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Chair: Mr. Kody Blois



Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

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• (1145)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to the third meeting of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of our witnesses who are here today. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, you can click on the microphone icon to activate your mike. Interpretation is available at the bottom of your screen. You can certainly toggle between French and English as your language of choice. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly for the benefit of our translators. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

If interpretation is lost, please inform me immediately, and we will do our best to address the issue with the clerk and the team here. With regard to a speaking list, for the benefit of the members, the clerk will advise the chair, to the best of her ability, as to whose hands are up first, and we will do our best to maintain a consolidated speaking list and order accordingly.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee earlier this morning, Monday, January 31, 2022, the committee will now proceed with the briefing on the status of the British Columbia flood recovery effort. I would now like to take the opportunity to welcome our witnesses, who are joining us today by video conference.

From the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food, I know we're still waiting on Mr. Del Bianco, director general, business risk management programs directorate, programs branch. We also have Nathalie Gour, director general, regional operations directorate; Scott Pellow, executive director, planning, coordination and disaster assessment division, business risk management programs directorate; and Aaron Fowler, chief agriculture negotiator and director general, trade agreements and negotiations.

From Farm Credit Canada, we have Michael Hoffort, president and chief executive officer, and Don Anderson, senior vice-president, western operations.

Let me just take a moment, Mr. Hoffort, to congratulate you. I know you're retiring in June 2022. Congratulations for all of your service, and thank you for being here with us today.

From Public Safety Canada, which will not be providing any opening remarks but is available to take questions from members,

we have Stéphanie Durand, who is the director general of the emergency management and policy branch.

Welcome to all of you. Thank you for being here for this important conversation today. I'm going to propose that we start with five minutes of opening remarks from Farm Credit Canada, which may allow Mr. Del Bianco to get in. We understand he was having some technical problems.

Mr. Hoffort, if you're okay with that, I would ask that you start with your five minutes, and then we will proceed to the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

[Translation]

Mr. Michael Hoffort (President and Chief Executive Officer, Farm Credit Canada): Good morning.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to address you today.

• (1150)

[English]

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a briefing on the status of B.C.'s flood recovery efforts. I'm joined today by FCC senior vice-president Don Anderson, who is responsible for our customer-facing teams in B.C. and Alberta.

FCC is a self-sustaining federal Crown corporation that provides financing, software and advisory services designed for the Canadian agriculture and food industry. We are Canada's leading agriculture and food lender, with a loan portfolio of more than \$44 billion. FCC serves all agriculture and food-processing sectors, and we have more than 2,100 employees working out of our 101 offices across the country.

In B.C., FCC has \$2.9 billion in loans outstanding to primary producers, and another \$876 million to agribusiness and agri-food operators. Prior to the flooding in question, our teams located in Abbotsford, Surrey, Kelowna and Duncan were actively reaching out to our customers, as many producers in B.C. were impacted by extreme heat and drought conditions during the 2021 growing season.

In the days and weeks following the devastating November flooding and erosion in parts of the B.C. interior, the Lower Mainland and on Vancouver Island, FCC has worked with customers facing significant losses and financial hardship. Examples of losses include buildings, equipment, livestock, feed and productive land for crops. The personal and business property damage has been extensive. For some, the cleanup and recovery may have impacted their operations for days or weeks. For others, the production disruption may be felt for months to come. And for others yet, such as those in blueberry operations, the impact could last for years. It is safe to say that the circumstances will vary significantly and will not be fully understood for several months.

The public infrastructure damage and the impacts to highways and rail transportation have been extensive as well. For local producers, this has curtailed their ability to obtain supplies, like feed, to sustain their operations, materials to rebuild and access to area processors. For food processors and logistics companies that move perishable food products to grocery stores across Canada, the supply chain disruption contributed to an already challenging situation.

Upon hearing of the magnitude of the flooding in B.C., FCC sought immediate approval from our board of directors to launch a customer support program that mirrored FCC's response to industry disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. More specifically, we offered loan payment deferrals that could include both principal and interest for up to six months, or interest-only for a full year. To date, 28 customers on 53 loans representing \$34.2 million have taken advantage of this offer. The volumes are concentrated in greenhouse, hay farming and blueberry operations. Livestock loan deferrals to poultry operations are \$3.8 million. For dairy farms, loan deferrals total \$2 million. Emergency credit lines of up to \$500,000 are also available, and there has been some limited uptake so far on that offer.

Recognizing that the needs would stretch well beyond what FCC could do with financing, we also provided a \$100,000 donation to the BC Agriculture Council, or BCAC, to help relief efforts for the industry. BCAC is a non-profit council of agriculture industry associations that advocates for the interests of the province's agriculture and food producers.

All FCC customers in affected areas have been contacted and invited to reach out to us to discuss their individual situations and options. Although the early uptake on customer support may be limited to date, we will continue to work with our customers as they develop a better understanding of their financial impacts.

To assist in the continued recovery effort, there are areas that we continue to monitor. We are keeping a close eye on the following: impacts to the livestock sector, including recovering feedstock and longer-term facility repair and rebuilds; impacts to the crop sector, where we're paying specific attention to blueberry and crop land productivity and possible soil contamination as a result of the flooding; impacts to the agribusiness and agri-food processors to monitor lingering supply chain disruptions; and the overall mental health of area producers and our FCC teams to understand the effects of the very stressful events of the past year.

The early days of this disaster were marked by images of the community pulling together to protect livestock and take care of

their neighbours. Now, as the infrastructure heavy lifting begins, we continue to monitor the situation and look forward to more progress in the months ahead.

In closing, FCC remains committed to supporting our customers and the broader B.C. agriculture value chain through these challenging times.

● (1155)

[Translation]

Once again, thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today.

[English]

The Chair: Well done, Mr. Hoffort. Only a few seconds... I gave you some extra time, but thank you for being within the five minutes.

I understand that Mr. Del Bianco is now on the line, so we'll head over to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

Mr. Francesco Del Bianco (Director General, Business Risk Management Directorate, Programs Branch, Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the committee for holding this special meeting on the impacts of the extreme weather event in British Columbia. As you know, the floods were significant, and dairy, poultry, swine, beef, horticulture and fruit and vegetable growers all incurred significant losses. Over 1,000 farms, 15,000 hectares and 2.5 million livestock were impacted by the floods.

I want to note that producers do have access to a suite of business risk management programs that will help them manage the significant risks that threaten the viability of their operations. These programs include, obviously, the AgriRecovery initiatives and AgriStability, AgriInsurance and AgriInvest. These programs are cost-shared 60:40 between the federal government and the provinces.

Last month, Minister Bibeau and Minister Popham visited with some of the farmers and ranchers in the region to see the full extent of the damage to the lands and livestock. They essentially struck a federal-provincial task team, which was quickly established, to understand the full impacts of the event and how AgriRecovery could respond to help producers with disaster recovery costs.

I should note that AAFC has experience in working with the provinces on AgriRecovery initiatives, most recently having rapidly deployed programs totalling \$825 million in response to drought conditions across western Canada and northwestern Ontario.

Today, as we consider the impacts of the significant floods, we know that the agriculture sector will face a number of challenges related to productive assets, soil health, feed shortages, plant health, disease and contamination, and the impact of livestock losses.

I am joined by Scott Pellow, the executive director who leads AAFC's AgriRecovery team. By way of example, I thought I could share some of the extraordinary expenses that could be supported under the program. These include the cleanup, repair and restoration of land, barns and animal shelter, water and waste systems; work to return flood-impacted land and buildings to a safe environment for agricultural production; repair of on-farm structures such as livestock containment fences and drainage ditches; and measures related to animal welfare, such as the replacement of feed, livestock transportation, veterinary care and, unfortunately, mortality disposal.

In addition, federal and provincial officials are working with Public Safety Canada to better understand how AgriRecovery initiatives could best complement the support that will be provided through the disaster financial assistance arrangements, known as DFAA. I want to note that I'm also joined by my colleague Stéphanie Durand, who is the director general for the emergency management and policy branch of Public Safety Canada and who can also respond to some of your questions.

As noted earlier, producers also have access to other business risk management programs. We've encouraged producers to sign up for AgriStability, which can help farmers cover severe drops in their income. Initial payments, through interim payments, can be made available in a matter of weeks. We've also put in place what we refer to as "bilateral late participation", which allows producers who aren't currently enrolled to enrol in the program. Insured producers can also make claims under AgriInsurance, which insures crops against losses due to weather.

As you have heard from the president and chief executive officer of Farm Credit Canada, FCC has reached out to affected clients to offer flexible financing terms to help ease the pressures on cash flows.

In closing, I should mention that during her visit to British Columbia in December 2021, Deputy Prime Minister Freeland said that agriculture would be eligible for a share of the \$5 billion in disaster recovery support outlined in the economic and fiscal update.

In December, the Committee of British Columbia and Federal Ministers on Disaster Response and Climate Resilience held its first meeting. They're working together with first nations to ensure an

effective response and recovery, while also enhancing climate adaptation and response measures.

Mr. Chair, AAFC officials and our federal-provincial colleagues will continue to support B.C. producers during this incredibly difficult time.

Thank you again, Mr. Chair. We're now available to respond to your questions.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Del Bianco.

Of note for the committee, some may be wondering about officials from the Government of British Columbia. An invitation was sent. There were challenges in being able to coordinate the interpretation and audio test. Unfortunately, they were not able to make the meeting today. I know that Mr. MacGregor particularly had signalled this, along with others.

We'll turn now to our questions and begin with six-minute rounds. We have a few folks joining us on this committee: Mr. Albas, Mr. Fast and Mr. Vis. Welcome. It's great to have you here.

I'll turn the floor over to Mr. Vis for six minutes.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm one of the MPs who represent some of the hardest-hit areas. My questions today will largely focus on a meeting I had with blueberry producers in the region last week.

I read the DFAA website from the federal government, and it says that the program aims to bring back people's personal property to "pre-disaster condition". Right now, my constituents, when they read that statement, look at it in the context of the agreement with the provincial government in British Columbia, which, unfortunately, to my knowledge.... The program will provide an 80% compensation on eligible expenses exceeding \$1,000 up to a maximum of \$300,000.

In our region right now, we have some berry producers especially who didn't participate in the AgriStability or AgriInsurance programs and who have incurred significant losses. What should I be telling these constituents about what programs to access? You did note that there is a late entry for AgriStability—that's helpful information—but what steps should they be taking to receive adequate compensation for the losses they've incurred?

That's for Mr. Del Bianco or the representative from Public Safety Canada. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Del Bianco, it's over to you.

Mr. Francesco Del Bianco: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll defer to my colleague with regard to the disaster financial assistance arrangements and the emergency management in B.C. program.

With regard to the programs available jointly through the federal and provincial governments related to business risk management, there is AgriStability. For those who hadn't enrolled, we've introduced the provision for late participation. AgriStability, in the case of British Columbia, is administered by the province. They informed me this morning that approximately 122 producers have made use of that and have requested to be enrolled in the program. They can also make requests for interim payments. Traditionally, producers could receive up to 50% of the anticipated payment under the program. We've increased that to 75%, so producers who are in immediate need of support can make requests for interim payments under AgriStability. In addition, producers do have access to AgriInvest. On average, producers have about \$20,000, so it does provide some support in the immediate.

With regard to the longer term, in the case of blueberry producers, there is insurance coverage in place for the loss of blueberry plants due to excess moisture. Again, B.C. administers the AgriInsurance program. The role of the federal government is to ensure that they're actuarially sound. Hopefully, a large number of those producers had agriculture insurance that would cover the productive asset—

• (1205)

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you, Mr. Del Bianco.

Many farmers do not have insurance. That is a reality. What type of support could they receive through the AgriRecovery program when they're not eligible for some of those additional programs that you just referenced? How much funding is available through AgriRecovery for the loss of income, the soil damage, and the loss of agricultural infrastructure?

Mr. Francesco Del Bianco: AgriRecovery is a framework. It's not an actual program. We do an assessment with the provinces to determine what the extraordinary costs are. Then we put in place a program and seek the authorities and the source of funds in order to put the program in place.

In the case of AgriRecovery, it doesn't offset income losses—that would be covered through AgriStability—but AgriRecovery can cover the extraordinary costs producers need to incur to resume their operations.

Mr. Brad Vis: Where are the Government of Canada and the Government of British Columbia at in discussions related to the AgriRecovery framework and future agreement through the joint committee?

Mr. Francesco Del Bianco: As I mentioned in my remarks, we have a task team. We're working very closely with our provincial counterparts to identify all of the extraordinary costs that the producers have incurred, both in the immediate this year and what we anticipate to be the longer-term costs into 2022. I think there's a commitment to move very quickly and to respond in short order.

Mr. Brad Vis: Has the provincial government come forward with any initial requests or assessment of the damage in British Columbia to date?

Mr. Francesco Del Bianco: Yes, it's a joint task force, so we've essentially done it together, but given that they are physically located there, the province has been able to provide us with an incredible amount of information to help us assess both the gravity of the situation and the type of support that should be provided.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you, sir. I really appreciate your appearance today. I will be going back to farmers in my community, and I hope they can still enter the AgriStability program if they were not previously a part of it.

Just one final—

The Chair: Mr. Vis, I apologize. You will have another opportunity.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you, sir.

The Chair: Thank you for the questions. I know this is important to your region and to your constituents.

Mr. Turnbull, go ahead for six minutes, please.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all the panellists for being here today. I appreciate your expertise and all the hard work you're putting in. Obviously, we have heavy hearts for all the people of British Columbia. The natural disasters they experienced last year alone are unprecedented, I think.

I wonder if Mr. Del Bianco could give us a sense of the scale of the impact on the food system and the agri-food supply chain in B.C. and across Canada. I wonder just how big the impact of this natural disaster is in comparison to other ones. Is it unprecedented? Is it larger in size and scale, or are there others that are on a similar scale?

Mr. Francesco Del Bianco: Part of an AgriRecovery assessment is to see whether this is a recurring event. There was an event in 2011 called the Canada-British Columbia excess moisture initiative, but the scope and magnitude of this is far beyond that. We would categorize this as a one-in-a-hundred-years event.

In terms of the specific details, I will turn to my colleague Scott Pellow to give you an impression of the magnitude and the impact it's having on producers.

Mr. Scott Pellow (Executive Director, Planning, Coordination and Disaster Assessment Division, Business Risk Management Programs Directorate, Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the question.

As Francesco articulated, it has been categorized as a one-in-a-hundred-years event impacting southwestern British Columbia with regard to flooding and landslides. It has been described as the worst financial agricultural disaster in B.C.'s history.

In terms of the regions that are impacted—the Sumas Prairie region, Abbotsford, Merritt and Princeton—we know that these are the major agricultural production areas in B.C. With regard to the dairy industry, it has been estimated that it represents approximately 80% of the milk production in the province. With regard to poultry, it represents around 56% of the province's production. With regard to eggs, it's around 77%. Again, it is a very large area with regard to the cropland that's been impacted, particularly for the horticulture, fruit and vegetable sector.

This is a major agricultural disaster event that we've seen in British Columbia.

● (1210)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you for that detailed answer. It highlights the importance of addressing climate change, for sure, but also understanding the full impact. It must be quite the challenge.

In response to Mr. Vis's question, Mr. Del Bianco pointed to the AgriRecovery framework and trying to estimate those extraordinary costs.

Mr. Del Bianco, could you or any member of your team help us understand the process of actually estimating those extraordinary costs, obviously working with the B.C. government?

Mr. Francesco Del Bianco: Yes. There's a formal process when we launch an AgriRecovery initiative. First, we need to determine if it is a recurring event or an abnormal event, and if there are extraordinary costs. This event has clearly met those requirements. Next, we look at whether it is a collective experience. Are there significant negative impacts? Are these extraordinary costs significant, and do the producers have a capacity to manage them?

We're in the process of finalizing that assessment and identifying all of the costs related to livestock, perennial crops, farmlands and environmental concerns, and developing a response in partnership with our colleagues in British Columbia, who will administer the program on our behalf. We will cost-share the response sixty-forty.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Are there any gaps in that process in getting a full understanding of the costs? It sounds pretty thorough to me.

Mr. Francesco Del Bianco: We try to get it right. With the B.C. wildfires and drought, whether it is the drought in the western provinces.... To date, we've been able to respond to producers' needs in a timely manner, and we aim to achieve the same with this initiative.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: In terms of the federal/provincial joint supply chain recovery working group, which is a very long title for a working group, what measures has that group either taken or recommended?

Mr. Del Bianco, I'll ask you, but you can pass that off to another member of your team, if you want.

Mr. Francesco Del Bianco: I think my colleague Stéphanie Durand may be in a better position to respond to that.

Stéphanie, would you be able to respond?

Mrs. Stéphanie Durand (Director General, Emergency Management and Programs Branch, Public Safety Canada): Thank you.

That particular committee is being led out of Transport Canada. We'd be happy to reach out to other colleagues and follow up with additional information if the member wants us to. The work is at the early stages, but I would suggest that we could follow up after the meeting.

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

The Chair: You have 25 seconds.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: This is a quick question.

Of the number of producers or agri-food businesses that have been impacted by this natural disaster, what percentage would you estimate have applied for the different types of support that they need? Is there any estimate of that?

The Chair: You have 10 seconds, Mr. Del Bianco.

Mr. Francesco Del Bianco: It's difficult, because... Most producers, with the exception of those who are supply-managed, have access to their AgriInvest accounts, so we can see the withdrawal rates. With AgriStability, if they're already enrolled, they'll file their request after they file their taxes. We're also encouraging producers who haven't already enrolled to enrol in AgriStability through late participation—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Del Bianco. I apologize. Perhaps it's something you can table to Mr. Turnbull.

I'd like to turn it over to Mr. Perron.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I also thank the witnesses for being with us today for this important meeting.

Before I begin, I would like to express my solidarity with the producers in British Columbia who have been severely affected by these natural disasters.

I would now like to address Mr. Del Bianco.

Mr. Del Bianco, in your opening remarks, you said that farmers could access some money in a matter of weeks through the AgriStability program. Because of the cumbersome administration of support programs—and I don't mean to be critical in saying that—producers often tell us that it takes a long time for the money to flow.

Given the extreme emergency that British Columbia is currently experiencing, can you tell us what money farmers have already accessed? What is the timeline on the assistance they need to complete the restructuring, recover from the tragedy and return to normal production activities?

• (1215)

Mr. Francesco Del Bianco: As I mentioned earlier about the AgriStability program, along with the provinces, we have put in place measures so that agricultural producers can apply for interim payments. Normally they can receive 50% of these payments, but we have increased the threshold to 75%. To date, 122 producers have applied for interim payments.

Normally, the AgriStability program applies several months after the event, mainly because producers must file a tax return first.

Thereafter, they have up to six months to provide additional information. With this measure we have put in place, producers can receive money within a few weeks. We've talked to our colleagues in British Columbia, who have responded extremely quickly to the situation.

And then there are the AgriInvest accounts. B.C. producers have access to almost \$61 million through these accounts. On average, that's about \$20,000 per producer. Producers can apply for this money at any time.

Mr. Yves Perron: I am particularly interested in the first part of your response. I am pleased to hear that you have raised the threshold for interim payments to 75%.

To what extent are producers taking advantage of this? Do you have any data on that?

What is the number of producers who have received money so far?

Mr. Francesco Del Bianco: In British Columbia, the program is administered by the province. This morning, I was given the confirmation that 46 producers have applied for enrolment, and 43 have applied for interim payments. In addition, 122 producers have applied for late entry into the program.

Mr. Yves Perron: Do we know if there are people who need money but don't qualify for these programs?

At the end of his remarks, Mr. Vis wanted to make sure that producers who were not previously enrolled in AgriStability, and therefore could not access it, had the opportunity to enrol anyway. I think you mentioned that in your opening remarks.

Mr. Francesco Del Bianco: Yes.

As part of the recent agreements with the provinces, we have put in place a measure called late participation. Under this measure, if the Government of Canada and the provincial government decide to remove the requirement of previous enrolment in the program, producers who were not enrolled can enrol after the deadline. That's what we did. So producers can enrol in AgriStability for 2021, even if they were not previously enrolled.

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you. That is reassuring news.

You mentioned the AgriInvest program. During the COVID-19-related crisis, we talked about it often with Minister Bibeau and other stakeholders. We were told that there was a certain amount of money per farm in this program.

I don't mean this unkindly, but everyone knows that not all farms receive money. Setting an average per producer seems like a some-

what simplistic calculation for those producers who are struggling at the moment and don't have access to these funds.

AgriInvest can also be used for longer-term programs to adjust for what is considered a minor income change. Here we are talking about something major. I'm not going to tell you what you should do, but I would suggest that you not use this simplistic calculation for AgriInvest.

That said, Mr. Del Bianco, I see your dedication to producers, and we are all very grateful for that. I also thank you for your testimony.

I wanted to make that comment, because I think it is important.

• (1220)

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Perron, but I have to interrupt you. Your speaking time is up.

Mr. Yves Perron: All right.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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

[*English*]

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

As a resident of British Columbia, I want to thank all of our witnesses for coming before our committee today and providing an overview of how things have gone.

I'll start with Mr. Hoffort from Farm Credit Canada. First of all, I appreciate your giving producers some leeway with their financial obligations. It's nice to see the kind of flexibility that you were so quick to put on offer for those who are going through extremely tough times.

Looking at your authorizing federal statute, the Farm Credit Canada Act, and given that we're probably going to see many more instances of climate-related disasters hitting our agricultural sector, do you feel that the current structure of the act gives Farm Credit Canada the appropriate amount of latitude to deal with what will be coming our way in future years?

Mr. Michael Hoffort: In response, I would say that in the current statute we operate within, there are some other responsibilities that can be assigned to Farm Credit Canada through the direction of the minister as well. From a financing perspective, being able to have sustainable financing is something we'll continue to look to build out from an offer perspective. Being able to create a structure of loans that has more flexibility to address some of these types of circumstances that it seems we're going to be faced with—I think that's well within our act. From a knowledge perspective, being able to bring knowledge and advisories is well within our abilities. We have some other offers as they relate to a software tool, which I think could be part of some of the tracking and data collection that will be necessary on farms. That's well within our current statute.

I would say that it wouldn't be something that would hold us back from responding appropriately—based on what we know right now, anyway.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I appreciate that answer. Thank you.

To Mr. Del Bianco from AAFC, looking at business risk management programs, and given the fact that we will probably be seeing far more climate-related disasters hitting the agricultural sector, has your department done any kind of forecasting or financial analysis on our liabilities in future years, given our agricultural sector? I mean, just look at what happened in British Columbia last year from wildfires and flooding. Other parts of Canada are going to be at risk as well.

Do you have anything you can provide to the committee about what kind of financial analysis or projection you're doing on what our future liabilities may be that are associated with climate-related disasters? This would be specific to the agriculture sector, please.

Mr. Francesco Del Bianco: Actually, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada is the only department within the core public service that has a team of actuaries. Our chief actuary is a fellow of the Canadian Institute of Actuaries. They are doing some modelling in terms of the potential impacts of climate change. The sense is that the events will be more frequent and the variations will be more extreme.

We don't have any actual translation of how that would play out in terms of increasing the financial impacts at this point in time, but we are looking at, for example, modelling related to AgriInsurance. The federal government's role right now is to ensure that premiums are actuarially sound, so that the premiums we charge producers represent the indemnities paid. The provinces subsidize the premium rate. The premiums are actually based on historical performance, not on a forecast or the future. We're starting to look at whether there is a potentially better way to estimate what the premiums should be, based on climate scenarios versus historical performance.

• (1225)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

Mr. Del Bianco, does your department play any role in working with other federal departments and with provincial governments in conducting an analysis of how our farm infrastructure is currently equipped to deal with climate disasters? Is anyone conducting a wholesale analysis of the state of our infrastructure as it relates to agriculture and its ability to withstand some of these major events?

I mean, we saw what happened with some of our major transportation corridors that a lot of agricultural goods travel on. We saw problems with dikes in the Fraser Valley, etc. Perhaps you could provide some feedback on that, please.

Mr. Francesco Del Bianco: From a business risk management perspective, and in particular an AgriRecovery initiative, right now the federal and provincial governments are focused on the immediate impacts and providing support to producers so that they can resume their operations as quickly as possible. But there is the committee, referenced earlier, between the federal and British Columbia governments working with first nations—

The Chair: Mr. Del Bianco, I apologize. We're at six minutes.

Thank you, Mr. MacGregor, for your questions. I do want to be mindful of our time.

I believe that Mr. Del Bianco may have to leave at 12:30. On behalf of myself and the clerk, I apologize that wasn't articulated, but we do have a great group of folks who can take questions.

Mr. Albas, it's over to you.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, committee members, for having B.C. members here today.

Thank you to the witnesses for the work they do.

I have to say, Mr. Chair, that not having the B.C. government officials here is a big loss for the committee. I also, from the tone of the conversation here today, think that it's sad that we don't actually have producers here to explain the absolute tragedy and heartbreak many have had. I've spoken to some people. During the wildfires, the B.C. Wildfire Service would come in and do what they call "controlled burnings" while people were away from their homes. When they got back, people would ask, "How do we pay for the damages that have been done to our farms?" and they got nowhere, Mr. Chair.

I was really hoping to have those officials here. Other constituents who have been on the record publicly, such as Rhonda MacDonald and her husband Wayne, said that they have been living in limbo and would need around \$450,000 to repair the ranch fencing and \$300,000 to repair the ranch irrigation system. That's just from the Lytton fire.

Mr. Del Bianco said that this is a rare event, a once-in-a-hundred-years event, the worst in agricultural history in British Columbia.

My question to each person here today is this: Do you feel the current bureaucratic system for supporting the farmers of British Columbia works right now, and will work for these individuals, yes or no?

The Chair: Mr. Del Bianco, I'd just like to intervene. Mr. Albas, I'll stop your clock.

It's a fair question. I want to make sure the record reflects that an invitation was sent to the B.C. government. Unfortunately, that was not able to happen. For the benefit of those who have worked to try to have them here, I want to make sure that's on the record.

I'll turn it over to Mr. Del Bianco.

Mr. Francesco Del Bianco: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I unfortunately do have an appointment that requires me to leave at a quarter to one at the very latest, but I think it's important to take your questions.

With regard to the business risk management programs, we are working very closely with our provincial counterparts to understand all of the extraordinary costs the producers could incur and to launch a program that would meet their requirements in a very timely fashion.

With regard to...we have very clear—

• (1230)

Mr. Dan Albas: I did ask a very clear question.

Mr. Francesco Del Bianco: Maybe I can leave it there and take a supplementary question.

Mr. Dan Albas: Yes. I would like to have all the officials say whether they believe the current system as it stands can deal with the depth of trouble that British Columbia has found itself in—just a simple yes or no.

The Chair: Was that directed to anyone specifically?

Mr. Dan Albas: I want each witness here who is representing a program, whether from a Crown corporation or the government itself, to say, “Yes, our system can handle this event in its current form” or “No, it can't.”

I would just like to hear that from officials.

The Chair: Mr. Del Bianco or anyone may choose to respond. I know we have Mr. Hoffort, as well, from Farm Credit Canada. Chime in if you'd like.

Mrs. Stéphanie Durand: I can perhaps answer very quickly.

I think it's important to recognize how complex disasters are and how recovery requires close collaboration among different levels of government, and different departments and agencies. I think we are also taking an opportunity to learn and to improve how we support disaster recovery.

I'll leave it there. Thanks very much.

Mr. Dan Albas: Okay, well—

Mr. Michael Hoffort: Mr. Chair, from Farm Credit Canada's perspective, I could weigh in on the question.

I really don't have an answer as it relates to the variety of programming from a disaster recovery perspective. I can confirm that our organization serves only one sector, the Canadian agriculture and food industry. No matter what the status of that sector—whether it's through those good times that the industry does enjoy often or challenging times, which is clearly the case for British Columbia—we're not going anywhere.

As long as—

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you. I did ask for a yes-or-no answer.

Unfortunately.... I will tell you the reality for the people back home. Someone described the Similkameen Valley as “the forgotten valley”. Both the Nicola Valley and the Similkameen Valley have been left out.

There are major losses here—

The Chair: Mr. Albas—

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Chair, I'm going to ask for 10 seconds.

There are major losses here, and they don't feel the system is working. In fact, Rhonda MacDonald—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: —hasn't heard anything from the B.C. government—

The Chair: Mr. Albas—

Mr. Dan Albas: —since she applied in August. I just—

The Chair: Mr. Albas, I would ask that you let me handle this meeting. I know this is a passionate issue. As Mr. Vis has also indicated, it matters, but we do want to be mindful of members' time.

I would like to turn it over to Ms. Taylor Roy for five minutes.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Very briefly, will Mr. Pellow be staying to answer questions?

The Chair: Yes, that's correct. Mr. Del Bianco has a personal appointment. There will still be members of the team to answer questions.

Hon. Ed Fast: That's great. Thank you.

The Chair: We're going to Ms. Taylor Roy for five minutes.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to everyone for being here today and to the witnesses who have come to answer our questions.

Like other members.... I'm not from British Columbia. I'm from Ontario, but, like all Canadians, we have very much felt the pain and suffering of the farmers and residents in the areas that have been so affected by these extreme climate events. It's not just the flooding, but also the fires and the drought throughout western Canada. Thank you for all that you are doing to help.

My questions follow up on some of the questions that Mr. MacGregor began.

To Mr. Hoffort from the FCC, I'm interested to know how many loans are being taken out. What percentage are being taken out for climate adaptation and mitigation projects, as opposed to other kinds of projects? You mentioned earlier that you felt you had authorization under the current statutes to engage in this kind of lending. Are farmers availing themselves of this? Are there any special programs to help farmers improve their infrastructure and get ready for these kinds of extreme climate events?

Mr. Michael Hoffort: I will probably have my colleague Don Anderson join me in the response.

At this stage, I would say a lot of the investment goes into more typical land buildings, technology and investment in the operation. Some of that technology can definitely...precision agriculture or areas that will be very applicable to adjusting practices to meet expectations for the future climate. We have a loan program for energy and for environmental purposes and stuff. Our uptake has not been as much as I would expect it will be in the future, and we will be doing some tuning on those programs to improve their applicability.

Don, maybe you can answer from your perspective, more boots-on-the-ground, about what you're seeing in British Columbia and Alberta in particular.

• (1235)

Mr. Don Anderson (Senior Vice-President, Western Operations, Farm Credit Canada): The focus of producers there is anything they can do to manage risk in their operations and maximize returns for their business. It's utilizing things around energy and lessening demands on energy.

We're seeing growth in areas where irrigation is now available and more in play. It's more so on the Alberta side, with the expansion of the irrigation districts there, but if we're looking over into B.C., the water licences that are in place are utilizing irrigation in that aspect.

Specifically going in as far as focused efforts on managing impacts of climate change are concerned, it really is part of the overall risk management strategy that producers are incorporating overall.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: To follow up on that, when you're looking at the loan applications, are you doing any specific kind of risk assessment regarding environmental disasters or the potential for them? Are you looking at the effect they have on the farms, so that the producers and the farmers are considering the long-term costs of some of these extreme climate events? Are you looking at those when you're approving loans or making suggestions about what those loans are being used for?

Mr. Michael Hoffort: For our risk assessment on any loans, it would be nearer-term and not so much on the tail event side of things. If you think about interest rate risk and some of the production risks, are there programs being utilized that have been discussed by the province and the federal government on the business risk management side of things?

Increasingly, in the future, as we get more information on what different scenarios there could be, that could be much more a part of our risk assessment. However, at this stage, it would be more in line with what you would expect in terms of price, production. Some of those things from an interest rate perspective, market risks and that sort of thing would be the primary focus of the assessments at this stage.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Thank you. You mentioned that maybe in the future.... Are there any specific plans?

I was just talking to the Intact Centre at the University of Waterloo, where they're doing a lot of assessment on the impact these different extreme climate events will have on many insurance risks and also, obviously, on loan risks. These climate events are here now. This may be called a one-in-a-hundred-years event, but it seems as though a lot of one-in-a-hundred-years events are happening—

The Chair: Ms. Taylor Roy, I apologize. We're at our five minutes, and I want to be respectful of time.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you for those questions.

[Translation]

Mr. Perron, you now have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I don't know if Mr. Del Bianco has left the meeting, but I would like to address, again, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada officials about the ongoing discussions with British Columbia regarding the development of AgriRecovery, as well as the timelines.

Mr. Albas made a good point earlier that these producers need money now, need support quickly. Now, my concern is that these discussions can go on for a long time.

Is there a timeline in relation to this issue?

In the meantime, beyond the interim payments, which come under the AgriStability program, do you plan to lend these producers some money, interest free, much like what was done for the citizens that Mr. Albas was referring to earlier?

I don't know who can answer my question.

• (1240)

Mr. Francesco Del Bianco: Mr. Chair, I am still here, but unfortunately I will have to leave the meeting after giving my answer.

With respect to AgriRecovery, we are working closely with our colleagues in British Columbia. Obviously, the Minister will be the one to announce the decision, but we understand the urgency of the situation and are working to get a program in place without delay.

On the subject of immediate access to certain monies, I can say that under the AgriStability program we have put in place measures to allow producers to apply for interim payments. Our colleagues in British Columbia are ready to receive those applications and respond as quickly as possible. Producers also have access to an AgriInvest account.

According to risk management programs, these are the measures that are available immediately to support producers.

Mr. Yves Perron: All right.

Thank you for your reply.

Are you also planning measures for a future crisis? As we know, another crisis may occur again within the next hundred years. I am thinking in particular of problems related to global warming.

The Chair: Mr. Perron, your time is up.

Mr. Del Bianco, I would ask you to answer the question quickly. You have the floor for about 15 seconds.

Mr. Francesco Del Bianco: The aim of AgriRecovery is to help producers get back to business as soon as possible. In addition, a committee will look at longer-term measures.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Perron.

Mr. MacGregor, go ahead for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

This question is for Mr. Pellow from AAFC, and maybe Mrs. Durand could chime in as well.

Whenever we're confronted with these types of disasters and we look at the way the federal government enacts its procedures and works with its provincial counterparts, there are always learning opportunities. If we were to have another extreme flooding event this year in some other region of Canada, what lessons could we apply from how we reacted to the one in November in British Columbia? Is there anything you would do differently? Is there room for improvement? Is there something that we as policy-makers need to look at, to make sure that we are being there, to the best of our abilities, for our hard-working Canadian farmers? Thank you.

Mr. Scott Pellow: With regard to the AgriRecovery process, whenever we complete an initiative with the province, we do take the time to conduct a "lessons learned" to see what worked well and what didn't work well with that initiative, with the idea of looking forward to how we could better respond to those disaster events and to how we implement programming. It's a very key thing we do when we finish these initiatives.

We work with the province to identify whether or not there are any gaps within the current core BRM programs. Particularly with AgriInsurance, are there ways in which we can improve the insurance coverage to deal with some of these risks going forward? When we do that, again, we're looking to make sure that the producers have the BRM tools they need in order to manage the significant risks that are threatening the viability of their farms. Of course, if there was another flooding event like this, we would try to take those lessons learned as much as possible to be able to react more quickly.

That being said, as you guys are aware, each disaster can have its own unique disaster costs with respect to the different regions of Canada and the different types of production that are occurring in sometimes localized areas. We do have to take the time to do the proper assessment with our provincial colleagues and make sure that we have the most complete information when looking at what disaster recovery costs are there. Then, what is the appropriate program response to help producers be able to take those recovery actions and get back into business as quickly as possible?

Again, we try—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Pellow.

Mr. Scott Pellow: —to learn from our experiences and apply them going forward.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. Fast, it's over to you for five minutes.

Hon. Ed Fast: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As the member of Parliament at the very epicentre of this flood event, I know well how devastating this event has been for our farmers. I mean, you can talk about the dairy farmers. You can talk about the poultry folks, about the chickens and the eggs. We have the greenhouses. We have the nurseries and the flower growers.

Then we have the blueberry growers and the raspberry growers. Some of these industries will recover relatively quickly. Others will not. The blueberry growers will not.

Mr. Pellow, Mr. Del Bianco suggested that the AgriRecovery program isn't actually a program but a framework that gets triggered for extraordinary events. Is that correct?

• (1245)

Mr. Scott Pellow: Yes, that is correct. It is a framework that's part of the Canadian agricultural partnership and that allows us to work together with provinces to put in place the AgriRecovery initiatives to respond to disaster events.

Hon. Ed Fast: Would this be an extraordinary event?

Mr. Scott Pellow: Yes. This would be characterized as an extraordinary event.

Hon. Ed Fast: Mr. Del Bianco also said that it would have to be a collective experience. I assume this would be a collective experience.

Mr. Scott Pellow: Yes. It is impacting many farmers and many sectors, so in terms of the collective experience, it could be characterized as being a collective experience.

Hon. Ed Fast: Okay.

With the unprecedented heat dome event and the subsequent drought—again, it was the highest temperature in Abbotsford in our recorded history—would that qualify as an extraordinary event and trigger this program?

Mr. Scott Pellow: In regard to the summer events that led to drought and obviously wildfires within British Columbia, there was an assessment done in regard to those disaster events in each province. Again, there is a current active program initiative that's taking place in British Columbia to deal with both the drought and the wildfire impacts that have happened.

Hon. Ed Fast: So this unprecedented series of events that would trigger the framework would trigger, I assume, a funding request to government. Is that correct? Help me on the process.

Mr. Scott Pellow: The AgriRecovery process starts when a province makes a formal request to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to start an assessment. Once the province has done that, that really initiates the process to create a task team to study the disaster event and look at the criteria that are part of the AgriRecovery framework to see how that disaster event meets those criteria.

As we complete that assessment, we're exploring the level of the significant impact and the significant costs that are there. We're exploring what current programs can respond—

Hon. Ed Fast: Has—

Mr. Scott Pellow: —and then targeting a response—

Hon. Ed Fast: I'm sorry. My time is short.

Has British Columbia triggered or requested that funding be given?

Mr. Scott Pellow: It was on November 19 that B.C. formally put in a request to have an AgriRecovery assessment, so that is what started the process. We've been working very closely with British Columbia, as well as with some of our other federal colleagues and Public Safety, to do the proper assessment regarding those disaster recovery costs.

Hon. Ed Fast: What kinds of losses and what portion of losses would be covered?

Mr. Scott Pellow: In regard to the types of extraordinary expenses or costs, Francesco provided some of those. To be more specific, we're looking at the lost feed and the feed that producers may have to purchase in order to feed their animals. We're looking at the transportation of those animals and whether they need to be taken away from those flood zones and moved to a safer location. It could be the rental of certain facilities to house those animals. There's livestock safety and health, veterinary costs that producers have to incur to make sure their animals are safe and healthy. There are mortality costs. We know that producers are going to have to replace some of their breeding stock.

When we look at the scale of flooding and the amount of damage that's been done to the land and soil, there are a lot of land remediation costs that must be undertaken to—

Hon. Ed Fast: Again, my time is short. I have maybe 15 seconds.

If a farmer is not insured under the AgriRisk program—failed to get insured or refused to be insured—do these AgriRecovery funding programs supersede the AgriInsurance program?

• (1250)

The Chair: Answer very quickly, Mr. Pellow. I want to be mindful of the time.

Hon. Ed Fast: Answer yes or no, please.

Mr. Scott Pellow: AgriRecovery explores all of the support available through the BRM programs currently and then looks to target the costs that the producer cannot manage. It looks to fill that remaining gap.

The Chair: Mr. Louis, you have five minutes—

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Epp.

Mr. Dave Epp: As a regular member of this committee, could I ask that these officials bring back to this committee the questions that were asked earlier about the AgriRecovery funding, as well as the accounts with AgriInvest?

Second, given that our Thursday seems to have opened up, would it not be prudent to extend the invitation to the B.C. agri-food officials? Our colleagues could return to ask them their specific questions.

The Chair: As it relates to the question of the witnesses providing further information, that is fair game.

If you're proposing a motion right now on the floor to do a Thursday study, that's something that, ultimately, would have to be hashed out in the short time that we have remaining on the floor. It was agreed upon in camera as we.... We laid out in the subcommit-

tee report the elements of where we want to go. If you believe that we need to go in a different direction, that's a conversation we can have.

I see Mr. Drouin's hand, so I'd like to recognize him, and perhaps we can continue.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Chair, what I suggest to Mr. Epp is that, given the fact that we may have time on Monday.... To give enough time for witnesses, I would suggest that Mr. Epp bring his point to the Monday meeting. Perhaps that would give enough time for the witnesses to appear.

As you have noted, the invitation was extended to the B.C. government. I don't want for us to seek out another invitation and then find that, because of the short notice, they can't make it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Epp, please be quick.

Mr. Dave Epp: If I could clarify, the information I was looking for specific to AgriInvest was B.C. information.

If I could ask for the unanimous consent of the room, would we all be in agreement to invite those B.C. officials back?

The Chair: Just so I'm clear, Mr. Epp, and I will consult with the clerk, what you're asking for is additional information that would be privy to the British Columbia department of agriculture and the officials with the B.C. government, not information that you're seeking from the witnesses who are before us today.

Mr. Dave Epp: It's two things. It's that specific information for B.C. accounts, as well as for the officials to come back and testify.

The Chair: I see some hands. I will consult with the clerk, but I see Mr. Perron.

It's over to you, Mr. Perron, and then Mr. Drouin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

What concerns me is that this is being put off continually and we are delaying the other work of the committee.

In my view, the proposal to invite representatives from British Columbia again is appropriate. What I am suggesting is that we try to do it on Thursday. We could set aside an hour to hear from the British Columbia representatives. Is that a compromise my Conservative colleague can accept?

If that doesn't work, we'll be able to discuss it the following Monday. This is an emergency situation. We need to have answers to our questions, and there should be a consensus on this.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Perron has suggested that we take an hour on Thursday. That's not unanimous at this point, but it's certainly a pathway.

Mr. Drouin, it's over to you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Drouin: I hope this is not the way we will proceed in the future. We have just had a meeting to organize our work, and already proposals are being made that were not discussed.

If committee members wish to have a meeting by Thursday, we have to take into account that the British Columbia government representatives will not be able to be there. We will not be able to give them sufficient notice. If we want them here, let's at least give them some time to respond to our invitation. Again, this is too last-minute to invite them. That is what I wanted to make clear to the members of the committee.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

It's a short time frame, but I do think it is reasonable.

I'll go to Mr. Vis for his remarks.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to thank all members of the agriculture committee for hosting three B.C. MPs who have gone through the worst disasters we've ever seen in our province.

Committees serve a purpose in terms of raising important issues, and we heard from witnesses today that it is "once in a hundred years". All of us have constituents who have lost everything, and if this committee can just show some compassion and work with us to get the answers we're seeking, that's all we're looking for today.

This has been a great meeting and I've appreciated all questions from all parties. I'm just asking that Parliament use its authority and power to make sure that farmers and producers, who give us the best food we could ever ask for, get the chance to have their voices heard, and that we get a review of the programs that are going to make or break it for them.

• (1255)

The Chair: I've had a conversation with the clerk, and here's how I propose we move, Mr. Epp. I'm trying to take into account Mr. Drouin and everything I've heard here today.

You're seeking information from a witness who was not able to make it despite an invitation that was sent for today. Perhaps we could move forward with a motion to ask for that particular information. If that information does not suffice for the folks on this committee—recognizing that we have laid out our schedule as a committee—we could then, of course, provide more notice to British Columbia officials to come, and schedule the time frame.

It is a challenge to be able to work on that tight time frame for Thursday, but I think the information you're seeking is important. Perhaps that's a way we can proceed.

Mr. Dave Epp: I believe the motion is in order, so I would like to test the room. Obviously, if the B.C. officials can't or don't want to appear on Thursday, that's something the subcommittee can take up on Monday. However, I think it is important, and I would agree with Mr. Perron's comments that it is important enough to our colleagues in B.C. and that time is of the essence.

The Chair: Just so we're clear, can you reiterate what exactly the motion is? Of course, this is on the fly, and there are some members who are at home, appearing virtually. Can you make it very clear what you're moving right now?

Mr. Dave Epp: I'm moving two elements.

I'm requesting the information specific to the B.C. accounts on the AgriInvest program that was asked for in the questioning, as well as the specifics on the AgriRecovery program. That's part A.

For part B, we're asking that the officials from the B.C. agri-food department appear for an hour on Thursday to answer questions from our colleagues from B.C.

The Chair: Colleagues, you've heard Mr. Epp table the motion. Is there any further discussion?

I see Mr. Albas's hand, and I'll wait for anyone virtually if there's any further comment.

Mr. Dan Albas: In most committees, when you have officials and you ask for them to get back to the committee with information, if there's no issue with anyone, we would just accept that.

The real issue is whether or not the committee is going to give its unanimous consent to tasking you as the chair to work with the clerk to bring those witnesses. Quite honestly, we have a big gap in knowledge, and it's not just the numbers that would be brought forward by them but also what is actually happening on the ground.

I would just ask all members to think of that. This is just giving unanimous consent for you to invite them to an open spot on Thursday.

The Chair: Understood.

Mr. Turnbull, I see your hand.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I just wanted to clarify: Is this just for an hour, or is it for the whole meeting? I am certainly supportive of this, even though I agree with my colleague Mr. Drouin's comments about how we have just agreed not to have a meeting on Thursday. That's fine. Given how this conversation has gone and given the desire to have additional input from the B.C. officials, that's fine.

Is it for an hour, or is it for the whole meeting?

The Chair: I can let Mr. Epp speak to it, but my understanding is that it is for an hour. I will remind members.... We can work with the clerk to send the invitation. The officials from the British Columbia government are not beholden to our timeline, but we can at least extend the invitation and see.

I see Ms. Taylor Roy.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The officials from the B.C. government were invited to this meeting and were not able to make it. What is it, specifically, that we're looking for from them, if we are going to reinvite them with short notice for another meeting?

As we all know, their priority is working in British Columbia to address the very real and continuing issues that are facing the farmers and the producers there. I want to be sure that if we reinvite them and ask them to come on short notice, we are asking them some very specific things that could not be answered today.

• (1300)

The Chair: Mr. Fast, I see your hand.

I want to be mindful of our time. This is an important conversation. We have some ability to extend, but I don't want to abuse that privilege.

It's over to you, Mr. Fast.

Hon. Ed Fast: I'll be brief, Chair.

The questions we're looking at include things like whether the request has been made to the federal government for extraordinary funding under our AgriRecovery framework. Has that request been made? Has an amount been attached to that? Is it an amount that is

yet to be determined? Will it be sufficient to address the needs of groups like our blueberry farmers, who are desperate to survive right now?

Those are the kinds of questions that need to be directed to our provincial officials. I sense that there is a consensus around the room to allow us to do that.

The Chair: That certainly gives some parameters. At the end of the day, if there is unanimous consent, we can move forward. There is no guarantee, but we can work in short order to see if it is possible for Thursday. If not, to Mr. Albas's point, the committee is well within its right to ask for the information, even if we can't line up a meeting.

We can move forward, assuming that is the will of the committee. Seeing no issues, that is passed.

Can I get a motion to adjourn?

An hon. member: I so move.

The Chair: All are in favour. Thank you.

We will be in touch. Thank you, everyone.

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