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Chair

Mr. Pat Finnigan

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

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• (1100)

[Translation]

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

Welcome to the committee.

This morning, we are beginning our study of the 2019-20 main estimates with the Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Thank you for being here today, Minister. We are delighted to have you.

[English]

This morning we have the pleasure of having at committee Mr. Chris Forbes, deputy minister of the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food. Welcome to our committee, Mr. Forbes.

We also have Ms. Christine Walker, assistant deputy minister, corporate management branch. Thank you for being with us this morning.

We will start with the opening statement by Madame Bibeau.

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's good to be back.

I will start by saying that I appreciate the work you do at this committee. I hear about it regularly. I realize that farmers' needs are always at the heart of your discussions. I want to thank you for your recent reports on mental health and indigenous peoples in agriculture. These are issues that impact our farming communities across Canada, and we have a duty to take immediate action.

Today, we are looking at the main estimates for 2019-20. The estimates underline the government's commitment to the Canadian agriculture and food sector. Over the coming fiscal year, we are budgeting \$2.5 billion to support key priorities of the sector. This morning, I would like to touch on some of these.

[English]

On trade, the canola situation in China continues to be a top priority. Last month, I met with Minister Han, my Chinese counterpart, at the G20 ministers' meeting in Japan. I expressed Canada's deep concerns about the suspension of Canadian canola

exports to China and urged that this issue needs to be resolved quickly. Canada's ambassador to the WTO—the World Trade Organization—has also urged China to work with Canada on solutions.

Responding to industry, we have extended the loan limit of the advance payments program to \$1 million for all producers, with \$500,000 interest-free for canola producers. The regulations are now in place and producers will be able to apply for new amounts as early as June 10.

We have also worked with provinces and territories to extend the deadline for AgriStability. This will give producers a great opportunity to make use of an important risk management tool in uncertain times.

We are taking a Team Canada approach. Our working group meets once a week, bringing together the industry, the provinces and, obviously, our officials at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, as well as Global Affairs Canada.

[Translation]

On the Japan mission, I was joined by Jim Everson, president of the Canola Council of Canada. We met with some key Japanese importers to look at ways to grow our business in this key market, especially with opportunities opening up under the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, or CPTPP.

I also took the opportunity to meet with other G20 ministers, including European Commissioner of Agriculture Phil Hogan, to express Canada's concerns about barriers to our durum wheat in Italy and our pulses in India.

We continue to diversify trade for our canola and all of our great agri-food products through new free trade agreements such as the CPTPP.

[English]

There is more good news, Mr. Chair. Japan recently announced that it will now accept Canadian beef from animals over 30 months of age. This gives our beef producers full access to Japan, so they can take full advantage of the new opportunities under the CPTPP.

There is more good news for our farmers and food processors. The U.S. lifted section 232 tariffs on steel and aluminum, which strengthens our relationship with our largest trading partner. As you know, the Prime Minister has introduced legislation to ratify the new NAFTA. Last week, he and Vice-President Pence both expressed the aim of moving forward as quickly as possible to ratification.

• (1105)

[Translation]

The new NAFTA is imperative for our agri-food industry. The United States and Mexico buy \$37 billion of our agri-food products, and we know we can grow that business even more. We are also working very closely with the United States and Mexico to take measures to keep African swine fever from our shores.

Building on our international African swine fever meeting in Ottawa last month, Canada and the United States have reached an agreement on the application of zones. This measure will allow safe trade in pork to continue in the event of an outbreak of this serious disease.

[English]

Some \$200 million of the estimates will support year two of the Canadian agricultural partnership. Programs under the partnership are also helping farmers capitalize on opportunities for sustainable growth while adapting to climate change.

In agricultural science, there's \$70 million to address emerging priorities, such as climate change, and soil and water conservation. To help meet these goals, our government has committed to hiring 75 new scientists and science professionals in emerging fields of agriculture, and we have launched a world-first living laboratories project, bringing scientists and farmers together in the field to conduct environmental research that producers can apply directly to their farms.

It will help farmers adopt climate smart technologies at a faster pace. This made-in-Canada approach was embraced by G-20 agriculture ministers at our meeting in Japan.

Environmental sustainability is also a key pillar of our new \$50 million Canadian agricultural strategic priorities program.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, we have a busy few weeks ahead.

We are aiming to announce the details of our investment in support of our supply-managed producers and processors soon.

That includes \$2.4 billion to sustain the incomes of dairy, poultry and egg farmers as a result of the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, or CETA, and the CPTPP.

As promised, we will support our dairy, poultry and egg producers who are impacted by trade agreements. We continue to work with industry to secure the long-term prosperity of producers and processors.

[English]

I also look forward to announcing Canada's first-ever food policy. There has been much enthusiasm across Canada. In fact, 45,000 people have participated in the consultations and I have had some excellent discussions on the policy, including at the recent national conference on food security. The policy sets out an ambitious vision to ensure that all people in Canada are able to access safe and healthy food through a healthier and sustainable Canadian food system. Therefore, we continue to work hard to advance the industry.

[Translation]

Once again, I want to thank you for your great work on some key issues impacting our sector.

I would be pleased to answer any questions you have.

The Chair: Thank you for your opening statement, Minister.

We will now move into questions and answers.

Mr. Berthold, you may go ahead. You have six minutes.

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

Thank you, Minister. I was glad that, yesterday, in the House of Commons, we were able to find some common ground. That was quite useful.

I want to make clear that, in no way, do I question your concern for Canada's agricultural industry or your desire to protect it. No one in Canada would ever intentionally work against the industry. It is an industry I care about deeply and one we all want to see grow. In fact, I want to tip my hat to department staff. We all want to help farmers succeed and to raise the profile of Canada's products around the world.

What we disagree on, however, is the means to achieve that end.

Minister, in your opening statement, you mentioned your meeting with your Chinese counterpart. You wrote him asking for permission to send a delegation of experts to China. You had what you referred to as an introductory meeting. I didn't quite understand what you meant by that. You said you spoke at length, but you never once said what the Chinese agriculture minister's answer to your request was. Can you tell us about that?

• (1110)

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: I did indeed have a chance to meet with my Chinese counterpart when I was in Japan for the G20 agricultural ministers meeting. It was a golden opportunity because the focus of the discussions was rule-based trade and evidence-based decision-making, so that set the stage. We had a face-to-face meeting on the issue, and our respective teams were also there. I raised Canada's concerns.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I already know all that. You've repeatedly mentioned the topics that were discussed, but I'd like to know what China's response was.

The problem, right now, is China's lack of a response. You sent a letter, but you haven't gotten an answer. Canada still hasn't sent a delegation of experts. You met with your counterpart, but nothing has come of it. The Prime Minister refuses to broach the subject with the Chinese president to resolve the issue.

You, however, managed to discuss the issue with the Chinese minister. What was China's response?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Minister Han Changfu is responsible for agriculture. At the end of our discussion, he committed to speak with his colleague, the customs minister.

I'm pleased to tell you that, last night, Canadian Food Inspection Agency experts had a meeting and followed up with the people at China's customs department. Talks are progressing as we would like, in other words, based on data and evidence.

Mr. Luc Berthold: You didn't demand that China stop making false allegations about Canada's agricultural products. You didn't ask your Chinese counterpart to urge his government to put an end to the allegations.

Are you still hopeful that Canada will be able to send a delegation of experts to China? Everyone in Canada knows this has nothing to do with science or product quality. You, yourself, said yesterday, in the House of Commons, that this was political. Nevertheless, you're still talking about a delegation of CFIA experts discussing the science with their Chinese counterparts, but you're stubbornly refusing to address this on a political level.

Why is your government refusing to engage in a political dialogue with China?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: As Minister of Agriculture, I will continue to stand up for the quality of Canadian products and the extreme rigour of our inspection system. That is one of my core responsibilities.

Mr. Luc Berthold: As Minister of Agriculture, you're a member of cabinet.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Yes.

Mr. Luc Berthold: You are in cabinet to defend the interests of canola farmers and pork producers. Your job at the cabinet table is to bring forward the views of farmers.

We want to know why the Canadian government stubbornly refuses to initiate formal talks with China. Why are you refusing to appoint an ambassador? We found out that the Chinese ambassador is resigning. Will you tell China that Canada won't accept the appointment of a Chinese ambassador to Canada if China doesn't accept the appointment of a Canadian ambassador to China?

Diplomatic talks with China are necessary, but you're refusing to go there. Why?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: As I've repeatedly said, we work as a team. We recognize that, central though it may be, the technical dimension isn't the only issue at play. The science is another central aspect, and that's why I'm working closely with Ministers Freeland and Carr. Obviously, the Prime Minister is also very involved in the file.

You should direct any diplomacy-related questions to Ms. Freeland. We are exploring all available tools and options. Many countries, including the United States, are behind us and recognize the importance of continuing—

Mr. Luc Berthold: Unfortunately, Minister, it's not working, and the situation is going from bad to worse.

Yesterday, on 24/60, you said you were aware of other export access restrictions on other Canadian products. What are they?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Officially—

Mr. Luc Berthold: And unofficially, since you've had other conversations.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Officially, we know about the restrictions on canola and pork, obviously. In the case of pork, it's more of an administrative issue. Certain forms and certificates contained errors. The industry has noted that it is subject to heightened inspection measures, but no formal notice has been received to indicate that the procedure has changed for other Canadian products.

Mr. Luc Berthold: We are worried about that. What are the other products?

• (1115)

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: I've heard soybeans mentioned, among others.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Is that the only product?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: According to the reports I'm getting.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Berthold, and thank you, Minister.

Mr. Drouin, it's your turn for six minutes.

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

I'd like to thank you, Minister. I'd also like to congratulate you on your appointment, even though you've been on the job for a while now, politically speaking.

We've seen a number of issues emerge. As members of Parliament, we talk to farmers. Then, all of a sudden, a crisis hits, and it's not always Canada's fault. Sometimes, it has to do with the impact the U.S. is having on the global market.

I know that you'll be meeting with your provincial counterparts in July. What will you be talking about?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: I have already spoken to many of them, either by phone or in person, including Minister Lamontagne, who will be hosting us in Quebec City. My relationships with the provincial ministers have gotten off on the right foot. Clearly, the provinces are key partners in agriculture.

As you know, a joint investment of \$3 billion is being made over five years under the Canadian agricultural partnership, which features a number of funding and risk management programs for farmers. The suite of programs to help farmers will be on the table, given that changes were made in recent years. We'll be reviewing them to see how they help achieve objectives and what the feedback from industry is. That will be a major topic of discussion.

We'll be discussing African swine fever and the issue of animal health. Items on the agenda include African swine fever, the labour shortage—which is having a significant impact—international trade and market access. Those are the main topics on the agenda for July.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you very much.

I'd like to discuss another issue I care deeply about. I represent a region where supply management is tremendously important, whether we are talking about poultry or dairy farmers. The past seven or eight years have been hard on them. They've been tough internationally. Concessions were made under CETA, as well as the TPP negotiated by the previous government. We want to make sure farmers are properly compensated, so I'm glad to see your leadership on that front.

Mr. Lampron was pleased with the budget announcement, saying, "The federal government recognizes the impact of trade agreements on our sector and is following through on its commitment to support our domestic dairy industry." That's important to note.

Can you tell us what's been done in the supply-managed sectors and what the working groups have accomplished since the budget measure was announced?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: In the budget, we announced a total of \$3.9 billion in funding, with \$2.4 billion in compensation for farmers in a number of supply-managed sectors. Support in the amount of \$250 million had already been provided through investment programs. I became minister three months ago, just a few days before the budget was announced. As you are aware, I was already very familiar with the issues affecting supply-managed sectors, particularly the dairy industry, since my riding is home to many dairy farmers. I was therefore able to take over the file fairly quickly.

As for the approach, it comes down to examining what the working groups have come up with. In the reports they submitted to us, they measured the impact of the various trade agreements and specified which funding mechanisms they think would work best, as well as how long the mechanisms or compensation should be in place. It depends on the sector. The needs of the dairy sector aren't the same as those of the poultry or egg sector, for example. We've taken the time to thoroughly examine the work that's been done and the report findings.

On my end, I wanted to speak directly with industry representatives, so I organized a number of round tables and visited a number of farms. I needed to gauge the situation so I could make the best possible recommendations to cabinet and the Minister of Finance. Billions of dollars are being allocated, so it goes without saying that Treasury Board has a pivotal role to play. A well-designed and robust review mechanism is essential to make sure everything is done properly.

• (1120)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have 35 seconds left.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I met with some canola farmers a few months back, and the advance payments program was one of the things they were asking about.

Could you give the committee an update on that?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: We increased the loan limit from \$400,000 to \$1 million for all producers on a permanent basis. The

first \$100,000 remains interest-free for all producers. For canola farmers, specifically, the interest-free portion has gone from \$100,000 to \$500,000.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

[*English*]

I would also like to welcome Ms. Kim Rudd, MP for Northumberland-Scarborough.

Ms. Kim Rudd (Northumberland—Peterborough South, Lib.): No, it's Northumberland—Peterborough South.

Ms. Kim Rudd: But there we go, close enough.

The Chair: It rhymed but it wasn't the same thing. Thank you for being here with us today.

Mr. MacGregor, you have six minutes.

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

Minister, welcome back to our committee. It's good to see you here again. I think my line of questioning will be similar to Mr. Drouin's.

Yesterday, during question period, I asked you specifically about the compensation for dairy processors. We know about the \$3.9 billion announced in budget 2019 for our supply-managed farmers, but given that we've known what the probable impact of the three trade deals is, or has been, on our sector for quite some time now, I'm a little mystified why you are still taking time to figure out what our processors need to have as compensation. Can you please explain why we don't have a figure yet for our dairy processors?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: When the budget was released, the working group had not yet completed its work. There was a gap or a difference between the understanding of the department and that of the industry, and we really needed to do much more work. I also wanted to understand it better. Since then, for the last three months, we have had the opportunity to deepen our analysis, to share data, and to better understand the situation. I'm confident that I will be able to release the information and the compensation, not only for the producers but also for the processors, by the end of the month.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: That will be by the end of the month?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: I hope so, yes. I'm working very hard on it.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: We'll be looking forward to that.

Also related to our processors, you may recall that at your last committee appearance we had an exchange on the tariff-rate quotas for our processors, specifically with regard to the European Union. I was just looking at the transcript of our exchange and you said that you couldn't really give me an answer as to why retailers were getting 55% of the TRQs and our processors, 45%. When I speak with the processors—and I'm sure you have spoken with them as well—it makes sense to me that given that our processors have a very intimate understanding of our local dairy market, whereas retailers are huge, multinational conglomerates.... Why is it that are you not giving them more of the TRQ allocation? Why are they getting only 45%? I think they would really like to know that.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: You know there is a difference in the share of the TRQs for CETA and the trans-Pacific agreement. It's under the responsibility of Minister Carr, the Minister of International Trade Diversification. He is going through a review. I can tell you that we have had quite a few conversations on the subject. I can assure you that he understands the issue and the requests and the expectations.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: This must matter to you, not only as a minister but also as a member of Parliament.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Of course, absolutely, you are right, but I also have to respect the responsibilities of my colleagues. I can tell you that we talk about it on a regular basis. Right now he is going through a full review of the TRQs for all the agreements we have, including CETA, the trans-Pacific agreement, even the WTO agreements, and he is obviously looking at the new NAFTA as well.

• (1125)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: What is the reason for the inertia? Are you feeling pressure from the retailers not to change the current structure? Is that what's going on? Why is there a delay and how much time will it perhaps take for our processors to get an answer on this question?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: There was some agreement on the share to start with when the first two agreements were signed.

It's not such a delay. We had to see how it would be rolled out; what the impacts would be; and how the small, medium and large ones would benefit from that. This is why we have to go through this review—and we're talking about months, not years. We really want to hear from the processors and to understand their reality. I do it. Minister Carr does it as well. We want to find the best solution for the longer term. Now I would say that we are in the transition period and we want to do the best for our industry.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Okay, thank you for that. I think in my remaining time I also want to revisit the issue of China and our canola. I was at the international trade committee in April when you appeared. I was here on May 2 when you were before our committee, and here you are back on June 6. Have we had any movement on a high-level delegation getting access to China?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: The latest movement we had was last night. We had a new conversation between scientists and specialists from the CFIA, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and Customs China.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I recall your saying that the president of the CFIA wanted to go.

The crux of my question is, at what point are we going to regard this as an insult? What other measures are we going to start employing to get some movement on this issue? It just seems to be stuck really quite badly.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: On the discussions, there was a little time between the last discussion and this one. Yesterday, last night, we agreed and they agreed to have more sustained discussions, a telephone conference on the subject. They did not close the door to the delegation, because we asked for it again, as I did when I met with Minister Han in Japan.

We are still asking for that, but the conversation has been reactivated, and yesterday we could feel that we were at a different level of getting into what we want to talk about—the evidence and everything. This is encouraging. I will go back to Minister Han and ask again for this delegation. We still believe that it would be easier for our scientists to have a face-to-face discussion to understand the issues on both sides and to find a lasting solution.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

[English]

Mr. Longfield.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair, and thanks, Madam Minister, for being here for the second time in a month.

It's a great committee in terms of focus on agriculture and farms, and I think that even when we're working on reports we do have a common focus. One of the things I really enjoy in Parliament is the interaction that we have at committee, and I really like seeing our work end up in budgets.

The food policy study that we did was a big one. We worked on it together. We hashed out things. We made recommendations, and \$19 million has been included in the 2019-20 estimates, with \$134 million over five years for the food policy.

We've never had a food policy, so one of the questions is, how do we come up with the numbers? What process are we following? How do we allocate the funds? How are they going to be used?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: There had been very important consultations before that. I want to acknowledge as well the work of my predecessor, Minister MacAulay, of course. It has been a very interesting process, especially when we see that 45,000 people participated in this consultation. We could feel that Canadians were asking for such a food policy.

I would say that the estimates and the first phase...because I believe that it's the first phase that we have announced in the budget, and I strongly hope that it will be a lasting policy and will get into our DNA in Canada.

There will be a fund for local infrastructure. The amount that has been allocated to that is \$50 million.

Another one will be working on promoting Canadian products. For the last three months, I've had the chance to meet with so many farmers, and I think we have so many good stories to tell. I want to make sure that this part of the food policy promoting Canadian products also includes getting Canadians to know more about our Canadian agriculture and the good work that our farmers are doing, getting them to better understand where their food comes from, and strengthening the trust and the pride between Canadian consumers and farmers. There will be \$25 million attached to this portion.

Tackling food fraud will also be something important. Canadians told us that they worry. Even if we are confident in our actual system—I don't have any doubts about its safety—still, when there is a product that comes to us under one name, and later on we understand there are other ingredients in it, we want to be stronger on that to make sure that we buy what we think we're buying. This is something that Canadians care about a lot.

There will be some funds directly allocated for our northern and isolated communities. We're talking about \$15 million specifically dedicated to these communities.

Food waste is also an important part of the food policy.

• (1130)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I'd like to build on that last point. I'm really glad to hear you say that.

Recently, the City of Guelph and County of Wellington were awarded \$10 million to create Canada's first circular food economy. One of the main goals of that is to reduce food waste and to take food waste as an input for other things, like energy or like making bioplastics or other things we can do from food waste.

As a member of Parliament, how can I tie in some of these innovative programs to the food policy? Do you, your staff, or your officials have any idea? We talk about an all-of-government approach. There's a lot of innovation around food, and there's a lot of funding around innovation that's separate from agriculture. How do we bring all this good energy together?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Specifically, there's \$26.3 million for reducing food waste. We want to go through a challenge program to find the best ideas to encourage the businesses and the NGOs to work together to find innovative solutions to tackle food waste. Hopefully, after that the idea is to have a second phase and then to use these vast ideas to scale up and bring them to other communities as well.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Super.

Food fraud is something the University of Guelph works on through the International Barcode of Life project. I know they've been participating with the department on that as well.

The main estimates also have \$7.5 million for supporting the agricultural clean technology program. We did a study on climate change impacts on soil health and clean technology. This has increased \$3 million over the previous estimates.

Could you please explain where we're heading with agricultural clean technology as a program?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: The clean technology program last year was at its beginning. That is why the amount of money was a little bit less than it is this year.

[*Translation*]

Things are now in full swing.

[*English*]

It's getting rolling. That's why we have an increase in the amount of money.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Perfect. Thank you very much.

It's always great to see you.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Longfield.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Minister.

[*English*]

We now have Ms. Rudd for six minutes.

I think I got it right this time.

Ms. Kim Rudd: Thank you very much. It's great to be here today.

Thank you, Minister, for coming.

I have two areas.

I come from Northumberland—Peterborough South, which is a rural riding in eastern Ontario. I was glad my colleague Mr. Drouin brought up the supply management package that we have provided or are providing.

I want to talk about another thing that my farmers certainly wish they didn't have to have, or need: the risk management programs. There are a number of those programs: for example, AgriStability, AgriInvest, AgriMarketing. I know that part of your role is to meet—and you mentioned the meeting that you're going to have this summer—with the federal-provincial-territorial ministers, and there's a number of things that you have on the agenda.

Could you talk a little bit about how you see your role and your ability to strengthen those partnerships with the provinces and territories—particularly the provinces—around those funds and how we can best deploy them to our agriculture sector when it needs them?

● (1135)

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Last year, a new five-year Canadian partnership started.

This year, we will have an opportunity to look back on our objectives. Also, the ministers will be mainly new to their positions, not having been there for the previous meetings, so it will be a good opportunity for all of us to really understand why some changes have been brought to these programs. Obviously, I hear a lot from the producers on some of these agri programs. Sometimes they would like to go back to the previous rules, or sometimes they want to see a different type of approach. We are all thinking about it. Our teams are doing the analysis.

We are also open to new partnerships, such as bringing private partners on board in different ways. I would say that everything is on the table, but we are hearing what our farmers are telling us. Still, these programs have been developed to face the different types of challenge that a farmer can face. We can see that it's working. Considering the situation we have this year, we have seen a significant increase in the AgriStability this year. We can see that our programs are working.

Can we do better? Probably. We can always do better.

I really look forward to having this discussion and to sharing ideas. Our teams are already challenging each other and trying to make suggestions.

Ms. Kim Rudd: Certainly I hear from my farmers that they are really at ground zero with the effects of climate change. They see it every day in the work they do. So I think the review of those programs to ensure that we're addressing the constantly changing reality for them is extremely important.

I quickly want to bring something to your attention. We have something in my riding called the Ontario Agri-Food Venture Centre. MP Drouin, and I think his whole municipal council, came to visit us last summer and we had a great tour. That centre was really a creation of the agriculture community. They saw it as something they needed that wasn't there.

What they do is small-batch processing of fruits and vegetables, but there's a whole wrap-around effect with marketing, production, business supports and those kinds of things. We've seen these small producers get into not just national markets, but now international markets.

You may or may not know that we are the largest saffron-producing area in the country. Who knew? We think that saffron comes from overseas. Saffron is from my riding is now on international markets. It's in a variety of things from mustard to vinegar, etc.

Can you talk a bit about how that partnership with international trade diversification is not just an opportunity for large producers and processors, but also for niche markets? We may be able to find those niche markets that maybe we never thought of five years ago.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: You're right. Diversification is not limited to finding new international markets. It's a big part of it, as we have great opportunities, but finding new markets here in Canada and developing new niches, as you said, new products, is something

that we want to invest even more in. Actually, we have increased our investment as well, because we are still exporting a lot of raw products. I think we have a lot to gain through investing and processing, and not necessarily the usual products, but finding specific niches that would be interesting.

This is why we are investing in different types of programs for innovation as well. You might have seen that there is now \$100 million dedicated to agriculture in the—

● (1140)

Mr. Chris Forbes (Deputy Minister, Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food): Strategic innovation fund.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: —SIF, in English, the strategic innovation fund. The acronyms in French and English are always a challenge. We are investing a lot in it to try to find new opportunities for our producers.

If I may come back to your previous comment, you said that our producers were the first to realize the impact of climate change. I was the minister of international development, and I was always amazed when I was with farmers in the middle of Vietnam or anywhere in the world, and they were talking to me about climate change. That was something very important.

In talking about your farmers, I think it would be interesting to follow up with the local food infrastructure fund. There might be opportunities for small and medium organizations in different regions to get better organized to work together, keeping in mind that the objective is to give access to safe, healthy and even culturally diverse food to the people who are most in need in our communities. That could be an opportunity they will see shortly.

Ms. Kim Rudd: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Minister. Thank you, Ms. Rudd.

Now we have Mr. Dreesen for six minutes.

Mr. Earl Dreesen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Minister, for being here.

I suppose one of the first comments I want to make is that an inquiry was made by David Anderson to the ministry on April 9 about the canola crisis. The response we got back on May 27 said:

The Government of Canada's approach has been to defend and support our world class canola industry and our farmers. Our goal is to find a science-based solution to a science-based problem within the rules based trading system.

In that response as well there was a parenthetical comment at the end: “(can be said better)”. This was both in the English and the French version that we received.

We heard for a number of weeks that all of this has to be a science-based plan. Fortunately, we've moved off of that; it's not the talking point anymore. It's more about the actual politics associated with this.

When we look at that, we've seen Italy, India, Saudi Arabia, Peru and Vietnam—all of these countries—impose unwarranted market restrictions on Canadian farmers. There does not seem to be a response from the government on each of these things. The Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association estimates that the above list of countries represents over \$4.2 billion in direct export sales annually. With the multiplier effect, it's a potential loss to our economy of about \$6.3 billion.

Do you see any connection between this and what has happened in China? If we are not standing up strongly to these other countries that have come up with these non-tariff trade barriers, is that not part of the reason China looks at us and thinks they can keep doing this and not get a response? Do you personally believe that the arguments by China are true in any way, shape or form?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: We are really engaged in all of the files in all of the countries you mentioned. We stand strong for our farmers. Once again, the biggest strength we have here in Canada is the fact that we are providing very high-quality products and our inspection system is very reliable. I was in Japan recently and I can tell you how the Japanese government and the minister of agriculture reinforced the fact that Canada is a very reliable partner.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Absolutely, I agree. You made a comment earlier that CFIA yesterday had followed up with the customs people in China. I'm curious whether or not that had anything to do with canola or whether or not it was back to the announcement that was made that there's going to be more intense scrutiny of meat products going to China. Was that a canola issue that the CFIA was looking at, or did it have to do with meat inspections?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: It was specifically related to canola.

• (1145)

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Okay. I think folks would be interested in knowing that.

The other thing you perhaps might want to correct is that you had said there's \$500,000 without interest for Canadian producers. That, of course, is only on the canola portion associated with that. You don't need to correct it; I think perhaps it could have simply been a slip of the tongue.

Food policy is something that you spoke of. Again, it's how you spin food policy. When people start to suggest that “We can do this to Canada to make sure it has a secure and safe food system” despite our having the best system in the world... Unfortunately, we allow other actors to come in and say that they'll maybe pay a little attention to what's happening here and pay some attention to what's happening there.

The reality is we should be standing up and saying that we do have the best in the world and that some of these comments based, quite frankly, on some rather ludicrous arguments....

We've had a study and witnesses here when we were talking about analyzing public perception as far as food is concerned. With regard to front-of-package labelling, as you know or you've probably heard.... Whether or not you actually believe that yogourt is something we should be afraid of, that would on the front-of-package labelling.

We also hear of situations as far as GMO is concerned. When you have a list—as was mentioned by one of our witnesses—of genetically engineered maple trees, durum wheat, Hunt's tomato sauce, Himalayan rock salt, engineered tea, coconuts and genetically engineered bacon, the comments that are being made are ridiculous. People say to put that on the label. All it does is scare people.

When you were talking about a food policy, I'm wondering if our food policy shouldn't start by saying, “This is the very best we have and these comments by outside sources are being made solely to protect their own investments”. They are not doing it to protect Canadians.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: There are many questions within that one.

I said earlier how important it is for me, in the buy-Canadian promotion campaign, not only to take marketing action but also to reinforce and strengthen the trust and the pride of Canadians in our Canadian agricultural products. I stand strongly for, and we all believe in, defending and promoting and are proud of our best system.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Then does that mean that you—

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: We agree.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Does that mean that you will be one of them? You did say you wanted people to know that what they think they're buying is what they are actually buying, so does that mean you'll be standing up to make sure that people understand that some of these claims coming in are, in fact, not accurate.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Absolutely.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Thank you.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: I say this because when we did the consultation, it came as a worry, as something that Canadians want to be reassured about. That is why I'm saying in the same sentence that we have to acknowledge, but at the same time, we have to show and demonstrate and share the good stories of what we are doing in our Canadian agricultural sector. We have to be proud of it and be able to trust in it. That is very important.

The main objective of the food policy is to give Canadians access of healthy and safe food. We all know that we have safe products in Canada, but not everyone has access to the most healthy or diverse foods. This is much more the issue, making sure that everyone has access to healthy, and obviously, safe food.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

[English]

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Chair, I'd love to ask another question, but I should save the time for some of our other—

The Chair: It's already one minute extra.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Nassif, you may go ahead for six minutes.

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Thank you for being here, Minister, for the second time in a month.

You were recently in Japan for the G20 agriculture ministers meeting. There, you met with your counterparts from the G20, including China's agriculture minister.

Can you share some of the details of what you talked about and the results of the meeting?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: I did, indeed, attend the G20 meeting. The talks focused on the importance of reliable rule-based trade, market stability and evidence-based decision-making. It was the perfect opportunity to speak with my Chinese counterpart. I was quite clear about Canada's concerns over his country's suspension of the licences of Canadian exporters.

He said there was a problem with Canada's canola seed, and my response was that we'd undertaken all the necessary inspections and found no evidence of any issues. I asked him to show us the evidence and stressed that, if there was a problem, we wanted to know what it was so we could fix it. I made it very clear that we needed to have an evidence-based conversation.

At this stage, our respective scientists and experts need to talk and sit down with one another. He's the agriculture minister, but he's not in charge of customs. I got the distinct impression that he heard what I was saying and was going to raise the issue with his colleague. That may be why, yesterday, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency was involved in new talks that were more science-based. The general feeling was that the discussion would result in something more. Did one thing lead to another? I can't say for sure, but at least there some movement on the file. Our respective scientists are talking.

● (1150)

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Tell us, if you would, about the benefits of the G20 meeting.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: As a general rule, meetings at a G20 gathering are always very important. Of course, there's always a formal agenda laying out the main themes, which I already talked about.

On the sidelines, however, quite a few multilateral and bilateral meetings take place, so I had an opportunity to speak with the European Commissioner for Agriculture about Italy's shunning of Canadian wheat. We also talked about African swine fever, which is a major concern for us. We don't have the disease in Canada, so that opens up opportunities for our farmers.

I also met with Argentina's minister to discuss the possibility of exporting canola there. I attended a special meeting with U.S., Mexican, Argentinian and Brazilian representatives. We spoke mainly about the importance of a unified continental front to support decision-making and adopt evidence-based international trade rules so we can face the big issues together.

I had numerous opportunities to assert Canada's position and initiate or continue dialogue with other countries, either bilaterally or multilaterally.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you for sharing details about your G20 meetings.

I, too, think it's important to cultivate relationships with other countries in order to get results. Unfortunately, we haven't seen much in the way of results thus far. Canada seems to be having a tough time getting issues resolved. None of the problems you mentioned has been fixed. What's more, Canada hasn't been able to protect its farmers' interests, and therein lies the rub.

The government seems to do a lot of talking but isn't so adept at finding any solutions whatsoever. That is the exact opposite of what Canadians expect. That's why we want ministers to speak to one another—so they can work together in a coordinated way. We want the Prime Minister to stand up for Canadian farmers on the world stage, rather than letting his ministers travel around and talk to people willy-nilly. We want these issues resolved.

Minister, we examine multiple issues, and I could've asked you countless more questions. If you were willing to stay another hour, I'm sure that would do it.

I'm going to turn to the animal transportation regulations, which have drawn considerable feedback. The new rules are slated to come into effect early next year, but your department is in the midst of a study that won't be finished by then. Why don't you object and demand that the regulations not come into force until the results of your department's study are available?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: The Canadian Food Inspection Agency conducted a very thorough study and consulted—

Mr. Luc Berthold: That's not your department. I'm talking about your department, which is conducting its own in-depth study on animal transportation. Industry stakeholders expect tangible findings that they can rely on. Why, then, is your government going to implement the regulations before the results of your study come out?

● (1155)

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: A considerable amount of research has already been done, and there is sufficient evidence to warrant moving forward with the regulations.

Mr. Luc Berthold: So you are in agreement with the proposed changes.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Once again, the decisions are based on data, on probative data.

Mr. Luc Berthold: So you are in agreement with the proposed regulations.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Yes, indeed, we are proceeding with the regulations. I understand that, for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the process remains open. That means that we will—

Mr. Luc Berthold: As minister, are you in agreement with the changes that will go into effect in January?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Absolutely.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Minister, the Americans have announced a flood of billions of dollars to help their farmers with the various initiatives of their government.

What is the Government of Canada's plan to confront the consequences of those billions of dollars that are going to flood into the American industry? We demanded no concessions from the Americans for our supply-managed markets. We actually made a lot of concessions, whereas they are going to continue as before and even increase their subsidies to their industry.

So, Madam Minister, what is the Government of Canada's plan to support our producers in this very difficult economic situation?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Berthold, I do not understand how you can say with a straight face that we demanded no concessions. You know very well that the Americans wanted—

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Minister, we did not demand—

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: ...the complete dismantling—

Mr. Luc Berthold: ...any concessions. I am not laughing at all. For me, this is no laughing matter.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Nor for me.

Mr. Luc Berthold: No producers here will be laughing. The supply-managed producers gave up everything and you obtained nothing in return from the Americans for those producers. I think that has been very clear.

Madam Minister, I will be yielding the floor to Mr. Shipley. These will be his final comments, because he is retiring. I really want to leave the last question to him.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): TRQs are allocated to processors and retailers. The processors are linked to producers. Now, again, as you did with the environment, you're supporting the large retailers with an opportunity for a lot of money. Why are you standing by and allowing that to happen instead of standing up for the processors? Our producers will grow their industry only if we can grow the processors.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: I understand what you're saying. I'm working closely with Minister Carr, who is responsible, obviously, for the TRQs. Right now, he's doing a consultation, because he's doing a full review of the TRQs, including those for CETA, the agreement with Europe, the agreement with the Trans-Pacific region, the WTO and, obviously, NAFTA. We are taking it very seriously, consulting our partners and, obviously, processors.

Mr. Bev Shipley: You're the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Yes.

Mr. Bev Shipley: You're the minister of our producers.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Yes.

Mr. Bev Shipley: I am hoping that you have the authority over him around the table to support Canadian producers in supply management, so they can grow. Quite honestly, during the NAFTA,

we gave it all away, without getting anything back in return. You protected a couple of things. Now we have this opportunity to give our producers some help.

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

Mr. Bev Shipley: We can stay another hour.

The Chair: We might.

[Translation]

We may run over by a minute. Is that okay?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: A minute is fine, but not an hour.

The Chair: No. It is just to give Mr. MacGregor the full three minutes.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Of course.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Go ahead, Mr. MacGregor, for three minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I think what Mr. Shipley and I have been trying to get at with regard to the processors and our trade with the European Union is their intimate understanding of the local market. Retailers are just going to sell cheese, right? It could be European cheese or Canadian cheese. They don't have an understanding of how to maybe combine the two so that it doesn't hurt our local market—not to the same extent as our processors do. I think that's the point we really want to get across to you: Our processors should have more of that TRQ, because of their intimate understanding of the local market.

On Friday, I got the chance to go to Summerland in the Okanagan to the research centre that AAFC has there. It is staffed by amazing people, who are really dedicated to their craft and who are hiring more scientists, which is a great thing to see. I'm particularly interested in the work they're doing on soil health. The research on that is fascinating, and I'm glad to see that we are allocating more resources.

Minister, you have acknowledged that climate change is a huge issue. Our farmers have as well. What projections is the department doing with regard to climate change and the costs that could be coming our way? If farmers are facing more droughts and floods, there is perhaps going to be a bit more strain on the help they'll be asking for. Is the department looking at that particular issue, for the damage it could cause to our future budgets?

● (1200)

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Yes, absolutely. I think I can say that we have, within our business risk management tools, the AgriRecovery program, which specifically targets extreme weather events. The request has to come from a province. When they have seen a drought, a fire or a flood, for example, the province will open the file and ask for the funds. For these types of programs, there is no limited envelope.

Am I okay when I say that?

Yes, the amount of money that will be made available to our farmers is related to the demand.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: It's not a closed envelope for that type of program.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: However, you are making projections for what those costs could be.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Of course.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Okay.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: As well, we're investing a lot in innovation and trying to find ways to be more resilient, obviously, and having a very strong climate plan to fight climate change overall.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

[*Translation*]

Madam Minister, thank you for coming to see us this morning to share with us your expertise and your concerns on agricultural matters. You also talked about the main estimates, 2019-2020, for your department. Thank you once more.

[*English*]

If I understand correctly, Deputy Minister Forbes and the assistant deputy minister will stay with us for the second hour.

Mr. Chris Forbes: Yes.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We are going to suspend the meeting for a few minutes, so that the other witnesses can take their places.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1205)

The Chair: Let us resume the meeting.

Welcome to our second hour.

[*English*]

With us for the second hour is Mr. Chris Forbes, deputy minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. Thanks for staying with us for the second hour.

Also, we have Christine Walker, assistant deputy minister. Thanks for joining us.

There's no opening statement, so we'll go right to the questions.

Mr. Dreeshen, do you want to get this going for six minutes?

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Thank you very much.

It's good to have the department here so we can ask a few other questions and perhaps look through a few different things that we didn't have a chance to speak to the minister about.

A Statistics Canada report just came out a couple of days ago. We often hear glowing things about how the Barton report is going to make it so that agri-food exports reach \$75 billion, and how great that is going to be for agriculture. There is always a lot of money in farming, but it doesn't necessarily get to the farmer. I think that's

really the critical part because, according to the report by Statistics Canada, the realized net farm income of ag producers fell 45% in 2018, which followed a 2.8% decline in 2017. That's been the largest percentage decrease since 2006.

It takes into account inventory, pricing and volume and so on, but one of the key things is the increases in costs for farmers. There are rising feed costs, and interest and labour costs and new regulations that we see being added to small business. We also see changes as far as taxation is concerned. Of course, we see the one that I tend to talk about a lot, which is the carbon tax.

The costs associated with this continually add up. Prices go up for the farmer; income goes down for the farmer. The comment was made earlier about climate change. Producers are the first ones to recognize climate change, but they're also the first to speak out against a carbon tax as a solution for that. There is a need for real solutions. The knee-jerk things that we do.... Of course, that was done when we thought the U.S. was going to be engaged in some sort of North American carbon pricing, so the way in which we were trading around the world would have something like that included in it. We also saw countries that were our competitors, like Australia, saying that they'll give it a try. It didn't take long for them to make that change.

Here we have farmers who recognize that yes, there may be some great ideas as to how they can expand, but they aren't going to be the ones to benefit from this unless we can find a way to look at the cost side of this as well.

Perhaps, Mr. Forbes, you could speak to some of the things your department sees as concerns as far as the cost side for our agricultural producers is concerned.

• (1210)

Mr. Chris Forbes: Why don't I take a stab at that? Thank you for the question.

I think you accurately portrayed the net income numbers for last year. It was driven by a range of cost increases. Some of those—interest rates, obviously, and the cost of carrying debt—rose a little bit last year. We do have programming between the Farm Credit and ourselves to financially support people looking to borrow.

On some of the other costs, I would put forward a couple of points. I would start with our research agenda writ large, which is actually about how to find, if you will, more productive ways such as improved productivity of our crops—making them more drought tolerant and adapting to some of the changing climatic conditions, so we can maintain the productivity and in many cases reduce some of the input costs associated with running a farm.

If I think about other aspects, on our programming side we have innovation programming that would work for the extension of innovative, on-farm practices, whether it is the practices themselves or the equipment and tools that are available. These are some of the things that would be out there that would tackle some of the cost increases and try to improve sustainability.

The one other thing I'll mention is labour, which is obviously big—both in terms of availability and cost. You raised that, Mr. Dreeshen. We work closely with our provincial colleagues and with the sector to look at better understanding labour market conditions and what we can do to improve access to labour, predictions about labour and how provincial and federal programming can work together to support the sector.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: I will just say, in the time I have remaining, that the farmers were the first ones to adapt to the technology. Governments sit back and say, “This is our idea of how farmers will be able to do better.” Well, quite frankly, they're years ahead of anything government ever does. They're looking at the tools they need to have as well, the GMO products and all these other types of things. They're looking at regulations and the competitive edges they could have. They're looking at gene editing in Europe versus what we have in North America. If people put those two things together and started to look at it from square one, they'd be horrified at how those genes are changed in Europe.

Unfortunately, we're behind the eight ball. We have these different groups out there denigrating everything we do. We need a government that will stand up to that. I'm wondering if that awareness and desire to stand up and fight against some of these nonsensical types of things that are coming from afar is something that the department is set to do.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dreeshen.

Did you want to give a quick reply to that?

Mr. Chris Forbes: I'll just say something quickly.

I think from public servants' standpoint, we are in international fora arguing for science-based solutions and science-based approaches to regulations. I understand the point about regulation and trying to make it efficient. We want to maintain the strength of our regulatory system and the reputational advantage it gives us, but at the same time, we have to make it as efficient as possible.

This has been raised to us through numerous fora. It's not news to you and it's not news to me. We're working on that, for sure.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Peschisolido, you have six minutes.

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

Chris, it's great to see you again, and Madam Walker, welcome.

As you know, Chris, the agriculture committee has been studying the African swine flu outbreak. To use a very vernacular phrase, this could be very, very bad. In China, depending on whom you speak to, a third to half of their livestock hogs have been culled or will be

culled. It's expanding into Vietnam. There are concerns about it in Hong Kong. There are isolated cases in other parts.

We've been studying the issue here at committee, and I believe the department has also been looking at it and dealing with international stakeholders. One, are we prepared for this? What are we doing to make sure we don't have it here in Canada? And two, if it does come here—God forbid—what will we do in response?

Mr. Chris Forbes: I can give you a high-level answer. I also have a colleague here from the CFIA, if you'd like me to bring him forward.

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: Absolutely.

Mr. Chris Forbes: Jaspinder Komal is the chief veterinary officer at CFIA. He is really at the front line of this work.

If you're okay with being put on the spot, Jaspinder, you can talk a little bit about what you're doing.

Dr. Jaspinder Komal (Vice-President, Science Branch, Chief Veterinary Officer and World Organisation for Animal Health Delegate for Canada, Canadian Food Inspection Agency): No problem.

I'm sorry, but could you give me the question again?

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: Sure. Are we prepared, and how are we prepared? What are we doing in preparation?

Dr. Jaspinder Komal: As you know, we've been working at it for some time now. At the forum we had in Ottawa, we wanted to raise global awareness in addition to being prepared in Canada and the U. S. to try to prevent this infection from coming here. We also wanted to make sure the region of the Americas was free from it. Following from that, we had a meeting last week of G7 country CVOs and also of the World Organisation for Animal Health in Paris. At the G7 meeting, countries recognized Canada's leadership on this, and following that at the OIE as well. All the conclusions and the next steps on this were actually incorporated into the resolutions at the OIE. Countries are now on high alert. Countries with infections and countries that don't have it are all thinking of it as a global issue that we need to tackle together.

When it comes to preparing in Canada, we have worked a lot on prevention, on strengthening our borders and strengthening the biosecurity at the farm. We are now getting into making sure we are prepared in case the infection comes into Canada. Do we have agreements with other countries for business continuity? In case it happens, do we have enough resources? Are labs prepared? Are our inspectors prepared? We have our provinces with us to work with us. Industry is there to work with us. We're working on all those things.

Mr. Chris Forbes: I think the last point that Dr. Komal made was that there is a lot of work with provincial partners, because they have an important role in this, and of course industry as well, both in terms of their actions and communication to their members. It is a collaborative approach, as you described, with international partners as well.

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: Why don't we assume that we will make sure that it doesn't come here?

But if it does come here, it will probably be quite devastating. Then we're going to have to regroup somehow, and the way to regroup is to make sure that the hog farmers are compensated quickly. I'm not that concerned about the other stakeholders in the industry because I think they're big enough to take care of themselves, but for the farmers, will there be some flexibility in the compensation plan so they can get the money quickly?

• (1220)

Mr. Chris Forbes: The first point I'd make is that if it were to come here, I think the points that Jaspinder made around biosecurity containment—how we set up zones to make sure that we constrain it—are the first things we can do, should it come. This is not to downplay the importance of compensation, but just to say that's what we'd have to do: Limit—if it were to show up—any spread, and that's where a lot of the focus from the CFIA standpoint would be.

On compensation, I can't prejudge any subsequent decision other than to say that, obviously, to the extent that it has a significant impact on the sector, I think governments, federally and provincially.... The minister talked about some of the programming that we have in place already. We would stand ready to work with the sector to help them recover and get over this issue both in terms of containment, and doing our best to keep international markets open, or reopen them, whatever it is, and also on a domestic front.

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: I'll change gears slightly. Someone earlier on—it could have been Mr. Dreesen or Mr. MacGregor—talked about food security. After the last election, the agriculture minister's mandate letter, and I'm assuming it is in Madame Bibeau's mandate letter too, from the Prime Minister indicated that food security was one of his key focuses.

Can you tell the committee where we are on that and what specific programs and approaches we will be implementing on a food security platform?

Mr. Chris Forbes: This was part of the food policy announcement in the budget for \$134 million over five years. Food security was one aspect of that. The minister, I think, covered a couple of the programs, one for a local infrastructure fund that would improve access and try to increase access to safe food generally across the country. There's also a northern and remote communities project fund to specifically focus on some of those areas that the evidence shows have some of the higher rates—

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chris Forbes: —of food insecurity. There's \$19 million in these estimates to start rolling that program out this year.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Forbes.

I also want to welcome someone who is no stranger to our committee, Dr. Jaspinder Komal, vice-president of the science branch, and chief veterinary officer and Canada's delegate to the World Organisation for Animal Health.

Thanks for joining us at the table.

Dr. Jaspinder Komal: Thank you.

The Chair: Also, our front bench keeps changing. MP Maloney, MP Scott Simms and also MP Schulte join us now. Not unlike the hockey team and basketball team, the bench sometimes has to change.

Thanks for joining us here today.

Mr. MacGregor, you have six minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Mr. Forbes, Ms. Walker, and Dr. Komal for being here.

The main estimates for fiscal year 2019-20 have an 11.5% increase for the Canadian Grain Commission. Moreover, budget 2019 states that “The Canada Grain Act has not been substantially updated in decades, and its requirements are not aligned with current market realities.” It goes on to talk about a broad-based review of the act and of the operations of the Canadian Grain Commission.

I don't think we've got enough runway left in the 42nd Parliament for an amendment to the act. Could you inform this committee as to what AAFC has done with regard to a review of the commission and the act, and are there regulatory changes coming?

The reason I ask is that I know there are some people who want to see the Grain Commission changed, but there are also a number of farmers who like the role it has played and currently plays, so I'm wondering how you're taking those differing viewpoints into account.

Mr. Chris Forbes: This is something that we are working.... We have not launched formal consultations yet, so as you pointed out, there is no immediate change coming. We are looking at how to start a process of engagement.

To emphasize your point, I think it would be one that would be broad and inclusive. We would want to hear from all of the players in the sector—all of those voices. Some of the issues have come up in previous discussions, but I think it would be a chance to get a good sense of what the current issues are with the functioning of the Grain Commission. As you say, there will be some who are supportive of it in its current form and others who have big concerns or small concerns. We want to hear all of those and formulate a bit of a plan for—

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: There's nothing major happening on it?

Mr. Chris Forbes: Not yet, no.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: There was a question for the minister when she was here in the previous hour about the changes to the animal transport regulations. I know that our ultimate goal is the welfare of the animals. However, when I talk to the beef industry especially, they note that they have a 99.6% success rate, and they keep telling me and many of my colleagues that if the number of hours an animal can be transported are shortened, especially with cattle—the loading, the unloading, mixing with other stocks, the transfer of disease—there are some real concerns that it could actually maybe be to the detriment of the animals in question. These are farmers who handle the animals as a part of their livelihood. I'm wondering how your department is squaring with what they're telling us.

• (1225)

Mr. Chris Forbes: Jaspinder, do you want to talk a bit about that?

Dr. Jaspinder Komal: The humane transport regulations have been 10 years in the making. We have been working on them. The last time these regulations were put in place was in the seventies, so we wanted to modernize them. We know there's a study going on, but we looked at all of the current studies and wanted to do an update. These regulations were created when the transport system was different: It was by rail, and the times were set at that time, and it was actually impeding innovation in the industry. With these, we took all of the information and tried to bring a balance by looking at the geographical reality in Canada, looking at other countries, looking at what the OIE suggested to us, and we came into the middle. We understand there is still more research going on, and we'll continue to look at that.

I must say that when we did this, when we put the package together, we looked at the current reality and 98% of these shipments were in compliance with what we proposed.

So that's the way we went. We had a lot of consultation with all stakeholders. Given that animal welfare is pretty important to consumers and to the international community from a trade perspective, it plays a large role on our front. Given that we are an exporting nation, we can't be left behind, because we need to use that as a negotiating tool when we are seeking market access to other countries.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you for that.

My final question is with regard to the food policy. So \$19 million in this fiscal year will go to things like a local food infrastructure fund, a buy Canadian promotional campaign and a food waste reduction challenge. Canada's a big country, and \$19 million is a lot of money, but over a country as large as ours, perhaps it's not so much. I know there will be a lot of demand—I'm thinking of my own riding—especially for a food infrastructure fund. How fast do you anticipate this \$19 million is going to be spent? Does it actually match up with the reality of the demand that is probably going to be out there for it?

Mr. Chris Forbes: I probably can't speak to the demand out there. We're hoping to start rolling out or launching the food policy programming shortly. How quickly we roll it out or how quickly the dollars go will depend on a bunch of things, including take-up and demand. I would say this is the first time we've done some of these programs at the federal level, and certainly for the agricultural department, so in some ways, we're starting at a level that.... Is it the right level? I couldn't tell you for sure, but it's a level, and I think it seems to be a good way to start the programming on a variety of tracks and we will get a good sense of the demand, the types of projects and the interest, once we have the programming going.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Forbes. Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.
[Translation]

We now move to Mrs. Nassif, for six minutes.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for coming to answer our questions.

My question goes to Mr. Forbes or Ms. Walker.

In the list of transfer payments for 2019-2020, an amount of \$2.5 million has been allocated to support a new program, the living laboratories initiative.

Can you tell us about this initiative? What is it, exactly?

Mr. Chris Forbes: We are launching this new program in order to do a little more research with producers and people working in the fields. These are living laboratories. This research will not be done in our laboratories, our research centres, as is normally the case.

We are trying to find active farms where we will be able to work with the producers. It goes back a little to what Mr. Dreesen was saying. The producers know best how they work. We can do the research with them so that they learn, but also so that we learn.

• (1230)

Mrs. Eva Nassif: What is the goal of the initiative?

Mr. Chris Forbes: At the moment, our emphasis is on environmental practices. We want to see whether there are ways in which environmental results can be improved.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: How will you evaluate that? Do you feel that it will improve things a lot?

Mr. Chris Forbes: I am not a scientist myself, but scientists are very good at evaluating the results of their research. There is a plan for each project, which will extend over a number of years. They will look at the data from those projects and will be able to assess the results.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Is the funding for the initiative recurrent?

Mr. Chris Forbes: Yes.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Will farmers have to submit an application each year?

Mr. Chris Forbes: No, the funding extends over five years.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Ms. Walker, do you want to add something?

Ms. Christine Walker (Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Management Branch, Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food): No.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Nassif.

Mr. Poissant, you have six minutes.

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (La Prairie, Lib.): My thanks to the witnesses for being here and for giving us information to supplement everything the Minister told us earlier.

I would like to go back to the living laboratories initiative.

I had an opportunity to announce a project similar to that in the region next to mine. Fourteen producers are going to take part in a study on protecting organic soils. I can tell you that those producers will have a financial role in the study. So the laboratory really is a living one.

However, I would like to know if you meet regularly with Farm Credit Canada, FCC, to discuss the price of land and equipment, which is constantly rising, and ways in which we can support our producers.

Mr. Chris Forbes: We meet with people from the FCC on a regular basis. They are a very good source of information on the situation of producers on the farm, given that those are their clients. The organization takes care of important matters for their clients, specifically with financing and mental health programs, and can give them all the details they need. I know they work closely with their clients to meet their needs.

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: Okay.

The long-term health of our agriculture is something that is particularly close to my heart. You talked about the psychological distress of our producers. I know that a report was submitted and that it contains recommendations.

Can you tell us a little more about how things are going?

Mr. Chris Forbes: Which report are you talking about?

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: We submitted a report with a number of recommendations. Can you tell us a little more about what is going to be happening with those recommendations?

Mr. Chris Forbes: Normally, we look at a report and an official process follows, in which the government becomes familiar with the details and subsequently provides a response. That is the process followed each time a standing committee submits a report.

As a department, we take the recommendations very seriously and we look at them in detail to find out how we can adjust our processes and our priorities. We work with the government to provide the committees with a more official response.

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: I would also like to hear what you have to say about the next generation of farmers. As I have just said, the long-term health of agriculture is particularly close to my heart. Is there a next generation? Are there sufficient programs to attract a next generation?

Mr. Chris Forbes: We are making efforts in that direction. As I have said in connection to the work force and the next generation, we work with the provinces on a regular basis. Each of us has programs in the area so that we can determine what has to be done. It may be about groups like 4-H, or other organizations working along those lines. Programs like that may be provincial or federal.

As to whether we are doing enough, that is a question to which I have no answer. It is a challenge for the economy overall. As the population ages, we need young people in every area. There is a great deal of pressure to replace the workforce that is now leaving. Earlier, the minister talked about our efforts to replace our scientists. That is another aspect of this challenge. It is important for processors and producers to find the next generation. We are working on it with our partners.

• (1235)

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: We want our exports to go from \$64 billion to \$75 billion by 2025.

What more can we do to achieve that objective?

Mr. Chris Forbes: We are already working very hard to increase the possibilities for our exporters, producers and processors in foreign markets. Currently, we are focusing on increasing our representation in international organizations like the FAO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, or the OIE, the World Organization for Animal Health. That was a key demand from the industry. That is where the rules on commercial trading of food are established and where debates begin. One of the objectives for our investments in this area is to create a system of exchanges where the rules are more science-based.

We are also investing in trade commissioners. Their role is to help exporters gain access to markets and find importers to whom to sell their products. These are major investments. Finally, we are helping companies that would like to export their products to understand how to get involved in the export process from Canada. For small and medium businesses, that is important. Even though it may be possible to export a product to China or Japan, they need to understand the situation in those countries. That is what we are doing here.

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Forbes.

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

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for joining us today, Mr. Forbes and Ms. Walker.

The Minister mentioned earlier that there were exchanges with China yesterday.

Can you tell us at which level those exchanges were held and who took part in the discussions?

Mr. Chris Forbes: Our principal representative was a director of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. He has led most of the discussions with his Chinese government counterparts since the beginning. He is an expert in health—

Mr. Luc Berthold: Things are still happening at director level.

Mr. Chris Forbes: Director level or director general level, yes.

Mr. Luc Berthold: That is good, but did the president of the agency or yourself not participate in those discussions?

Mr. Chris Forbes: No, because they were discussions of a technical nature.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Very good, thank you.

I would like us to talk about the regulations on transporting animals. Across the industry, we are told that you are in the process of conducting a study and that the results will be known in a year and a half. But a decision has been made.

Do your two organizations talk to each other? What is going on? How do we explain that you are conducting such an exhaustive study?

The entire industry is ready to make use of your results. Everyone I have talked to has said that they will trust the results of your studies if they are convincing. But it would seem that you are working in isolation. One part is not talking to the other part.

Tell me what the problem is, Mr. Forbes.

• (1240)

Mr. Chris Forbes: I will try to reply and Dr. Komal can complete my answer, because the regulations are those of the agency. Dr. Komal said that the regulations that we are currently implementing for 98% of the current transport are consistent with the new regulations. Is that what you said, Dr. Komal? I see that it is.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I agree, Mr. Forbes, but I know you are devoting a lot of resources to that study at the moment. If we are adopting the new regulations before we have the results of the study, what is the point of continuing it?

Mr. Chris Forbes: For us, the study will allow us to find out, for example, how to be consistent with the code of practice. It can help not only with the regulations themselves, but also to ensure that they are consistent.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Let me follow up with you on that. To be consistent, you would need to have waited to have all the data from all the studies. A lot of public money is being invested in this.

Mr. Chris Forbes: Yes.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Consistency, to use your word, would have meant waiting for all the data from all the studies before undertaking actions that can have very serious consequences.

I understand, but I will change the subject.

We are in the second phase of the Dairy Farm Investment Program, or the milk lottery, as I call it. We know that money has been distributed. When will the list of those who have received money be available? Will it be possible to send it to the members of the committee? That would be really appreciated.

Mr. Chris Forbes: Clearly, I cannot tell you who has received money now, but I can tell you how much money has been allocated. We can send you an update and tell you where the process is.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Can you list how much of the \$350 million has been spent and how much is left?

Mr. Chris Forbes: There was \$250 million for producers and \$100 million for shippers. We can send you those figures as of today.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I know that you have to send us information on the people who have received grants. When do you anticipate that?

Mr. Chris Forbes: The names will be published in the Public Accounts of Canada.

[English]

Ms. Christine Walker: Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Chris Forbes: Ms. Walker has the figures here, if you want.

Mr. Luc Berthold: You can just send them to us. It's so that we know the status of those envelopes.

Mr. Chris Forbes: Okay.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I have 15 seconds left.

As I said earlier, I will let Mr. Shipley finish.

[English]

Mr. Bev Shipley: It's going to take more than 15 seconds.

Mr. Luc Berthold: No, you have more than a minute.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Oh. You heard me talk about the TRQs. Processors are getting 45% of them. Retailers are getting 55%, I think. What policy are you presenting to the minister to make that fair for our processors and producers? The suggestion is around 85%.

Mr. Chris Forbes: Yes. Just to be clear, the roughly fifty-fifty TRQ allocation is under CETA; for the CPTPP, even the preliminary allocation thus far is around 85%. That's sort of the number you were positing.

I think the process is as the minister described. I'll just take a little bit more time.

Mr. Bev Shipley: I don't have much time for that. I heard her.

Mr. Chris Forbes: Okay. Well, I'll just say that we work with the sector and with Global Affairs Canada to engage on what the sector is looking for out of this process. Then it is the Minister of International Trade's decision.

Mr. Bev Shipley: I now want to move to transportation, quickly.

In terms of the transportation of livestock, there's 99.6% compliance. It's like the front-of-package labelling.

Mr. Komal, I was surprised to hear you say that that given that we are an exporting nation, we actually need to make sure, in terms of our transportation standards.... Yet we're going to put front-of-package labelling on many of our cuts of beef and pork, and on our dairy products. It seems to me that if we're going to be an exporting nation, we have a conflicting message here. To our consumers in Canada, we're saying, "Oh, be careful, this is not healthy. This is not good". But we're going to send delegations around the world, through our free trade teams, saying, "Listen, we've got the safest food in the world. You should be buying it."

Is that not a contradiction, in terms of policy, for the government?

The Chair: Answer very quickly, if you can.

Dr. Jaspinder Komal: What I was trying to say is that animal welfare is front and centre for all consumers, both domestic and international. If you don't follow what is happening in the international scene, then I think we don't have that tool to negotiate market access. We need to bring ourselves to the international standard. That's what we have done. We're not there, but we are at least looking at the geographical reality in Canada, how movements of animals take place and how the systems have changed since 1976, when this regulation was put in place.

• (1245)

Mr. Bev Shipley: That is a problem with China—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Shipley.

Mr. Bev Shipley: —and their inspections of our beef right now.

The Chair: Now, Mr. Peschisolido, we have about four or five minutes because we're going to have to go to approving—

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: Of course.

The Chair: —the mains, so it's yours.

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

I have a question for Mr. Forbes.

Ms. Nassif touched on our possible expanding trade with Japan. Our trade minister, Minister Carr, is off to Japan as we speak. Obviously, they're the lead on this, but on the agricultural side, what can we do or what can you guys do, as a department, if there is a willingness on the part of the Japanese government—and there may be, given the geopolitics occurring internationally—to lay the foundation for expanding our trade into Japan, perhaps for hogs and canola, but other products as well?

Mr. Chris Forbes: I think there are a few things. We have the foundations with the trans-Pacific partnership agreement, which is, I think, improving the market access and the tariff conditions for our exporters going into Japan. I think that's critically important. I think the second piece is often being able to respond to what the sector sees as opportunities in Japan, whether that's, again, through our people on the ground in Japan, who are able to work with local businesses to identify connections, or whether that's our focus here, with ministers bringing people to open doors. That can happen. And there are technical discussions, too, over issues that maybe sometimes be barriers to trade, and how we have the science-based discussion that allows those markets to open for beef, for example, and potentially other commodities. It's a range of issues.

It does take the whole tool kit, I would say, if that's the right analogy, in both getting market access, developing the markets, and working with exporters to help them take advantage.

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: I believe it was Mr. Dreeshen who mentioned our transportation policy. It seems to me that one of the challenges or issues that we can work on is the number of slaughterhouses in Canada and their geographical distribution. Basically, we don't have enough slaughterhouses. The supply chains are so wide. Maybe that was a decision taken by industry for profit. Perhaps it was a decision made by CFIA for cutting back; I don't know.

But my question for both Mr. Komal and you, Chris, is, first, is there a willingness and a possibility of having more slaughterhouses

across the country, and second, if that's the case, how would that work? I'll open it up to you.

Mr. Chris Forbes: I would just say on slaughter capacity that what you'll often hear from the processors is that access to workers was important. One of the things that came out in the budget was a pilot program for facilities that had a need for permanent, year-round work access—an immigration pilot. The details of that haven't been announced yet, but that will, ideally, address some of the big issues that some of the larger processors have with just having enough workers to take advantage of the processing.

I think if we can tackle the labour issue, I would say it then comes down to things like a competitive business environment. The trade deals are a big help. I would say that the tax system is very positive in Canada. We talked a bit earlier about regulation, and taking advantage of our strong regulatory system and the reputation that brings us, but also making sure that it is efficient for companies that are looking to invest. We need to get the whole package together, I think, in creating a good business environment for these kinds of facilities.

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: Why are we having problems finding workers for the slaughterhouses? Is it because of the pay? Is it because folks don't want to be in an environment where animals are being slaughtered in that way?

Mr. Chris Forbes: I'm not in the hiring business there, but I guess I would say, if you look at labour markets across the country, one of the challenges—it's a good challenge to have probably—is that unemployment rates are very low. That's the first thing. Monsieur Poissant and others have raised this. I would say once you get past the low unemployment rate, a lot of these jobs are difficult. They're physically demanding. They're not for everybody, right? I don't think it's a question of pay. Sometimes it's just a matter of the availability of people. I think that's where this immigration pilot was headed.

• (1250)

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: Chris, thank you.

Mr. Chair, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Peschisolido.

Thank you to the panel. We'll have to stop now because we have to adopt the report.

[Translation]

Thank you, Deputy Minister Forbes and Assistant Deputy Minister Walker.

Mr. Chris Forbes: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Also, thank you for joining us, Dr. Jaspinder Komal.

Dr. Jaspinder Komal: My pleasure.

The Chair: Now we'll go ahead.

[Translation]

We are going to approve the votes in the Main Estimates, 2019-2020.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), the committee will now approve the votes in the main estimates ending on March 31, 2020, less the amounts voted in the interim estimates and agreed by the House on Monday, January 28.

[English]

Do I have the unanimous consent to dispose of all of these?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: We don't, so we'll vote on each one individually.

CANADIAN DAIRY COMMISSION

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$3,772,890

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

CANADIAN GRAIN COMMISSION

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$4,846,955

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$571,622,434

Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$40,505,291

Vote 10—Grants and contributions.....\$418,975,000

Vote 15—A Food Policy for Canada.....\$19,000,000

(Votes 1, 5, 10, and 15 agreed to on division)

The Chair: Now, shall I report the main estimates to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: That's all for the report.

Before we adjourn I would like to thank Ariane. This will be her last day with us. It's unfortunate for us, but fortunate for her. Her family's expanding.

[Translation]

Ms. Gagné-Frégeau, I just want to tell you that you have been great. You kept us on track, you always had—

[English]

You made my work so much easier. We really appreciate, Ariane, the work you've done. We wish you all the best with your new family. Thank you.

Voices: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Ariane Gagné-Frégeau): Thank you very much.

It was a privilege to work with you. I learned a lot, both professionally and personally. I will continue to make sure that procedures and regulations are followed, but at home.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Things will be well organized there.

The Chair: Thank you, everyone.

That brings our meeting to a close.

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