



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 037

PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT

Wednesday, November 16, 2022

Chair: Mr. Kody Blois



Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

Wednesday, November 16, 2022

• (1630)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 37 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

As per normal, I'll start with a few reminders. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. The proceedings will show only those who are actually speaking, so if you're not speaking, you won't necessarily be on camera. Of course, screenshots are not permitted.

We have a couple of substitutions. Substituting in for Mr. Drouin, we have Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury.

Mr. El-Khoury, it's great to see you here at the agriculture committee.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): I'm happy to be here with you.

The Chair: It's great to have new members join and be able to be on the best committee on the Hill.

[Translation]

Today, Ms. Andréanne Larouche will be replacing Mr. Yves Peron starting at 6 p.m.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, May 30, 2022, we are continuing our study on global food insecurity.

This is actually the last panel we will have. I certainly appreciate all the witnesses who have appeared and those who are here today.

Appearing today as an individual, we have Dr. Michael Fakhri, special rapporteur on the right to food with the United Nations. He's joining us by video conference. Welcome, Dr. Fakhri.

In the room we have, from the Canadian Canola Growers Association, Dave Carey, who serves as the vice-president of government and industry relations. Mr. Carey, it's great to see you.

From the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association, we have Charles Stevens, who is the chair of the board. Mr. Stevens, welcome to our committee.

From Quorum Corporation, we have Mark Hemmes, who is the president. He is joining us by video conference.

Colleagues, you'll note that we have four witnesses as we try to round out our schedule. We thought it was best to make sure we could exhaust the witness list, which is why we have four on this panel.

I'll get right to it and ask Mr. Fakhri to begin.

It's over to you for five minutes.

Dr. Michael Fakhri (Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, United Nations, As an Individual): Thank you, everybody.

As the UN special rapporteur, I am the eyes, ears and good conscience of the UN system when it comes to the right to food. That means that the UN Human Rights Council has mandated me to regularly report to them and the UN General Assembly on matters regarding hunger, malnutrition and famine from a human rights perspective.

For the last two and a half years, I have had a unique perspective on the food crisis. I have consulted governments and communities from every single region of the world. I have also directly engaged with over a dozen international organizations at the highest levels and at working levels. I bore witness to how women face overwhelming degrees of discrimination and violence, all while having to feed their families and communities.

In 2021, the number of children in child labour globally increased to 160 million. This is the first rise in 20 years, and this is mostly in the agricultural sector. Workers, peasants, pastoralists and fishers are essential to making sure that we all eat, but they've been treated as expendable. Indigenous peoples' homelands are being stolen, occupied and decimated at genocidal rates.

In light of all this, last year the UN General Assembly requested that I report on the food crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. I am happy to share with you today some of my findings. I am speaking as an international expert, but I should add that I practised law in Ontario for several years before taking up this position.

The ultimate takeaway from an international perspective is that there remains no international co-operation and coordination to tackle the food crisis. Without international co-operation and coordination based on the right to food, it will be very difficult to overcome the food crisis.

I suggest that the Committee on World Food Security is the best place to develop an international plan for co-operation and coordination. Something to keep in mind is that this is a long-standing issue. Before the war in Ukraine and before the COVID-19 pandemic, hunger and malnutrition were on the rise. Even if the war in Ukraine and the pandemic ended tomorrow, we would still find ourselves in a global food crisis that would be getting worse.

Let me get to my report. First, I identify structural challenges that make it difficult to tackle the food crisis. The structural challenges are rising debt rates for all countries, an international trade system that doesn't serve people's real needs, and an increasing concentration of corporate power in food systems. Second, I identify what can be done in the immediate term and what steps can be taken now to serve needs in the long term.

As an immediate response, I recommend that governments build on what worked during the pandemic. Many governments are starting to end pandemic relief measures, but these measures provided proof of what is possible to realize the right to food. My suggestion is to make these programs permanent; do not end them.

In the long term, I recommend that all countries transition their food systems through agroecology. Agroecology is a practice based on science, on traditional knowledge and on social justice. It is a practice committed to mimicking ecological processes. It treats the goals of enhancing biodiversity and enhancing justice as one and the same.

I also explain in my report how governments can repurpose existing budgets and use their national food plans to devise a transition to agroecology. This is through three things: one, providing a just transition for workers; two, ensuring strong land rights and genuine agrarian reform; and three, holding corporations accountable.

Finally, I explain why an explicit affirmation of the right to food is important. It is worth remembering that Canada has an international obligation to fulfill the right to food as a party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and as a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In the simplest terms, the right to food means that everyone has the right to access good, healthy food. People can access good food through fair and stable markets or through access to land and natural resources. Importantly, the right to food provides a very specific international framework that enables international co-operation.

I look forward to any questions you may have.

Thank you very much.

• (1635)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fakhri.

We'll now turn to Mr. Carey for up to five minutes.

Mr. Dave Carey (Vice-President, Government and Industry Relations, Canadian Canola Growers Association): Thank you for the invitation to appear.

I'm filling in for our farmer chair, Mike Ammeter, who is down the road presiding over a board meeting as we speak.

Global food insecurity is a complex, multi-faceted issue. It involves geopolitics, socio-economic factors and armed conflict. These are forces outside the purview of a farm group and, to a degree, even outside the control of the Canadian government.

Today, I want to talk to you about what I believe we can do from the Canadian farm group perspective to produce more food, feed and fuel to increase our agricultural exports to a hungry world. We have not realized Canadian agriculture's full potential, and many of the greatest barriers to increased productivity are domestic legislation, regulations and infrastructure, items that are within our control as a nation.

In my brief time, I will cover the top five factors that, if addressed, would mean that Canadian farmers would be well positioned to sustainably intensify their production and ultimately grow more products.

One is transportation. We need to increase transparency and confidence in Canada's railways, invest in adaptive and resilient infrastructure and take immediate steps to implement the recently released supply chain task force report.

The top recommendations that would benefit agriculture would be to expand the current 30-kilometre interswitching; to revise the Canadian Transportation Agency's mandate to provide the independence, authority and funding required to deliver on that mandate; to develop a transportation supply chain labour task force with strong agricultural representation; and to increase and improve the supply chain data—it's all for naught if we can't move our products to market.

The second would be around fertilizer. Next to water, nitrogen-based fertilizer is the second most important input to grow canola.

Any reduction in fertilizer emissions must remain voluntary and must focus on incentivizing farmers to adopt additional best practices to improve their already sustainable and efficient operations. Incentives for farmers must be made through the lens of a return on investment to get the best results. Emission reduction must also be measured on an intensity basis as farmers look to increase their yields using the same amount of land to meet current and future demand. We need to support Canada's innovative and sustainable farmers by focusing on increasing productivity, incentivizing best practices and measuring emissions on an intensity and efficiency basis.

Number three is about crop protection products. Canada has a world-class regulatory system and the products that the pest management regulatory agency, or PMRA, regulates have led to significant environmental and economic advancements on farm. These tools protect farmers' crops against pest pressures and disease and play an important role in canola sustainability. Effective weed control paves the way for conservation tillage, increasing soil health, reducing fuel use, sequestering carbon and eliminating up to 750,000 tonnes of GHG emissions per year.

The PMRA transformation agenda has created uncertainty and it challenges Canada's reputation and commitment to science and risk-based assessments. Assessments need to be done in a timely manner based on the best possible science to encourage investment and adoption of the latest technologies to sustainably grow more canola and keep our farmers competitive on the world stage. We need to champion science-based decision-making, restore confidence in Canada's regulatory system and avoid taking a European Union hazard-style approach.

Number four is around plant-breeding innovation. Plant-breeding innovation will play an important role in farmers' responses to global food security and climate change challenges. Farmers need access to the latest seed varieties developed using the latest technologies, such as gene editing. To benefit from these advancements, we need clear, transparent and predictable guidance documents from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to be released as soon as possible.

Number five is around working capital. Like any family business, farmers want to invest in their operations; however, the capital costs of farming are intensive, with most pieces of major farm equipment costing hundreds of thousands of dollars. The CCGA strongly supports Bill C-234 and commends this committee for its work on moving that through committee stage on Monday. With no viable fuel alternatives and infrastructure in place for farmers to replace natural gas and propane, Bill C-234 provides much-needed economic relief on farm and will ultimately help the environment, the footprint of farmers and their economic viability.

The last piece of legislation we will chat about is Bill C-244, or the right to repair, currently in its second reading. Farmers also need their equipment to work in time-sensitive periods such as during seeding and harvest. The CCGA supports Bill C-244, as it will give farmers the choice of who can diagnose and repair their equipment, saving them critical time and money, and it would help reduce prices by allowing for competition.

In conclusion, it's vital that Canada focus on what we can do to sustainably intensify our primary agriculture production. To do that, we need a legislative and regulatory environment that is predictable and science-based and that fosters investment and innovation.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear today, Mr. Chair.

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Carey.

We will now turn to Mr. Stevens for up to five minutes.

Mr. Charles Stevens (Chair of the Board, Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association): Thank you very much for the opportunity to present.

I represent the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association.

Canadian food security in terms of our fresh fruit and vegetables is worryingly low. According to the U.S. Trade, in 2021, over 75% of Canadian fresh vegetables in the market and 80% of the fresh fruit were supplied by imports into Canada.

However, Canada can play a tremendous role in combatting global food insecurity for certain crops. For certain vegetable crops where we have strong economies of scale and favourable growing conditions, such as greenhouse vegetables, we are significant exporters. In 2021, Canadians managed to export \$2 billion in fresh vegetables to other countries and exported an additional \$3 billion in frozen fruits and vegetables worldwide.

A key to both increasing our domestic food security and our ability to contribute to global food security is strong agricultural policies. That's why we're here.

For example, the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council published a study in 2021 that showed that labour shortages in Canadian farms directly corresponded to \$2.9 billion in lost sales. We're not the only ones who have a problem with this issue, as you know. Other studies of Ontario safety net programs for farms show that without some of these programs, 95% of the farms would be negatively impacted, including my own, by the way. These are just two examples of the direct correlation between government policies and our ability to produce food for Canadians and for the global community.

I have a few items here about the policies that need to be addressed to help us address this problem.

Protect the temporary foreign worker program, including the seasonal void that SAWP fills compared to other, year-round programs. If we lose this, or if it gets tweaked badly, we're out of business.

Ensure that business risk management programs are strong and accessible. Don't throw up barriers to programs, rushing for new cross-compliances. The uptake would be—

● (1645)

The Chair: I apologize, Mr. Stevens. I'm just stopping the clock. I know Mr. Perron was having a bit of difficulty with translation.

I will continue to speak in English. Can you hear me now in French in the translation?

Okay, we've resolved it.

Mr. Stevens, sorry to interrupt, but we'll let you continue from there.

Mr. Charles Stevens: Okay.

Get farmers back to farming by streamlining government inspection processes. They are complicated and drawn out, especially the temporary worker program integrity audits. There were 11 audits on my farm last year. When I started, there were none. It doesn't help the farmer when he's under stress and harvesting his crop to have somebody come in and audit. At the end of the day, he has nothing wrong, and it just overburdens them.

Establish financial protection for fresh fruit and vegetable farmers in Canada to mirror the same policy in the United States by quickly passing Bill C-280, the financial protection for fresh fruit and vegetable farmers act. Our product is perishable. We can't collect it when there is a bankruptcy.

Implement a grocery code of conduct to protect domestic farms from risk of anti-competitive practices by large retailers, which are stretching family farms to the limit.

Correct the competitive handicap for Canadian farmers due to the fertilizer tariffs by developing a fair and equitable refund or tax rebate program.

Ensure farmers have the tools that they need to protect their crops by increasing funding to the pest management centre. That is not the PMRA. They got some dollars the other day, but the pest management centre is the tool that we use to get the new technology in crop protection to the farmers of the fruit and vegetable industry. That is the key big one because without them we're going down the tube. It's very important.

That's it. Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stevens.

Mr. Hemmes, you're online, but your camera is not on.

There you are.

We'll go over to you for up to five minutes.

Mr. Mark Hemmes (President, Quorum Corporation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and the committee, for the invitation to participate in today's meeting.

I'm Mark Hemmes, the president of Quorum Corporation, based in Edmonton. Quorum has been responsible for monitoring the Canadian prairie grain handling and transportation system on behalf of Transport Canada and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada since June 2001.

You all have my notes, I believe. I sent them in a couple of days ago, so I'm not going to try to read the whole thing to you.

As my expertise and knowledge centre on the logistics and supply chain of the Canadian grain industry, my comments today are

going to be focused on how global food insecurity can and cannot be aided by the Canadian industry.

Global food insecurity has been a concern for many over the past number of years as demand grows with increased population and higher standards of living, while production and supply fluctuate with regional weather conditions and supply chain disruptions, be they weather- or human-caused. The Russian invasion of Ukraine served to exacerbate this situation. As such, my comments will cover both the short-term and the long-term challenges that we face.

In the short term, not unlike the impact the pandemic had on the entirety of the global supply chain, the Russian invasion of Ukraine served to upset an already tenuous balance of supply and demand for grain and grain products globally. Using wheat production and exports as an example, the three-year average of global production was 752 million metric tonnes, while the global export market averaged about 177 million metric tonnes. Four countries made up over half of the global export supply—Ukraine, Russia, the United States and Canada, with Ukraine and Russia providing about 31% of that supply. Most of those exports flow from Black Sea port origins and supply the demand of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa.

General industry opinion suggests that supply from that region is going to be reduced by half, if not more, for the duration of the war and for a period after its conclusion. In short, the global market is going to be looking for about 26 million metric tonnes of wheat, which has been lost due to the impacts of the war.

Western Canadian wheat and durum production has averaged 28.9 million metric tonnes annually over the last five years, with an average of three and a half million metric tonnes carried over. Domestically, we consume about six million metric tonnes annually, and the remainder, anything over and above this that we grow, goes into the export markets. That's about 26 million metric tonnes. There is a graph in the paper I sent you that pretty much displays how that kind of balance happens.

Canadian grain companies and grain exporters have long-standing commitments to established markets globally, many of which are second and third world countries. While the current year's western Canadian production volumes have returned to a level that equals the five-year average, the total available to supplement the loss of supply due to the impact of the war is very minimal.

Compounding this are the logistical challenges of supplying the regions that will be most impacted by the shortfall in supply—meaning the Middle East and North Africa. The logical routes would be through Thunder Bay and the seaway or eastern Canadian ports.

While the port of Thunder Bay has more than adequate terminal capacity, it would require increased seaway capacity, either through increased laker vessels or through an increase in seaway-sized ocean-going vessels. This would increase the cost of movement as compared to the existing routing, which normally goes through the west coast ports.

A direct rail movement to eastern Canadian ports would require additional rail capacity in terms of railcars and resources, adding to an already constrained system. These constraints would need to be considered if we are going to think about routing the supply to the affected regional areas.

In the longer term, though, Canadian grain production has enjoyed an annual increase averaging about 3% due to improved agronomics, while our domestic consumption has remained relatively constant. This allows for the potential in the future of increased exports of Canadian grain and grain products that will serve to help in the alleviation of global food insecurity.

To serve that growth, grain companies in Canada have invested significantly in expanded capacity in their country elevator networks and the facilities at both western and eastern Canadian ports. The challenge that is faced by all the grain exporters, though, is getting access to the ports through the rail networks, as Dave has already mentioned.

• (1650)

This committee has probably heard in previous meetings on this and other topics that grain exporters base their sales and marketing plans primarily on what rail capacity they think they can obtain. The railway grain plans that are issued each August for the upcoming grain year do not reflect the level of increased production experienced already. As such, access to rail capacity is and has long been a serious concern for all grain exporters, and it will continue to be in the future if the current conditions continue—

The Chair: Mr. Hemmes, we're going to keep it right at that, if we can. I know my colleagues will want to ask more questions, and we're going to get to that right now.

Ms. Rood, it's over to you for up to six minutes.

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for appearing here today on this important topic.

I'm going to turn to Mr. Stevens.

I've had some great meetings over the last couple of days with our fruit and vegetable producers from Ontario. Having been in the industry with my family for a long time, I understand some of the challenges that the industry is facing right now.

We are a supplier of high-quality fruits and vegetables not just to Canada, but to the world. As you mentioned in your statement, we export a lot of our vegetables that are greenhouse-grown in Canada.

I'm wondering if you could touch on the fertilizer tariffs and the fertilizer reduction that the government is looking at imposing on farmers. What will that do to our food security in Canada? What will it do to our growers as far as being able to continue to produce

the yields and the great crops that we have is concerned, while we're seeing fewer and fewer farmers in the business of producing fresh fruit and vegetables in Canada right now?

Mr. Charles Stevens: That's a pretty easy one. There's legislation or a policy that has increased the cost to the farmer, and it comes out of his bottom line. When you do that, it reduces his funds to be able to innovate, grow his business and grow the industry. It gets very tough when you have one of your key ingredients doubling in price in one year. I know it's probably more important to the grains and oilseed business.

We use technology, even in our horticultural operations, to put the fertilizer just where it is necessary. The technology is phenomenal in how this is being done. I don't know whether the government understands how we are getting better and better at using this technology to help reduce the emissions.

As I said, it's a policy that takes dollars out of the industry. You cannot do that. We have a huge opportunity to be a key leader in agriculture in Canada. We have water and we have land, but we need policies that bump us up, instead of taking us down.

• (1655)

Ms. Lianne Rood: Correct me if I'm wrong, but what I'm hearing from those remarks is that if we cannot reduce our inputs as growers, we're going to become uncompetitive compared to imports that we would receive of fresh fruits and vegetables from around the world, where we can't control how they produce them, what they're putting on their crops and what regulations they have.

Is that correct?

Mr. Charles Stevens: That is correct. The fruits and vegetables.... We are in an open market in the world. There's no protection for us at all.

Ms. Lianne Rood: You're leading into my next question, on financial protection for those who are in the business of perishable foods.

Can you expand a bit on how important it is to make sure that we have mechanisms in place to protect Canadian growers, so that they can continue to grow food for Canadians and we can make sure that we have food sovereignty and food security in our own country?

Mr. Charles Stevens: On that one, obviously, Bill C-280 is with the government at the present time. We would love to see that pass. The reason is that the United States protected us when we took fruits and vegetables and went into the United States. They had their own deemed trust, as it's called, and they took that away. We weren't protecting them when they put product into Canada, so they gave us a slap. We need to put this in so that we reciprocate and have the same type of protection on both sides of the border.

This costs the government nothing. It's a deemed trust. There's no money, but it puts agriculture.... When my producers take apples to the States and that company goes bankrupt, we're number one on the list to get paid. We're number one over the banks, because that's the only way: We can't take back that produce. It would be bad by that time, and we'd really be at a disadvantage.

This is a pretty simple thing. We've been working at it for 20 years and have yet to get it through. Your support would be great. At the end of the day, it will protect us for every dollar, because there are companies that will buy produce.... This is done in Canada too, such as when you go to the food terminals in Montreal. It protects us from people going bankrupt and not paying the farmer.

Ms. Lianne Rood: Mr. Stevens, one of the greatest costs that some farmers face is the carbon tax and, we've heard, the tripling of the carbon tax. We just passed Bill C-234 through the committee stage yesterday. Can you touch on that a little bit ?

I'll ask you this point-blank: If greenhouse growers didn't have the carbon tax exemption right now, what would that do to our growers in that sector? Would this bill help keep fruit and vegetable growers, in Ontario and beyond in Canada, in business?

The Chair: You have only 10 seconds, unfortunately, but I'll let you go ahead, Mr. Stevens.

Mr. Charles Stevens: Okay.

Well, in terms of the greenhouse growers, the carbon tax is huge in that industry. We got some protection on it, but it will make us uncompetitive again. We're only doing this in Canada at the moment, I believe, and the United States produce will come in. They will expand. We will shrink.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will go to Mr. Turnbull, who is online.

It's over to you for six minutes.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Thanks, Chair.

Thanks to all our witnesses for being with us today.

Dr. Fakhri, I will probably have questions directed to you. I appreciate all the other witnesses, but I'm interested in your role in particular and your vantage point, which I think is very interesting, to add expertise to this conversation. I think you bring a somewhat unique perspective.

Dr. Fakhri, do the global trends in our food systems give you cause for serious concern when it comes to addressing food security?

Dr. Michael Fakhri: Thank you for your question, Mr. Turnbull.

Most definitely they do. As I mentioned, and I'll expand upon on it, even if the war ended tomorrow and the pandemic ended tomorrow, we'd still be in a food crisis. The war in Ukraine, to build on what a previous witness said, exacerbated existing problems. The reason the price fluctuated at first, when the war happened, wasn't necessarily a supply and demand issue. The problem was commodity markets.

Commodity markets are unregulated. They're really influenced by the U.S. commodity market in Chicago. Ever since 2000, because they've been deregulated, it allows for speculation. The price fluctuation of the price of grain isn't necessarily reflecting supply and demand; it's reflecting the fear and panic of speculators. The market isn't working properly, and what the international markets are doing is amplifying the problem.

The WTO, the World Trade Organization, is at a standstill. For 25 years, they've been stuck on negotiating over the Agreement on Agriculture. The consensus is that the Agreement on Agriculture is outdated, but there's no consensus on how to move forward. That's one of the structural problems.

Finally, the food system generates about one-third of greenhouse gases. The United Nations held a food systems summit last year, in 2021, and the global consensus is that everybody needs to transform their food system. There's disagreement on how and in what direction, and that was my suggestion on agroecology. It will take a lot of work, but we have to start now.

Thank you.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you for that.

Just to follow up, 10 years ago, the previous special rapporteur, Olivier De Schutter, visited Canada on a mission and produced a really great report, which I've read extensively and for numerous years, actually, because I've gone back and reread it. He said:

Since the 1950s, Canada has been moving to large-scale, input-intensive modes of production, leading to increasingly unsustainable farming practices and higher levels of greenhouse gas emissions, soil contamination, and erosion of biodiversity.

He also noted that trade liberalization in agriculture via free trade agreements has had the effect of decreasing net incomes for farmers and has led to increased debt. He said that “depression of farm-gate prices in relation to input prices and the cost of living means that margins are constantly tightening, forcing farmers to raise production levels simply to maintain income levels.” He actually outlines this extensively.

Would you say that this trend of larger-scale, input-intensive agriculture with corporate concentration, rising input costs, decreasing farm incomes and rising debt—necessitating “bigger is better”, essentially—runs counter to a real solution for global food insecurity?

Dr. Michael Fakhri: Indeed, I think I would wholeheartedly agree with that.

Again, to give you a specific example, the problem with fertilizers and genetically modified seeds from a market perspective—there is an ecological problem, of course, and we can talk about that—is that it creates a dependency on a shrinking number of corporations.

Based on that report from 10 years ago, until today, more and more, companies are buying each other out, so that power is concentrating in the hands of a few. Farmers and people and food systems around the world are all at the mercy of a small number of people. It's hard to break that small circle of power.

On the ecological issue, to transition away from fertilizers is not just a matter of emissions. It's a matter of soil depletion. Fertilizers ultimately deplete nutrients from the soil. There are techniques that are more regenerative, but it takes conscious choice and a strong policy to commit to that and to help farmers and workers transition. Governments have to start today, to start that transition into the future.

• (1705)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Yes.

You talked about resilient solutions. I note that on November 15, I think, you made a delegation to the General Assembly, if I'm not mistaken, or at least that's when it was published on your website. You pointed to “resilient solutions such as localized markets, public food reserves and public food distribution systems, as well as agroecology”.

Could you speak to this? Again, it's about contrast, because I think what you're playing to is resilient solutions versus solutions that essentially are “business as usual” and almost continue to exacerbate the vulnerabilities we have in our food system today. Can you speak to those?

Thanks.

The Chair: Answer in about 35 or 40 seconds, if you could.

Thank you.

Dr. Michael Fakhri: Okay, will do.

I agree that business as usual—producing more by any means necessary—is not the way to go. Generally, on a global scale, we have produced more than enough food. The problem is, how do we produce?

There are solutions to point to. I provide those specific solutions, backed up by science and backed up by policy. It's already happening. The question is about how to scale it up, how to connect all these different things and how to both feed people nationally but also think in terms of how to export. There is an export dynamic, which one can figure out, but we cannot continue business as usual. We cannot just add more money to the existing problem. We always have to think about power. Who has the most power? Who doesn't have enough power? Is it indigenous peoples, small farmers and, for that matter, workers?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, both of you.

[*Translation*]

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

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Fakhri, you said it is still important to protect the power of small farmers and to avoid excessive globalization. That is an interesting perspective.

Do you think that Canada, for instance, would do well to preserve a system such as supply management for the sectors that are affected and that manage the price and quality of their products, without undermining the export of products, which are managed in a different way?

[*English*]

Dr. Michael Fakhri: Thank you, Mr. Perron.

I'd agree in terms of focusing on small producers, but I would add that, ideally, it's the small producers who are committed to practices that enhance biodiversity and that also respect human rights, such as workers' rights, women's rights and indigenous peoples' rights. It's not just any small producer. Those are the small producers who are the most resilient because they act as stewards of the land. Those are the small producers I have in mind.

To your point, for over a hundred years people have been demanding stable prices. Historically, Canada has been really good at maintaining stable prices through systems of supply management. Today, one can advance in terms of thinking of stable and fair markets not just as supply management—that still plays a role and it's becoming more popular, globally—but also as strong labour rights. I think that provides some stability and resilience as well.

Supporting those local supply chains, I think, is also quite right—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: I'm sorry, Mr. Fakhri. I have to interrupt.

You said that supply management is becoming increasingly popular internationally. I gather it is a concept that we could perhaps share. Instead of gradually destroying supply management, perhaps we should export it to developing countries. That could help create an agricultural base, and would not prevent similar products from reaching international trading markets.

Have I understood correctly?

[*English*]

Dr. Michael Fakhri: I would add, Monsieur Perron, that I think it's not just supply management, but stabilizing prices more broadly.

There are a lot of tools. Supply management is an important one. I think the Canadian experience is something that can be shared. More importantly, what has been missing ever since the 1980s is an international system of stabilizing prices and supply management. From 1930 to 1980, international agricultural policy was an internationally coordinated system of supply management.

I'm not calling for another system of just supply management. I think, in today's terms, we have to think of international coordination that includes an element of stabilizing prices through different means. The idea of having stock holds of food isn't just supply management; it's a source of food as well—

• (1710)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much. I'm sorry to cut you off, but we do not have much speaking time and I have other questions for you.

You touched on another point that I am very interested in, the debt level of farming enterprises. In order to preserve international food security, and first and foremost national food security, we have to make sure that our farm products are viable. You seem to be sounding the alarm about the debt level of farming enterprises. Do you think our farming enterprises receive enough support as compared to other countries?

When you talked about environmental transition, I liked what you said about it being important to recognize good practices by establishing positive incentives for producers. Can you elaborate on that?

[English]

Dr. Michael Fakhri: Thank you, Mr. Perron.

Unfortunately, I can't speak too specifically to the debt level of Canadian producers. What I can speak to is the debt level of governments all over the world.

I do agree with your point. The only way transformation is going to happen—the only way food systems are going to transition to a system that is fair, stable and sustainable—is with active, explicit government support through incentives, through direct programs and through direct support. It can't just be a hands-off approach. That hasn't worked for the past 30 years, and governments around the world realize that the only way you can have a viable agricultural sector, and food sector more broadly, is with very conscious, coherent food policies that support the right kinds of producers.

[Translation]

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

I have a quick question for Mr. Carey.

Hello, Mr. Carey. It is always a pleasure to see you.

We are talking about the debt level of farming enterprises. I would like to hear your thoughts on that. Could you please answer the question I just asked Mr. Fakhri?

[English]

Mr. Dave Carey: I don't have the exact numbers, Mr. Perron, but on-farm debt is at an all-time high. Farmers are over-leveraged, cer-

tainly, and I think farmers' liquidity is also a big concern. Farmers tend to be cash-poor. They have a lot of money tied up in acres and equipment, but when it comes to liquidity, on-farm debt is at an all-time high. Anything that would increase that would not be a good food policy.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: I would like to talk about the direct support the government can provide for the environmental energy transition. How important is it to recognize the positive steps taken by our farmers? How should they be rewarded?

[English]

Mr. Dave Carey: Absolutely. I think farmers are also looking for credit for the things they've done. If you look at other jurisdictions around the world, say the United States, our level of conservation, no-till acres, is far higher than in the United States.

I think what we need to look at is incentivizing farmers to do more things on farm, absolutely. Some of that would be offsetting costs when it comes to soil sampling, as it's extremely expensive. The costs associated with custom and precision agriculture equipment are very high. So, yes, but they need to be incentive-based. There needs to be a carrot as opposed to a stick.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Carey and Mr. Perron.

Mr. MacGregor now has the floor for six minutes.

[English]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for coming today.

Mr. Carey, I'd like to start with you. I'm glad you brought up the subject of fertilizer because we certainly noticed a lot of confusion out there. I think the way the government rolled out its policy, it didn't take the time to properly explain it. I know that, given the volatility in the price, farmers are certainly going to do everything they can to minimize their use.

We've talked a lot about the 4Rs and how we can't really have food security unless we have farm security. We already touched on the high debt levels. We know the input costs are pretty horrendous for a lot of producers. In addition to 4R management, a lot of farmers are also leading the way with ecological intensification. They're really paying attention to the soil microbiology. They're paying attention to trying to mimic nature as closely as possible.

How can the federal government try to put those farmers who are leading the way up on a pedestal to really try to get more of their compatriots and comrades to adopt the same practices?

Mr. Dave Carey: Absolutely, even if you look back two generations, when it came to weed control, you plowed the land, you tilled the land, you plowed the land. Any time you had a drought, you had soil and dust flying everywhere.

I think when it comes to the realities, we need to make smart, sensible federal agriculture policies that allow farmers to be innovative and competitive on farm, because the cost of doing the things we're speaking of here is incredibly expensive. For example, the cost of a precision agriculture drill, with which when you're planting you can plant your seed right into the stubble from last year and you're not tilling it up.... You can plant your seed, which has been treated with pesticide so you're not spraying and you can apply your fertilizer at the exact same time, so one pass of diesel. The cost of that is about \$600,000.

Our vice-chair is with us from central Alberta, and his farm is 5,000 acres. His fertilizer bill in 2020 was \$316,000. This year it was \$670,000, and he anticipates next year it will be over \$700,000. As an example of that, he's being as judicious as possible with his use of that.

• (1715)

The Chair: We have a bit of a challenge with translation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: There, it is back now.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll go back to you, Mr. Carey.

Mr. Dave Carey: Yes, it's about incentivizing farmers to do the things on farm, and if we're going to roll out money, farmers need to actually be able to utilize and deploy that money. The programs need to be operationalizable on farm.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you for that.

I want to get to Mr. Stevens next.

Many years ago, when I was a teenager, I worked at a blueberry farm for four summers in a row, and I can remember the panic that set in when you got those really hot weeks in July and you had to get the crop off the bushes really quickly.

Your growers deal with the problem of food waste on a daily basis. It's a problem because of the perishable nature, so you really do have to be very efficient. You have to rush.

We know that food waste has always been a massive problem in many different sectors. In your opinion, what would you like to see the federal government do to step up and help your industry address this? I know some members of Parliament in other Parliaments have tried to establish a bill with a national food waste strategy. Do you have any opinions or thoughts on that?

Mr. Charles Stevens: Yes, thank you for that.

The blueberries that don't get picked go down in the ground and they produce the energies and everything. I don't consider that a total waste. It's a waste for people and their energy for sure, but sometimes that's the fertilizer. It's a waste for us and getting food to eat, but not as far as the product and the soil are concerned.

With fruit and vegetables, Mother Nature doesn't give us any breaks. Our biggest bill in the fruit and vegetable industry is labour. We need consistent labour that we can call on so when the rain-storm is coming we can get the crop off.

Also, there are machines now that pick the blueberries, but that's only for certain markets.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I want to get one last question in.

Mr. Charles Stevens: I'm done on that.

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

Dr. Fakhri, I'd like to turn my last question to you. You mentioned that the war in Ukraine and the pandemic exacerbated longstanding structural problems with the international food system.

I'm curious to hear from you, because you work for the biggest international organization there is, but two of its member states are actively at war with each other. It must be a bit awkward in the workplace at times.

Could you fill us in on what that is like, when you have a permanent member of the Security Council engaged in a pretty brutal war right now?

Dr. Michael Fakhri: Thank you for your question.

To clarify, I am an independent expert. It's a volunteer position. I'm one of the few players in these rooms, at times, who can speak freely. What I don't have in resources, I have in freedom.

I have been invited to brief the Security Council. When I brief the Security Council, I'm pleased to report that both the Russian ambassador and the American ambassador said that my remarks were fair and frank.

To your point, the problem I find with the United States and Russia is that they enter all of these multilateral spaces—I've been to the Security Council and the General Assembly, and the list goes on—and the one thing they always agree on is to not work multilaterally and to not commit to human rights. This is even though they're enemies, they're at war and they're destabilizing everything.

Internationally, I look for leadership and for someone to come forward and push in these multilateral spaces for an international kind of coordination and co-operation. Canada in the past has played a role. I think it was an honest broker in the past. I think it can play a role today. I haven't seen that in these spaces.

I want to invite the Government of Canada to step up its international role and bring people together on international co-operation and coordination.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fakhri.

Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

We now have Mr. Steinley for up to five minutes.

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Thank you very much.

My first question will be for Mr. Hemmes.

One of the security issues I see is the supply chain. Can you talk about how interchanging would be really important in making sure that we can get our commodities to market? Would interchanging play a big role in that?

That's one of the recommendations that came from the supply chain task force.

Mr. Mark Hemmes: I think the one thing about interchanging and the recommendation of the supply chain task force is that it's really focused on the movement of goods into the United States and Mexico. That doesn't address the global food insecurity issue. It certainly reduces costs, because now you're talking about having options of using different carriers, rather than being locked into the rail carrier that serves you.

There was an experiment a number of years ago that went on for three years. It was called "extended interswitching". In its last year of operation, it saved probably close to \$15 million or \$20 million in rail freight costs for the people who used it, so—

Mr. Warren Steinley: That's perfect. Thank you very much.

I have five minutes, and I have a few more questions. Thank you very much, Mark.

My next question will be for Mr. Carey.

The PMRA has about 60 products that need to be reviewed. If those reviews aren't done, what could be the effect on the food supply in our country?

Mr. Dave Carey: Thanks for the question.

We represent Canada's 43,000 canola farmers who rely on PMRA. PMRA has been under-resourced and understaffed for years. Part of our calls have been on that.

The concern we have.... In direct response to your question, we look at their workload increasing and the special reviews that are triggered any time a Codex country makes a decision on a unit. We are concerned that bad decisions will be made because they're rushed, they're under pressure and they don't have the resources.

It's a huge concern, because crop protection products are among the most important things to food security and modern agriculture.

Mr. Warren Steinley: Thank you very much, Mr. Carey. I appreciate that.

We've heard some interesting testimony today.

I would like to ask a question of you. You represent 43,000 producers. That's a lot of producers who have on-the-ground knowledge of our agriculture sector.

Through innovation and technology—like you talked about—with zero till, direct seeding and crop rotation, do you believe that the agriculture soil in Canada is in better health now than it would have been 15 or 20 years ago?

Mr. Dave Carey: Absolutely. There's just no question about it.

The amount of organic matter that's allowed to be built up in soil because we're not tilling it, because we're not having to get rid of all of those weeds, because we have genetically modified crops that are herbicide-tolerant, because we have products like glyphosate,

saves huge amounts of GHG emissions and also allows farmers to plant directly into the soil.

The notion that the American farmer you see in a gothic painting was sustainable is simply not true. Agriculture on farm has never been more sustainable. Producers want to do the best thing. I think trying to identify good and bad producers is unproductive, but I think Canada's agriculture and farmers are directly tied to the land. They have their money. They're tied to land succession. Their money is tied to land.

So, yes, with on-farm sustainability and soil health, there is a continuum, and we need to improve that, but it's never been better, in large part due to crop protection products, biotechnology when we look at gene editing, as well as access to fertilizer.

Mr. Warren Steinley: Thank you very much.

I think the idea of trying to portray agriculture as corporate farms isn't helpful now. I know that the average farm size in Saskatchewan is about 1,300 acres. It still is a lot of people. They grew up on that farm and they protect the environment and the soil because it's important to them, not only for their bottom line, but also to pass this on to the next generation.

I just want to get on the record that I think our agriculture producers are doing an amazing job, and I think anyone who wants to talk them down is heading in the wrong direction. Agriculture emissions in Canada, as part of our total emissions, are at 8%. That should be something the world should strive for. We are the gold standard when it comes to environmental sustainability and agriculture, and it's something we should be very proud of as a country and very proud of as a government. I think everyone else in the world is around 26% for emissions from their agriculture sector. We are a leader, and we should be very proud of that.

Thank you very much for being here today.

● (1725)

Mr. Dave Carey: Ninety-five per cent of Canadian farms are family-run businesses. Farms do get bigger, because you need scalability. It's very expensive to buy this. You can't have a bunch of 100-acre farms with a combine in each one.

On the intensity in agriculture emissions, we've been at about 8% for the last 20 years, but we've increased the amount that we're producing with those same emissions by 50%.

I think I agree with you that we're on the right track out here.

Mr. Warren Steinley: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Carey.

Thank you, Mr. Steinley.

We'll now turn to Ms. Taylor Roy for up to five minutes.

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

I'm going to leave some time for Mr. El-Khoury, who would also like to have a question.

I just want to say that I worked on a farm in the Holland Marsh growing up. I was pulling carrots and lettuce, and I know it's changed. What we're producing now has changed because of trade and what we're competitive in.

You talked a little bit about international standards and how we do things in Canada and need to be competitive. My concern is that if we go with the lowest common denominator... I mean, food safety and security in Canada has always been excellent. Our food is high-quality. I guess there are two ways to go. One is to say, "Well, we shouldn't make improvements. We shouldn't be the best we can in terms of that, because we're competing with countries that don't do that." The other is to say something that we heard the special envoy from New Zealand say, which is that we actually have a superior product.

Now, especially in the fruit and vegetable sector, Mr. Stevens, we have a superior product in Canada in terms of how it's grown, our food safety, our standards and everything, and we should be able to market it that way. It's different in commodity crops—I understand.

One thing I'm wondering about is growing this food and trade, but let me revert a bit, because what I really wanted to talk about was the land.

We need labour, but we need land and we need good soil. In Ontario, in particular, I think those two things are at risk. We have farms in my riding of Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill that are disappearing—farm land. Some of the owners want the land rezoned and they're saying that the soil quality is terrible now after years and years of farming.

Soil health, obviously, and having the land are two important things. What would you say to that, Mr. Stevens, in the context of Ontario and what's going on?

Mr. Charles Stevens: Thank you for asking the question. That's a great question.

I believe that in 100 years there will be no agriculture left in Ontario. Statistics Canada did an agriculture census back in 2016. At that time, 175 acres were being taken out of production every day due to development and housing. In 2021, the agriculture census, which is every five years, put it at 319 acres a day. Divide that into the agricultural land—not just fruit and vegetables, but all across it—and we're out of production in 100 years.

I know land policy is provincial, somewhat—

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Yes, so what can the feds do? I just want to intervene to ask about the solution. What can we do to help that?

Mr. Charles Stevens: We need better land use policies to save the number one, two, three and four agriculture lands, which a farmer can make a living on; but the five, six, and seven, which he cannot make a living on, maybe that's where we need to put the houses. I know it's a pull-and-shove here. We need housing.

I was talking to Doug Ford the other day. He said, "We're going to support agriculture." Then he turns around and says, "We're going to open up the greenbelts to build more houses." It's a crisis.

We won't need crop protection materials, and we won't need labour. Those are the two key ones for the horticulture industry. Also, we have water. We have a quarter of the world's fresh water right on our doorstep, and we have the climate.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Thank you so much. Yes, I think it is a concern.

I just want to make sure that Mr. El-Khoury has the chance to ask a question as well, but thank you for that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Thank you to the witnesses for being with us today.

My question is for Mr. Fakhri.

In your opinion, how could Canada become a world leader in establishing the right to food in the international community?

In your research and studies, have you considered the impact of climate change on the agriculture sector?

● (1730)

[*English*]

Finally, what do you think about paradigm shifts from food security to food sovereignty in order to remove the influence of those cartels that have an influence on the food sector?

The Chair: Mr. Fakhri, we only have about 15 or 20 seconds, but I'm going to give you a little bit more time. I might shave off the third round just to be fair, but I want Mr. El-Khoury to have this question, so it's over to you.

[*Translation*]

Dr. Michael Fakhri: Thank you, Mr. El-Khoury.

[*English*]

What can Canada do? At the UN Committee on World Food Security in Rome, it can play a leadership role and bring countries together. We're all pushing now in Rome over the next few months at the Committee on World Food Security for it to be the place for governments to come together and negotiate an international plan.

Canada can play a leadership role. It's been impassive. It's been at the back. It can step up.

To your point on the effect of climate change, the problem with corporatization isn't specifically farmers or family farmers; it's who owns the seeds—GMO seeds are corporate-owned, reducing biodiversity—and who owns the input—fertilizers and other inputs are also dominated by corporations. To achieve food sovereignty, to put the power back into the hands of producers, consumers and everyday people, we need a resilient system that supports the small producers, the family farms, and puts power back in their hands. Seeds should not be corporate-owned. Seeds are life. By patenting seeds and relying on genetically modified organisms, we're putting our lives in the hands of corporations and not in the hands of farmers.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

We will continue with Mr. Perron.

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

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

Mr. Stevens, you talked about financial protection for perishable fruit and vegetables. I imagine you have examined the matter thoroughly. You said 20 years.

In your opinion, why is there no such financial protection since it costs the government nothing and would be of considerable assistance to you?

You also talked about labour and a major problem relating to temporary foreign workers. Do you have any specific recommendations for the committee that we might pass on to the government?

If you don't have any recommendations right now, can you forward them to the committee later on?

[*English*]

Mr. Charles Stevens: On the labour component, when we order up our men and ladies from the islands, it used to take a month with Service Canada. We used to put our orders in, and it was done in a month. Now it's six months. We have to organize for six

months to get it through Service Canada. Service Canada is not getting their job done in time for us to get the job done.

The other thing is that the unions have put lots of negative news out there, because they want to unionize the 17,000 workers in Ontario, plus the ones in the rest of Canada, so they can get the union dollars. They take us to court every three to four years, and we win every time. But we need to stop the negative things about what's happening. I treat my workers like my local workers. Almost all farmers treat their workers as well as their local workers, or they'd be out of business. I have a man who's been with me for 34 years. They are vital. We would not have a horticulture industry in Canada without this labour.

I know the government put an audit system on. I've been audited many times—never a problem. They may pick a little thing that happened, but at the end of the day, it's not doing its job.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: Why is there no financial protection yet?

I would ask you to answer my question in five seconds because I think my speaking time is up.

[*English*]

Mr. Charles Stevens: I didn't get that. I'm having trouble here.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Perron, but your time is up.

I am usually generous with the speaking time each member is allowed, but we have to move on to someone else now.

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

[*English*]

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

Dr. Fakhri, I'd like to turn to you.

It was very concerning and sobering to listen to your opening remarks about the major increase in child labour that is coming about as a result of food insecurity. I've actually been quite troubled by the role that international finance plays in this kind of exploitation. I know, from when I did some research, that our own Canada pension plan has been found to have had holdings in companies that score in the low single digits on the responsible mining index. We have also been invested in food and beverage companies that have forced labour somewhere in their supply chains.

In your opinion, if we're going to tackle this—because the forced labour or the child labour, how it's linked.... We also know that those people are at such a vulnerable state, and they are just ripe for exploitation. Do you have any thoughts on how Canada can be a leader in combatting that?

• (1735)

Dr. Michael Fakhri: I'll talk in terms of policy and maybe leave it to you all to find Canada's role.

What often happens in these supply chains is that corporations will rely on child labour, but because they're not directly hiring the children, they say, "Well, we don't know. We have no control." That's not necessarily true. I think increased scrutiny and corporate accountability across supply chains.... This is the question everyone's asking.

The other thing is that the best way to reduce child labour is to support their families. No one wants to send their kid to work that way. They do it out of necessity, so supporting workers, supporting families financially and with social protection, and ensuring that workers have the right to unionize.... Time and time again, I've seen it across all different countries: When workers are able to organize and unionize, this provides them with the social protection they need. This increases their wages, gives them job stability, gives them a safe workplace. They don't have to send their kids to work. There is a direct correlation: The more you allow workers around the world to unionize, the more it reduces child labour. There is also, then, supporting them through school. Schools aren't just places of education. They are where we feed children, where we take care of our children.

So, supporting the families and supporting the schools are the best ways to keep children out of work.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

We have a little bit of time, and then we'll go to drafting instructions. I know we're a little bit beyond the hour, but I think it's most important to hear from our witnesses.

Mr. Barlow, you have no more than five minutes, but you have up to that time if you would like.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity.

There's been some great testimony from our witnesses today.

Mr. Carey, you talked about the importance of innovation and technology when it comes to improving yields in agriculture and soil health. Last spring, Health Canada deemed that gene editing was safe, but now it appears that the Minister of Agriculture has had cold feet and has paused the rules and regulation development around that.

How important is that when we talk about new seed varieties that, again, help us in terms of food security, and also about food sovereignty in other countries that would be able to use some of these new seed varieties for their own food security? How important is it to get this across the finish line?

Mr. Dave Carey: I'll come at it from two perspectives, the farm perspective and the competitiveness perspective.

Health Canada has released its guidance around gene editing for food, but it also requires the CFIA to release the guidance for biosafety and for feed. Typically, food is what we actually anticipated taking the longest. That's done. We are now, I believe, essentially waiting for signatures from the CFIA, two pieces. However, there are three legs to that stool.

It's critically important. What's actually interesting is that genetic modification is very expensive. There aren't that many companies that do it. Dr. Fakhri is correct in that assertion. It costs millions of dollars to do genetic modification. There are only a few crop varieties in Canada that actually are GMO, so the vast majority of the acres planted are not. However, what's interesting is that gene editing is very inexpensive. Actually, what we anticipate in the canola sector is that we'll have more seed companies, smaller seed companies, start-up seed companies, that can use a CRISPR-Cas9 technology and do things differently, which we think is really interesting. Could canola fix its own nitrogen? Could it become more efficient with nitrogen, more drought-tolerant, more disease-tolerant?

Getting clear gene-editing guidelines is good for farmers. It's good for Canadian innovation. We'll also probably see more start-up companies. Canada has over 200 seed companies alone, and we're a relatively small global market. What is also interesting is that these will also potentially have knock-on environmental benefits as well. Getting that across the finish line.... The rest of the world is there, with the exception of the EU. Argentina, Brazil, South America, the U.S. and Australia have clear guidance when it comes to how to take a product from R and D to commercialization. We just need that clearly spelled out for the companies so that they can invest here in Canada and so that canola farmers have more options for what they want to buy when they go to their local retailers.

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you for that.

Mr. Stevens had a chance to answer this. I want to give Mr. Carey a chance to answer this, and then I have one question for Mr. Hemmes.

There has certainly been a lot of discussion with a lot of ag stakeholder groups here this week and the previous week on the impact of the fertilizer emissions reduction policy. When it comes to canola, what would be the impact in terms of lost production and yield and your ability to meet your commitments? If you reduce fertilizer use, what will the impact be on the soil health and economic sustainability of your members' operations?

● (1740)

Mr. Dave Carey: The canola plant is one of the best fuel crops for sequestering carbon. For canola, it's water and then nitrogen. Canola cannot produce its own nitrogen; it needs nitrogen. Nitrogen is the key thing that gets yield. Thirty-five years ago, say, canola yields in Alberta were 20 bushels an acre. Now they're 50 to 60 bushels an acre from allowing the use of nitrogen.

There are other efficiency nitrogens coming online. They're very expensive, and they're not readily available yet, so there are efficiencies being made, but taking out a tool like that, an arbitrary target, would be incredibly detrimental, not just to canola but to all sectors.

Again, for farmers it's that innovation continuum in crop protection products and fertilizer that allow for precision agriculture, so that when our farmer members are driving their combines using the GPS and GIS to plant seed, the right seed goes in the right place with the exact amount of nitrogen. If the nitrogen isn't needed, farmers don't use it. For canola farmers, typically their biggest bill is nitrogen. They do it because they have to. They're trying to become more efficient.

The knock-on effects of moving away from innovation, GM, biotech and crop protection products are not good on the farm for environmental sustainability. Farmers have a choice in where they buy their products from; they certainly do. They see value in it, which is why they sign technology use agreements to access biotechnology. It's not forced on them.

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you, Mr. Carey.

I guess, again, it's just misinformation given in some other testimony that the soil has these nutrients in it. For example, with the Holland Marsh, in many cases the nutrients aren't there without the fertilizer. That is putting the nutrients there, which allows you to grow some of these products.

Mr. Hemmes, I have a quick question for you. I learned today an interesting stat that, out of the 400 ports globally, the port of Vancouver is ranked 396 or something like that in terms of efficiency.

In terms of the supply chain, I know rail is your expertise, and I certainly appreciate your knowledge on that. This is a big question, maybe. Is the port of Vancouver a critical pinch point when it comes to not only our supply chain of food security here in Canada but our role in food security around the world?

The Chair: Mr. Hemmes, Mr. Barlow is right at five minutes, but I'm going to be generous and allow you about 30 seconds. Anything that you don't cover you can put in writing to us.

I apologize, Mr. Barlow. Mr. Hemmes is no longer on the line, so we don't have to worry about that.

We'll go to our last line of questioning from Mrs. Valdez. We did borrow a little bit of time with Mr. El-Khoury, so I would say to keep it at four and a half minutes.

Mrs. Rechie Valdez (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Thank you to all the witnesses who have joined us today.

Dr. Fakhri, I'm going to send some questions over to you. Can you share with us how the right to food guidelines have assisted in closing global food insecurity?

Dr. Michael Fakhri: The right to food, if looking at the international treaty and the guidelines, focuses everyone's attention—and we've heard stuff like this today—on the importance of sharing knowledge and technology and of international co-operation, but, most of all, it focuses on who has the power and who should have the power.

I think everyone is in agreement today that ultimately the power needs to be in the hands of the producers, the small farmers and the workers in terms of distribution and consumers. They should be able to decide what counts as good food, not just in environmental terms but in cultural terms.

The right to food provides a very specific framework and, ultimately, it's a legal obligation; it's not just a policy choice.

I also want to highlight the point, from a human rights perspective and from a scientific perspective, that fertilizer depletes the soil in the medium to long term. You might get a boost in a couple of years, but the run-off creates a human rights violation because—and we've seen it time and time again—it violates the right to health and the right to environment. It creates more problems in the medium to long term.

The right to food provides a systemic understanding of not just agriculture but ultimately human existence in that systemic way, the food system from all points.

Thank you.

● (1745)

Mrs. Rechie Valdez: Thank you.

You provided several recommendations in your opening that could be done in the short term. Given your expertise, what is the most feasible option you've asked for today that we could execute right now?

Dr. Michael Fakhri: Thank you, Mrs. Valdez.

The one that I've seen work time and time again is universal school meals for children, providing free and healthy meals for all children in schools without some system of choosing who is worthy and who is not worthy. To really make it work, connect schools with local producers who are committed to biodiversity and human rights. That way, you have a procurement system that creates a relationship between local producers and our schools. We're supporting both local food systems and our children.

We've seen this work. It worked amazingly in Brazil, under a previous regime. It's been proven to work really well. It takes work, but I think that is one way.

The second way in times of need is direct transfer payments that give people cash when they need it the most, not systems of vouchers or food stamps, as they do in the United States. What we have seen work is this: When people need access to food, give them money. They know how to feed their families. They know how to spend their dollars. That seems to work.

Those are the two that jump out the most. I would also add another: Find ways to directly support local producers who are committed to biodiversity and human rights.

Thank you.

Mrs. Rechie Valdez: Thank you.

It's over to you, Mr. Turnbull.

The Chair: You have just over one minute, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: No problem. Thanks.

Mr. Fakhri, thank you again for your testimony today.

I will end on the fact that our Minister of Families, Children and Social Development announced today public consultation on building a national school food program in Canada, which we haven't had before. I'm very excited by that. I know that there is a coalition of the willing right across Canada that will be working on informing the build-out with the federal government funding commitment that's been made. I think your testimony today speaks to that.

I wanted to ask you more questions, but I don't have the time. Perhaps your report, which you've mentioned several times, could

be tabled with this committee, if you are willing. It would then allow us to benefit from some of your observations and expertise. I think we could all benefit from that.

Thank you again for appearing today. I really value your perspective and your work.

Dr. Michael Fakhri: Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

I had sent it earlier, but I will resend it to make sure you all have it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fakhri, and thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

I'm going to exercise one quick question from the chair.

Mr. Carey, we've talked a lot about fertilizer and the fertilizer emission reduction goal by the government. I'm on record in the Globe and Mail and in the House—along with your thoughts—that this has to be a voluntary measure. I believe the government to date has said that it is exactly a voluntary measure, but there is merit in trying to reduce nitrous oxide emissions.

In the conversations you've had through your many stakeholder meetings and the groups you work with, has the government been really resolute in making sure that it will be a voluntary target? I believe Minister Bibeau is on record as saying that it is. I just want to see if that is indeed the case.

Mr. Dave Carey: Yes. That's accurate. All our interactions to date with the government, including with Minister Bibeau—today we had her at our board meeting—indicate that it is still a voluntary target. We haven't seen any change in that. We do know that things change, but right now there is no regulatory legislative attachment to that goal.

You're correct in your assertion, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Carey.

Colleagues, that ends our session today.

On your behalf, let me thank Mr. Fakhri, Mr. Carey, Mr. Stevens and Mr. Hemmes, who unfortunately had to drop out a little bit early, for their work in agriculture and for their testimony today. It is very valuable to all of us.

Colleagues, we will be moving in camera in order to have some conversations and to provide feedback on what we've heard from our witnesses, both today and before that.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>