thank you.

I would like to thank the witnesses for appearing here and also appearing on teleconference—

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Mr. Peschisolido, if you don't mind, let me interrupt you here. You can resume speaking immediately after the presentation of our next witness. He has just arrived and we will allow him to give his testimony. This may lead you to ask different questions.

Good morning, Mr. Michell, and thank you very much for joining us. You have six minutes to make your presentation.

[*English*]

Chief Patrick Michell (Chief, Kanaka Bar Indian Band): Thank you for this opportunity.

There are 633 first nations or bands in Canada and 203 in B.C. Collectively, we're all positioned to be community hubs for regional food security and stability, with capacity to expand incrementally into the provision of surplus fresh and processed meats, fruits and vegetables for Canada. Faced with the decline and possible extirpation of the Fraser River wild salmon stocks, Kanaka has articulated that the people of the salmon must become the people of the potato.

Kanaka intuitively knows that what we are experiencing on the ground here today—forest fires, flooding, air quality, smoke inversion layers, wind events, power failures, changed precipitation patterns and heat—will be growing in frequency, duration and intensity, with even greater adverse impacts on local area agriculture production and food availability. Therefore, Kanaka has made a commitment to become a sustainable food self-sufficient community, and has instituted the first proactive steps in doing so.

Located in British Columbia in a region known as “Canada's hot spot”, Kanaka is one of 15 communities that make up the Nlaka’pamux Nation today. Kanaka Bar's story is available online. A recent Kanaka presentation on sustainable agriculture, “From the Ground Up”, is also located on our website.

A basic quality of life requires stability in food, air, water and shelter. To better understand these essential life elements, Kanaka recently completed a land use plan, a community economic development plan and a climate change assessment and adaptation report. All of these are available online through our community website.

These foundational documents and our first steps towards sustainable self-sufficiency are small due to resource deficiencies. Support today to address foundational deficiencies in land, agricultural infrastructure, data, people and money would be appreciated. The following is a list of areas where Canada could provide support toward indigenous communities, as their own-source revenues are small.

The first area is land. Kanaka assessed our current reserve land base and wound up purchasing six adjacent fee simple lands off reserve for the purposes of securing and developing food, shelter and water certainty for the community. We used OSR to produce maps of the land and resources on and off reserve. We have started to clear the land; fence the land; start crops, chicken coops and beehives; and build a first greenhouse. Greenhouses, barns and fences are needed in the summer now to protect crops and animals from extreme heat, drought, air quality and light diffusion issues. Development off reserve can also see an increase in regional taxes, as infrastructure investments are improvements that change assessed values.

The second area is water. Kanaka has installed water-gauging stations on four of our year-round water sources to generate site-specific data regarding water quantity and water quality. Kanaka has started replacing antiquated and inefficient ditches with water lines and new above-ground intakes so that we can have stable and predictable year-round water for drinking, agricultural purposes and small hydroelectric purposes. Surplus water can also be made available for the region in case they run out of water, or be used for fire protection purposes too. Kanaka could use financial supports to pay for the design and construction of legacy water diversions, lines, storage and treatment.

With regard to weather, using OSR, Kanaka has installed three weather stations to monitor site-specific temperature, precipitation, wind speed and air quality. Kanaka is therefore designing and implementing agricultural practices for the environment of tomorrow based on site-specific data so that we have sustainable agriculture. We can share the data with Canada, but we will need support to ensure that the information we gather meets national meteorological standards.

The last area is electrification. The cost of fuel is going up and soon scarcity will come into play. This is regressive—these costs are passed on to our membership—so Kanaka is seeking to become energy self-sufficient. Kanaka has completed the installation of seven solar projects to date, and now has two years of annual solar data collected, allowing for the design and expansion of small solar. Other data sources allow for wind and hydro to be harnessed as well, which can power our buildings, our agricultural infrastructure and electric vehicles. Canada can support Kanaka's agricultural electrification initiatives similar to the recent electric tractor story out of Ontario and the solar-, wind- and hydro-powered greenhouses, barns and processing centres.

Thank you again for allowing Kanaka to share. After all, what we do to the land we do to ourselves.

● (1140)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Thank you very much, Chief Michell.

We will now resume the question period, starting with Mr. Peschisolido.

Mr. Peschisolido, you have the floor for six minutes

[*English*]

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

Mr. Obed, I'll begin with you.

In your presentation, you discussed reclaiming food sovereignty, and you also went into the dichotomy between your approach and others. Can you elaborate a little on what reclaiming food sovereignty would involve, and how the federal government can be helpful in that process?

Mr. Natan Obed: The ways in which any of us create good mental health, and also continue our family, are grounded in many ways by what we eat, how we cook and how we access our foods.

In many cases in the south, you go to a grocery store and then your culture happens in the kitchen. In Inuit society, our culture happens in the act of harvesting, in the act of going on the land, in understanding the land and also in the interaction of living things within it. Our relationship with our food is not just one of dietary interest and nutrition but also of our society and the continuation of who we are as a people.

I will highlight the Qikiqtani Inuit Association and their proposal for Tallurutiup Imanga, which is hopefully going to go through this year as a new protected area.

One of the highlights of their proposal is in relation to Inuit guardians of the space. Those guardians of the environment are also harvesting and providing food to their communities in Nunavut's High Arctic. That is a part of food sovereignty. It's reclaiming our place as keepers of the land—stewards of the land, if you will, in a southern context—but it's also breaking down the cycle of conservation for conservation's sake.

It is not only in the policies we are hoping to work on with the federal government. It's also in accepting that the way we interact with nature, the way that we practice respect for nature, is outside the normal bounds of conservation. It gets into our ability to eat our traditional foods, to have them available and then also for us to be 21st-century Canadians with access to healthy store-bought food as well. Food sovereignty also includes ensuring that the nutrition north program works correctly, and that there are options for us.

● (1145)

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: Thank you.

I'd like to move on to Chief Patrick Michell.

The area that I'm blessed to represent is Steveston-Richmond East. The south arm of the Fraser runs through the area.

I was intrigued by your comment that the people of the salmon have to become the people of the potato. Can you elaborate a bit on what you meant by that?

Chief Patrick Michell: For 8,000 years the wild salmon population was the mainstay and the main blood of my community. My entire language, my culture—everything is defined by the salmon. In 2017, we weren't allowed to food fish for salmon due to extreme conservation measures.

I'm attending a meeting next week on the forecast of returns for 2019, and it's dismal. The cumulative effects of the last 150 years seized the wild salmon population. They were just unable to do what they used to do. In the absence of our traditional food source and the mainstay of our economy, we have to transition to something else. We must adapt. That's what we're faced with. There's no smoking gun. It's just all of the above.

Other forms of traditional food sources in my region are also disappearing due to climate change. The extreme heat is making the ungulates move. We are also trending towards overhunting. In the absence of the fish, we transfer our desire for traditional food sources to others, so we may now be overharvesting. If we don't come up with an alternative—which is agricultural-based practices—there is going to be some trouble coming for all of us.

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: A part of the agricultural-based practices is food processing. I want to follow up on Mr. Drouin's point.

This is to all of the witnesses. Perhaps we can have the folks from New Brunswick begin by talking about the importance of food processing and the unique characteristics of the indigenous community.

Mr. Chad Duplessie: Part of what we've been doing is about the immediateness of it. We're pretty grassroots. We're at the community level, so in anything that we're doing, we're leaving enough meat on the bone to include community. We're not operating any facility or hiring any facility to do that, so everything that we're doing is in-house. But we definitely are looking to preserve things as much as we can to create that kind of link.

Some of the things we're doing are canning moose meat stews and that sort of thing, where people can have that in their space. They have access to that and it's accessible. It's easy to obtain. It's easy to use. It's something they enjoy. We put the love and the pride into cooking it in a certain way.

Again, we're pretty grassroots, but I think the other side of that, again, is going back to the school food. There's a movement in New Brunswick of using schools as a facilitator of that process, and distributing through the CANB, the organization in New Brunswick. That's something that we connect to, but, again, I think schools can be used, especially in rural Canada and on reserve.

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: Would anyone else want to—

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Thank you very much, Mr. Peschisolido, but unfortunately your time is up.

We will now hear from the last witness, Chief Reginald Bellerose, who is joining us by videoconference from Regina, Saskatchewan.

Mr. Bellerose, you have six minutes for your presentation.

[*English*]

Chief Reginald Bellerose (Chief, Muskowekwan First Nation): Thank you. I appreciate it.

Good morning to the chiefs who are here. The leadership in Treaty 4 territory acknowledge the area that you are on, unceded Algonquin territory.

Part of our goal in Muskowekwan First Nation, in terms of agriculture, comes from the land base. We have a land base of 64,800 acres. We believe this is our way to a better future. Part of it is that we have to correct the wrongs of the past. The way settlement took place was by moving the first nation people on to settled areas. With that came a loss of land. Our populations are growing, and our perspective is that we need to increase the land base. That is our solution.

Next in terms of agriculture comes partnerships. Because of the high capital cost of equipment—I'm talking about agricultural production and the high cost of capital for equipment and input—it's very difficult for a first nations start-up to get into agriculture in a big way. We have established partners, preferential partners. We're basically in a lease arrangement for our land now, trying to figure out ways, such as crop sharing, to get greater return for the lands.

We have another project, on urban lands that we have outside Regina, called “Project Iron Horse”. Part of it is that Muskowekwan is a community with railway from day one. We dealt, going back, from 1906 with the Grand Trunk Railway. We believe facilities and transportation are very important. Project Iron Horse allows first nations to pressure CN and CP in a political way, apart from what the provinces and Canada are doing, to say that we need to open up, especially in Saskatchewan, which is very landlocked and is challenged in getting the agricultural commodities to market. In that way, we're trying to increase our participation in transportation, especially by rail.

Another important area is marketing and branding. Muskowekwan has a long-term agreement with the farmers' union in India to supply potash and soil enhancement products, expanding it into peas and lentils and into the pulse crops. We believe we are a nation that has the ability to market our goods and commodities globally. This is what we've exemplified by signing that agreement.

As we look at identity, preserved in all of these types of ways consumers look at making their purchases, we believe that a first nation brand globally would have a lot of positive impact. Part of the branding would be that many of our first nations lands have not seen a drop of spray or chemical or any of that type of application. Part of the belief is that much illness is caused by the application of those types of chemicals. We believe that our way of growing could actually help improve the quality of health for many people.

Our last area is youth and programming. We need to make investments in our youth's understanding of food security and of agriculture production. We can't wait until people are adults. We have to make those investments in the youth, whether by partnering with 4-H programming or creating our own type of agricultural program tailored for first nations. Those big investments in youth, whether for production or for cattle or for calving operations, whatever it may be, will I believe be worthwhile investments.

I want to thank you for your time. Those are the perspectives that I bring.

● (1150)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Thank you very much, Chief Bellerose.

We will now continue our round of questions.

Mr. Poissant, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (La Prairie, Lib.): Thank you very much to all the witnesses.

Right now, the House is considering a bill to protect First Nations languages. I think our witnesses speak different dialects. I would like them to tell us, in turn, whether their language is currently in use or whether it is threatened.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Who wants to start?

[*English*]

Ms. Erica Ward: Yes, growing up in my community, people my age—I'm 28 years old—have lost the language completely. There's nobody my age at all who is fluent in Mi'kmaq. I was brought up in a home where there were fluent speakers. However, for so many different reasons, it wasn't encouraged to speak it. Residential schools, intergenerational trauma and all of those things come into play. It's really unfortunate, but as of right now, my son, who is eight years old, is learning his language in his school, which is really incredible.

● (1155)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: Mr. Obed, do you want to add a comment?

[*English*]

Mr. Natan Obed: Inuit have the healthiest indigenous language in this country. We don't have the most speakers. There are more Cree speakers than there are Inuktut speakers, but a full 84% of Inuit who live in Inuit Nunangat can speak Inuktut. That is an incredible achievement.

It also is something that we are still concerned about, because there is language erosion and language shift. We've seen a drop in the number of speakers, but also in the complexity of the language. We are hoping that the federal legislation can be revised to ensure that the very practical measures that have been taken for English and French, and the supports for them through the Official Languages Act, can be at least seen as equal to the need to protect and promote, and the right to utilize our language within our homeland.

Nakurmiik.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: What about you, Mr. Michell and Mr. Bellerose?

[*English*]

Chief Patrick Michell: Yes, the Nlaka'pamux language is known as Interior Salish. As previously mentioned, there are intergenerational issues. My mother and grandmother were fluent in the language, but at my learning age, they refused to teach me the language. As a result, our language is recorded, but it's just not practised.

One thing we've started instituting at the band office is that the elders will speak and the youth will listen, but it also requires the youth to listen so that the elders will speak. We're creating space for elders and youth to actually get together. They've started recording simple vocabulary words that we've put on our website. It's introductory. Our challenge is that there's no formal curriculum. I can count to a hundred. I can say, maybe, 200 to 300 words, but it's very hard for me to speak in sentences because the language isn't being used on a daily basis. It's not being used in the schools. It's not being used in the offices. There has to be a context for it to be used in, as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: Mr. Bellerose, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Chief Reginald Bellerose: Thank you. We're facing the same thing as many first nations, coast to coast. Again, it comes back to the land. Part of our focus in Treaty 4 is land-based training. We have to get our young people out on the land. The paradigms of relearning and re-establishing cannot be controlled by a provincial or federal government. That has to be controlled and directed by first nations.

My own belief is that it can't be in a classroom. It has to be outside. It has to be out on the land. Many of the languages across the country are not in a facility or building. They're out on the land, the water, the animals—those are big parts of the language. Land-based training is a key focus in Treaty 4 right now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: Some of you have lost your languages. I would also like to find out about your traditional methods of producing food. Do you feel that your traditions of producing and preparing food could be threatened?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Are you addressing anyone in particular, Mr. Poissant? It would be easier if you specified someone.

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: Okay.

How do you feel about it, Mr. Michell?

[*English*]

Chief Patrick Michell: Again, the language we have is vocabulary based, and when you learn the words, you learn the practice. For example, *tokchola* is huckleberry, but the word itself carries when to pick, how to pick, how to process and how to consume. Within the language is who we are, and who we are is defined by the land.

We have a word for fish, *sqyéytn*, but only a few people know all the names of the species and all the names of the parts including the offal, so if we reintegrate this food practice with traditional harvesting as well as bring in a new agricultural practice, we'll be able to reintroduce people to the language and the language could be used. You can converse in the Nlaka'pamux language, but you can also converse in English.

● (1200)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Thank you very much.

Unfortunately, that is all the time we have.

The floor goes to Mr. Yurdiga for six minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for sharing your knowledge with us. It is very important.

I have a farming background, a trapping background. Things have changed over time. Knowledge was passed down to me from my father regarding farming with respect to the land and also trapping and hunting. When we grew gardens, we canned, but my children don't want that. They are changing. It's too easy to go to a local grocery store or some establishment, so I think knowledge is failing us all for the next generation.

I like these programs where we want to get back to producing our own food and provide food security. Understanding your environment is now on the forefront, and I appreciate your efforts.

My first question is for Chief Bellerose. From my experience, capital cost is a tremendous burden for somebody wanting to get into agriculture. Harvesting equipment is $500,000 plus. Tractors.... It's a very big venture for anyone wanting to go into it.

What do you believe needs to be done from a policy perspective to ensure that young, indigenous farmers who want to get into the business are successful? What do you foresee we need to do?

Chief Reginald Bellerose: Thank you. I appreciate the question.

In terms of capital cost, it comes down to security, and part of our challenge in first nations is that we can't use our existing land or any assets as security for borrowing. There is no concept of debt on reserve.

In terms of a real solution, it is addressing the land tenure of the first nations system through the Department of Indian Affairs. That's a very real challenge, obviously, because 60% to 70% of the Indian Act has to do with lands, but it's Crown land collectively held. There are no individual property rights.

That is how I would answer, David.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you very much for that. It is important. I can't go to a financial institution for a loan without the ability to back it up. I appreciate the struggles and the challenges that face many communities.

You mentioned organic farming, not using sprays on a lot of the land, and there is a big push globally to have more organic farms, and I think that is important. In your mind, as a business model, would you want to promote more organic types of farming or just farming in general, no matter what it is?

Chief Reginald Bellerose: My perspective is that it is what the end-user wants. The end-user is the customer, and ultimately, if you go to fewer chemicals and less spray, prices increase, and if the customer is prepared to pay that premium price, producers can basically produce what they need. It depends on the demand.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you.

My next set of questions is for Mr. Duplessie and Madam Ward.

During your testimony, you mentioned some projects within your community, and the things that stood out were the greenhouses and the community involvement. What are some of the challenges you face in starting these programs to enhance communities, to have more food security and especially to interact with youth?

Mr. Chad Duplessie: We put a lot of attention into.... What we see on TV around food marketing and that sort of thing was alluded to. That was a big challenge. One of the things about working with youth is that you had to make it cool for kids to want to eat broccoli. Everything else in the world is telling them the opposite. There was a lot of attention put into this. It was social marketing and really getting in there, finding programs that they thought were interesting and cool, and then sliding in the fruits and vegetables, healthy eating and the community volunteerism.

With the adults, it came down to trust. We've been in operation in the same space for almost two and a half years, but we're just now getting to a place where people come in. They'll come in and open up, share, and say that they're struggling with this or that this is an issue. In our space, we always bring it back to food. The garden is a good place for mental health, connectivity to the land and the community, and going onto the land fishing and hunting. Again, with all of these big, loaded, health issues, we're able to pull them into good food: how we get our hands on good food, and how we work together to create it.

With kids specifically, it's a struggle. It takes investment. It takes people thinking creatively and strategically, and then building trust and relationships. That's on the ground. That's funding in the schools and on the ground.

Right now there is a movement with the Coalition for Healthy School Food to get the federal government to do a $360-million investment to give every student healthy food access in Canada. I think there's something to be looked at around first nations schools, starting there and working there to build that. If we couple that with the ability for communities to come around and build their own food sovereignty and agriculture to support that at the end of the day, there's an opportunity there.

● (1205)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Thank you, Mr. Yurdiga. Your time is up.

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

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for being with us today.

I will continue with Mr. Duplessie and Ms. Ward, from New Brunswick. I paid particular attention to your testimony. As I understand it, you represent a community organization in New Brunswick.

According to studies commissioned by various universities, there are more food security issues in Atlantic Canada. I don't know if you are familiar with those studies, and it doesn't matter. Is this a challenge facing First Nations people in Atlantic Canada, particularly in your region? Can you give me specific examples of what is happening where you live?

[*English*]

Mr. Chad Duplessie: Sure.

Eel Ground First Nation is a small community of 600 on reserve. It's a suburb of the city of Miramichi. You can literally leave Eel Ground and within two minutes be at the border of the city. In Eel Ground, the food insecurity rate is 40%, of which around 15% is severely insecure. In the city of Miramichi it's 12%. Something happens within that city with the same job market, the same grocery store and all of these same things, but there is over three times the amount of food insecurity in that suburban neighbourhood just outside of that city.

It does speak to something pretty complex. I think the root cause is poverty. It's social assistance rates. It's people's inability to enter the job market and to have enough in their pockets to pay for the groceries. I think you could probably expand that to all of Atlantic Canada in that it comes down to not having enough money to pay for the food and a job market that doesn't allow it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Breton: Thank you very much, Mr. Duplessie.

Mr. Michell, in your testimony, you talked about the environment and sustainable development. That caught my attention. Can you give us some specific examples of what you are doing in this regard? What could be exported or exportable to other reserves?

[*English*]

Chief Patrick Michell: A concrete example is that our crops did not do very well this year, and we determined it was because of the smoke inversion layer. Our crops weren't getting the light.

The idea behind it was that we put up our first test greenhouse to provide.... It's currently growing as we speak. It's -17°C and there's no heat and no light in it, but crops are growing in it. It's a thermal greenhouse, but that greenhouse will also be used in the summertime to also provide a better lighting area. Greenhouses, as I mentioned in my presentation, are designed to provide year-round crop growth by controlling the environment. Field crops are going to start struggling, so we can still grow those crops. We just need to protect them.

We need water stability. In regard to these inefficient ditches that we're replacing, I have a water licence for 25 litres per second at the point of diversion, but I'm only getting three litres per second at the point of use. By replacing those ditches with water lines and a good reservoir, we have water security so that when a drought is around and the land outside of the crops is failing, the actual area that we're irrigating is doing well.

We are also planting our own traditional food sources like the Saskatoon because mother nature is beating up the traditional food sources, but we can actually irrigate them and harvest those. Because these challenges are here, we can actually adapt by just understanding what is occurring. If we invest today in these infrastructures that I've described, and we forecast increased adverse impacts, we can step up what we need to do to make sure that we have established food stability.

● (1210)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Breton: Mr. Chair, do I have time for one last question?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): You have 40 seconds left.

Mr. Pierre Breton: Great.

Mr. Obed, you said that the Nutrition North Canada program is having a positive effect. What more could the government do about that program? It seems to me that it is useful and has a positive effect where you live.

[*English*]

Mr. Natan Obed: The nutrition north program must be a social program, first and foremost. It must ensure that the end-user, especially considering our food insecurity rate, is the sole recipient of the subsidy or the primary benefactor in the entire process. One of the only ways to do that is to show that in transparent and accountable ways and to ensure that not a penny on the dollar of that program is being utilized in ways that don't lead to increased food security for those intended.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Thank you, Mr. Obed and Mr. Breton.

Mr. Dreeshen, you have five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Thank you very much.

When I was asking questions earlier, I was asking what programs you thought would be needed and what would be practical, because when we're talking about having a facility that would process fish and so on, and that would be a great thing to have in a community, you have to have labour. You have to have the ability then to be able to ship that to different places around the world if you're going to be dealing with that size of an operation.

I think that's really one of the things I'm asking when I talk about the practical side of it. Do you know that you would be able to have the labour to handle that? What type of infrastructure would you have? What magnitude of an operation would you be looking at? I think the idea is great, but I'm just wondering if you've taken a look at that.

The other thing I want to speak to is where the role of government comes into this, because CFIA is one of the organizations that is going to tell you exactly what it is that you can market when you go from one boundary to another, and we have to make sure that we have dealt with that.

I believe that's a critical part. It doesn't matter whether it's a country food or any other type of meat product, for example. If it's going to go across a boundary, you have to make sure that you follow certain rules. What would you suggest to CFIA that they should do to make it possible for you to move the products that you would like to see produced and then exported so that we can actually allow for the discussion about what you might need as far as infrastructure is concerned.

Mr. Natan Obed: I'll start with the infrastructure question. The cost of doing business in Inuit Nunangat is exorbitantly high, and we have existing concerns in relation to our infrastructure, whether it be enough water for our communities, the quality of the water, the price of electricity or the fact that all of our communities are still on diesel. We're looking for alternatives with which we can have reliable, cheap and also environmentally friendly power in our communities.

Our economic development landscape and our economies are based on government and natural resource sectors. Usually it's large natural resource projects that drive the GDP within Inuit Nunangat regions. Having more infrastructure, especially in relation to fishing, would allow for another form of revenue for long-term, sustainable growth for our communities in a way that we don't have now. Processing our natural resources in Greenland or in southern Canada takes away opportunity and the participation of Inuit within Canada's economy.

I don't believe that we need to start with massive infrastructure that would require an influx of southern labour. There are natural progressions from inshore fisheries or other sustainable harvesting hunts that happen within Inuit Nunangat that could use greater support and subsidy to ensure there is sustainable use.

Once we get to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, we're actually just looking for the first conversation. We host events here in Ottawa and we want to celebrate our traditional food and the way we eat it. We luckily now have a relationship with the National Arts Centre, where we are allowed to serve our country food at one of our big dinners that celebrate Inuit culture.

Most venues within southern Canada will not allow traditional foods that are raw or frozen to be served within any event, so we're still at the very beginning stages of a respect for the way we eat, for it to be respected by Canada.

● (1215)

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: I know my time is up. I was not looking at bringing people up there to work. It's to make sure that we have the workforce there already and give them that opportunity.

Thank you so much.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Thank you, Mr. Dreeshen.

Mr. MacGregor, you have three minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Chair.

Chief Reginald Bellerose, I would like to ask my question to you. You made comments in your opening statement about the fact that you have a lot of land that has been freed from fertilizer and pesticide use. One of our first witnesses in this study was Chief Byron Louis from the Okanagan Indian Band in British Columbia. He really saw the future in the international market for indigenous peoples finding those niche markets. I think you touched upon that as well.

I attended a breakfast earlier this week that was hosted by the Canada Organic Trade Association, and I know that we have the Canadian Organic Growers. When I saw those statistics of the growth of the organic market, I realized that it is phenomenal. Any agricultural group would give anything to see that kind of growth rate. I think, with the growing amount of consumer interest in how their food is grown and so on, there is a real opportunity.

I want to pose the question to you. Have you had any interaction with the Canadian Organic Growers or the Canadian Organic Trade Association to see if some assistance or partnerships can be thought out in that particular way?

Chief Reginald Bellerose: We haven't at this time. We've been more focused on preserved identity at this time, but also leading towards the organic. One of the challenges with the organic cattle is that the minute they're treated they have to be pulled out of the herd and then the question is what you do after the cattle are pulled out. They're basically of no value in the organic system. It's this whole structure, A to Z, I believe.

In terms of your question, it's something we can follow up with. Thank you.

● (1220)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

My next question will be to Mr. Obed. I only have about a minute.

You talked about the problems with infrastructure and the fact that it is very much a north-south approach. I mean, your summers are full of sun; you can almost see the sun travel right around the horizon.

I'm wondering if the secret is that we try to reach out to those individual communities to help them build their greenhouses so that we don't rely on the distribution network. I'm just trying to find ways forward.

Mr. Natan Obed: The sustainability of greenhouses is something we are still looking for a solution for. Any sort of aquaculture or agriculture in Inuit Nunangat is something that hopefully is a long-term solution.

Right now, there are only four greenhouses that exist across the 51 communities in Inuit Nunangat, and they do not contribute significantly to the food needs of communities. They are helpful, but they are not providing a significant replacement. We need to figure out how to do that. Because of the cost of doing business, the cheaper option is still to fly in fresh produce rather than grow it locally in greenhouses. The cost-benefit ratio is just not there yet.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Right. We still have a considerable amount of work to do on that.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Thank you, Mr. Obed.

Mr. MacGregor, I gave you a little more time, because I think everyone wanted to hear your answer. Thank you very much.

We have gone around the table twice. However, since we have a few minutes left, if anyone wants to ask a question, please say so. We could take turns asking questions until the end of the meeting. We won't be too formal. It's just a matter of taking the opportunity to get a little more information.

So the floor goes first to Mrs. Nassif.

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

My thanks to the witnesses.

My question is for Mr. Obed. Access to safe drinking water remains a problem on many reserves in Canada, although the situation is improving. According to the Government of Canada, 78 long-term drinking water advisories have been lifted since November 2015. However, 62 long-term advisories are still in effect.

Could you tell us how the difficulty of accessing safe drinking water affects the ability of indigenous communities to engage in agriculture, livestock or food processing?

[*English*]

Mr. Natan Obed: The Government of Canada is commendable in its push to end boil-water advisories. It is a first nations on reserve very specific initiative.

The Inuit communities also have boil-water advisories, but they're not considered to be in the catchment of the numbers you referenced. We still work with provinces, territories and the federal government to ensure that we have safe, adequate drinking water.

Not having the essential infrastructure, especially in regard to our growing communities and the existential threats in relation to climate change and the existing water resources we have, make it more of a priority for the local populations for water that goes to everyday use, rather than any water that might be diverted into any commercial enterprise. This is almost entirely unrelated, but there was a new brewery that was proposed in Iqaluit, Nunavut, but the project did not proceed because of water shortages within the community.

It's not just in agriculture, but it is across the board that we are having to make essential services decisions rather than economic development and growth strategy investments or opportunities because of the considerations related to water.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Does the issue of access to drinking water also affect indigenous people living off reserve?

● (1225)

[*English*]

Mr. Natan Obed: Yes.

Concerns in relation to access to drinkable water are also concerns that we have as Inuit in Inuit Nunangat.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Thank you, Mr. Obed.

Go ahead, Mr. Dreeshen.

[*English*]

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Thank you very much.

One of the things that was mentioned.... I apologize, I don't know where it came from. I have so many notes and we have a lot of witnesses here.

We're talking about school nutrition programs and the significance of how that can be expanded throughout the entire population. What I had thought about at that point in time was that a great place to start would be with first nations' schools, with the healthy food programs.

As a farmer, I look at the meat and the fish and all of the other types of things that are important parts of one's diet. My only political story will be that in a lot of ways it's contrary to our new Canada food guide. I'd like to see that young people understand how significant these foods are to their diets. I'd be very happy to see how that might progress within the communities that you represent.

I'm not sure. I think it could have been those in Miramichi, but could we have a quick comment on that, please?

Mr. Chad Duplessie: Yes. We've been running a school nutrition program pretty comprehensively for about 12 years and seen great success with it.

Something to note, too, is that it's understood that in mainstream communities in Canada about 20% of the schools have some access to a free school nutrition program. I'm not sure what that number is in first nation communities, at least I've not come across it. But speculating, it could be as high as 50% or 60%. The tipping point to make that a reality may not be as out of reach as we may think.

Right now there's this patchwork of funding through non-profits, bands and sometimes provincial governments. There is this patchwork of funding to make that happen, but in first nations specifically, absolutely it is a starting point.

I think again it can be expressed now. If you have commercial kitchens in communities to service a school cafeteria, what processing can you do out of those? Again, it's looking at the CANB initiative in New Brunswick and using school cafeterias as distribution networks and also processing networks. I think there are solutions there.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Your turn, Mr. Poissant.

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: First of all, Mr. Obed, you said that 35% of the territory belongs to you and includes all the communities. I would like to know how much of that territory could be devoted to agriculture and become productive.

Do you have enough support with agronomy?

[*English*]

Mr. Natan Obed: As far as traditional agriculture goes and what you might think of when you think of fertile land or animal husbandry in Canada, those sorts of industries are non-existent. We do have, in the Inuvialuit region, a caribou population that is in a herd managed by particular individuals there. I can't think of many other examples where agriculture, in the way in which you might think of it, is practised.

On the other hand, we don't just randomly go out into our homeland and magically find animals that we then harvest and prepare. We have a history of ensuring that the populations we interact with, say, a caribou population, are healthy. We have a history of improving fish habitat and creating spawning grounds in areas by strategically placing rocks or changing riverbeds. We have used the entirety of our homelands in the way in which you might have used five or 10 acres. We might not have been growing wheat, but we are still interacting with all living things in our environment and ensuring the health and success of all.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Thank you very much, Mr. Obed.

Mr. MacGregor, are you able to ask a question and get an answer in one minute?

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Chief Patrick Michell, I would like to talk to you.

The territory I represent in the House of Commons is the Coast Salish territory, of which the largest band is the Cowichan people. I'm very well aware of the troubles with our Pacific wild salmon. They have so many things going against them in just getting to the Fraser River, let alone travelling up it.

It's really a shame that your entire culture and language revolve around salmon, but you've had to adapt to forces that are beyond your control. Is there anything we can do specifically with respect to salmon that you would like to be more involved in, with conservation efforts and the discussion about salmon, generally?

● (1230)

Chief Patrick Michell: To change the negativity that comes with the potential loss of our way of life, we should change the "why". The reason why we're embracing agriculture is not because of the dismay that has occurred. The salmon is what it is. There are certain things that you need to do. For example, with regard to this whole aquaculture, why would you intentionally put into the mix something that could endanger the wild salmon populations? If you put reservoirs up, you could release cold water in August, when the temperature exceeds their natural ability. When the Fraser River hits 21° Celsius, the fish are, in a sense, being parboiled, so you can release cold water into the Fraser River when it's needed. You can put in reservoirs. Catch the freshet and then release it.

There are many ways that we could potentially protect and start mitigating and doing hazard reduction, and then hazard reversal. The answers are there. It's just whether or not there's a political will to implement that, because it's going to come at the expense of the sport industry and the aquaculture industry.

For me, our community wants to participate in aquaculture. We want to put the farmed salmon on land, and it's proven to work. Pull them out of the ocean and put them on the land.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Those closed-containment on-land systems, I agree.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Luc Berthold): Thank you very much, Mr. MacGregor.

My thanks to all the witnesses for their participation. I feel sure that these discussions will be very useful to us when the time comes to produce the report following our study on support for indigenous Canadians in the agriculture and agri-food industry.

We will take a break of a few minutes and then continue the session in camera to review the work of the committee. Thank you.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]