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Chair

Mr. Pat Finnigan

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

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• (1530)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone, colleagues and guests.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108, we are continuing our study on a food policy for Canada.

With us today are Irena Knezevic, of the Canadian Association for Food Studies, and Sylvie Cloutier, chief executive officer of the Conseil de la transformation alimentaire du Québec.

Good afternoon, ladies.

Also with us is Carla Ventin, vice-president of Federal Government Affairs at Food and Consumer Products of Canada.

Again, welcome.

We will start with your opening remarks. You will have seven minutes each.

Ms. Knezevic, you may go ahead.

[*English*]

Ms. Irena Knezevic (Vice-President, Canadian Association for Food Studies): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On behalf of the Canadian Association for Food Studies, I want to thank you for inviting us here today. We are a network of about 600 individuals across Canada who conduct scholarly research on food. Our members come from a wide array of disciplines, from nutrition science and environmental science to cultural studies and geography.

In existence for over a decade, our network is a web of current and rigorous knowledge and practices regarding food systems and social conundrums related to food. Many of our members work in and with communities that are the most affected by various challenges associated with the contemporary food systems in Canada, so our collective body of knowledge is very practical as well as theoretically sound. The challenges we identify greatly reflect the four themes that are guiding this policy consultation and we thank you for taking such a comprehensive approach to this undertaking.

We call on the standing committee to consider the following three recommendations that we have, which are related to innovation, adaptable policy, and food exports.

The current economic agenda in Canada rests on the view that our secure economic and democratic future hinges on innovation.

Investments in the agri-food sector pay a great deal of attention to innovation. Innovation is crucial to pillars two, three, and four of the food policy as proposed by the government. We welcome this but we implore you to take a wide view of innovation, a view that looks beyond technology and profit and that includes social and environmental innovation. This entails holistically valuing the work of small and medium-scale producers, processors, and harvesters, whose revenues obscure the type of social, natural, and community capital they generate through their work.

It also entails valuing the work of countless civil society initiatives across the country that are already addressing nutrition, food access, environmental sustainability, and the livelihoods of those who bring food to our tables. Innovation can mean thinking creatively about engaging citizens in food activities to increase food literacy. It can mean running a social enterprise that helps build skills and social networks for persons who experience social isolation and marginalization. It can mean reviving agro-ecological practices that build soil and regenerate our ecosystems with old technologies and practices.

As a nation, we invest millions in new technologies. Social and environmental innovations require the same kind of deliberate and substantial investment. Supporting community-led initiatives that are already creating better food environments and improving food literacy will be key to making this policy effective, so will supports for new farmers, fishers, and processors, as well as supports for farmland protection and transitioning to ecologically sustainable practices.

In the long run, an improved food system will generate substantial savings in health care costs and environmental remediation, making such investments wise, even from a monetary standpoint.

Next, we ask you to ensure that the policy is adaptable so that it encourages place-based and scale-appropriate solutions. This point was raised repeatedly at the June food summit, but we want to reiterate how important this is for all four proposed pillars. Different communities have different ideas about health, and for many of us, cultural and social well-being is as important as physical health. Our researchers find over and over that when those dimensions of health are ignored, physical health suffers as well. While evident across urban, rural, and remote locations, this is most evident in northern and indigenous communities, as we know you have already heard from others who have testified before this committee.

We also have plenty of evidence that the regulatory frameworks have difficulties accommodating agri-food enterprises that operate on different scales. In general, regulations err on the side of working for industrial-sized operations and they present significant barriers for small businesses, social enterprises, and community-based initiatives.

Lastly, we heard at the food summit that part of Canada's role on the global stage is to ensure that we help feed the world. This underpins proposed pillars two and four. There is an abundance of evidence that the world produces more than enough food, and that hunger and malnutrition are not a result of food scarcity but of uneven distribution. While food exports are essential to our economy, we ask you to ensure that the export agenda is not advanced at the expense of the most vulnerable in Canada or elsewhere but rather in line with the sustainable development goals and the global commitment to leave no one behind.

In other words, it is imperative that this agenda not overshadow the first proposed pillar: access to affordable, nutritious, and safe food. We ask that the growth of exports does not further jeopardize our environment or Canada's capacity to sustainably feed all who live here now and in the future. We urge you towards ensuring that the right to food is fully realized for everyone who lives in Canada, and that this agenda is prioritized over export expansion.

● (1535)

In closing, please allow me to reiterate our recommendations. First, include social and environmental innovations equally with technological innovation. Second, engage policies that can adapt to place and small-scale enterprises. Third, ensure that we consider the needs of people in communities with vulnerabilities over the desire to grow our exports.

Our recommendations are broad, as we represent a wide range of research. We are not submitting a brief as some of our members are already testifying and delivering more specific recommendations on behalf of their research teams and organizations. However, we invite you to continue to call on us and our research as you develop the various components of this policy and roll out the resulting programs.

Thank you for your time today.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Knezevic.

[Translation]

We will now move on to Sylvie Cloutier of the Conseil de la transformation alimentaire du Québec.

Mrs. Cloutier, you have seven minutes.

[English]

Ms. Sylvie Cloutier (Chief Executive Officer, Conseil de la transformation alimentaire du Québec): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all committee members for this invitation.

[Translation]

The CTAQ, which I am representing here today, has over 550 members, which makes it the largest group of food processors in Quebec.

The Canadian food and beverage processing industry is the second largest manufacturing industry in Canada and the largest in Quebec. It is the largest employer in the Canadian manufacturing sector in terms of the production value, and it is the key link in the agri-food system because it is one of the major buyers of Canadian primary agricultural products.

Recently, the Advisory Council on Economic Growth, chaired by Dominic Barton, recommended several measures to the government that would benefit the Canadian economy as a whole.

The council established agri-food as a key sector of the economy, one that presents untapped potential, as well as significant global growth prospects, and will require some attention to benefit from it.

To realize this potential, the council recommends an approach that uses carefully chosen strategic measures to eliminate obstacles, including excessive regulation, interprovincial trade barriers, forms of inefficient subsidies and market-related challenges.

The four pillars proposed in the new food policy are commendable, and are: increasing access to affordable food; improving health and food safety; conserving our soil, water and air; and growing more high-quality food.

However, the main thrusts laid down in this policy do not speak of strategic measures and do not encourage the creation of winning conditions to promote the growth of the sector.

In addition, the messages launched by this policy suggest that the food industry is deficient, heedless, and does not do enough. For example, when we talk about improving food safety and health, or producing more high-quality foods, there is doubt about the integrity of our Canadian food system, which is recognized as one of the best in the world.

The same comment applies to the environmental aspect. The food industry is already very active in many sectors, including water, recycling, recovery of waste material and organic waste, and energy consumption.

We all want greater accessibility to food in Canada, but the government will have to recognize its role and responsibility to ensure that it is accessible.

The food policy, in its present form, omits important actions and axes, such as ensuring the sustainability and growth of the food industry, promoting a culture of innovation within the food industry, encouraging local purchasing, ensuring the reciprocity of our standards for imported products, ensuring market access, addressing labour and productivity challenges, and so on.

On the one hand, the Government of Canada invites the industry to become the world leader in food production, and to invest in innovation to stimulate economic growth and meet global demand, which, is expected to triple by 2050. On the other hand, the government offers nothing in this new food policy to support these demographic and economic realities.

The industry is willing to take on the challenge, but is concerned that because of the many ongoing regulatory modernization activities, capital needs to be invested in regulatory compliance rather than innovation and growth. The introduction of new food inspection regulations, combined with new food labelling requirements and marketing restrictions, imposes a significant additional burden and additional costs on food manufacturers in Canada. The committee should also examine the impact of these new regulations on the competitiveness of the food industry.

In conclusion, we wonder how the government will reconcile the food policy as proposed with the recommendations of the Advisory Council on Economic Growth. We wonder how the government will ensure that its food industry will become a pillar of Canada's economic prosperity and meet the social demands of its new policy.

• (1540)

Thank you for listening.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Cloutier.

Now from Food and Consumer Products of Canada, we have Ms. Carla Ventin for seven minutes.

Ms. Carla Ventin (Vice-President, Federal Government Affairs, Food and Consumer Products of Canada): Food and Consumer Products of Canada would like to commend the government for its leadership in developing a national food policy, and I welcome the opportunity to provide our comments today for consideration.

With the rapid growth of the global demand for food and the recent recognition by this government of Canada's potential to meet this need, this is a critical and timely issue. FCPC is committed to continuing to work in close collaboration on a national food policy to help position Canada to play a leading role as a trusted leader in the production of safe, high-quality, and affordable food.

FCPC is Canada's largest national industry association. It represents the companies that manufacture and distribute the majority of food, beverage, and consumer goods found on store shelves, in restaurants, and in people's homes. Our membership is truly national. It provides value-added jobs for urban and rural Canadians in more than 170 federal ridings across the country.

According to the chair of the advisory council on economic growth, Mr. Dominic Barton, food is going to be one of the biggest businesses in the world. Canada is well positioned to play a vital role in feeding the world with its made-in-Canada products. This strategy hinges on a competitive manufacturing sector.

For the first time, budget 2017 singled out agri-food as one of three key strategic industries with great potential for growth and job creation. The government's commitment to diversify and move Canada beyond our reliance on commodities towards growth in value-added production is significant and unprecedented.

As food processing is the largest employer in manufacturing in Canada, with facilities in every region of the country, our industry plays a critical role in linking rural and remote Canadians through economic opportunity. Canadian farmers and food manufacturers work interdependently to produce some of the most trusted food in

the world. In addition to providing a market for the food that farmers grow, food manufacturers provide off-farm employment opportunities for rural residents and countless indirect jobs across Canada.

I'll briefly highlight our engagement on a national food policy and follow up with eight recommendations.

FCPC has been actively engaged in the development of a national food policy in close contact with several groups as they have pursued their own sound strategies, including the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the Conference Board of Canada, and the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute.

Back in 2011, I was pleased to present at the annual meeting of federal, provincial, and territorial ministers of agriculture and agri-food, in Saint Andrews, New Brunswick, in support of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture's food strategy.

I'll move on to our recommendations.

A lot of good work has been done to date, and this leads me to my first recommendation, which is to build on the work that has already been done in the development of an NFP.

Second is that, to ensure success, an NFP must integrate the entire value chain, from farm to fork.

Third, an NFP must ensure that our rural communities are sustainable and prosperous. As the largest manufacturing employer in rural Canada, food processors play an important part in making this happen.

Fourth, in developing an NFP, we should not lose sight of the fact that we have a lot to be proud of in Canada. We have some of the safest food in the world. The made-in-Canada food brand is globally recognized, and for good reason. We need to know our starting point before developing an NFP to understand where we're at and where we're going.

Fifth, the government should consider the report completed by the advisory council on economic growth, chaired by Dominic Barton, as an anchor to an NFP. This report discusses the potential of the agri-food sector and the opportunity to grow and process more of our own food in Canada, rather than letting other countries do this for us. In the report, Mr. Barton recognizes room for further growth that can be achieved with the development of value-added products. He points out that we add value to only 50% of what we grow in Canada and that this represents an enormous, untapped opportunity.

An NFP must help position Canada to achieve its agri-food export targets, as identified in the federal budget.

Sixth, we need to adopt a whole-of-government approach. While we commend the federal government's intent and efforts to coordinate between departments, more work needs to be done. An example of misalignment is Health Canada's proposal to place warning labels on food at a time when other departments are working closely with the agri-food sector to meet ambitious growth targets. We share the serious concerns of national farm groups regarding the proposal to place warning labels, such as stop signs, on iconic Canadian products like cheese and maple syrup. An NFP could help play a coordinating role.

• (1545)

Seventh, decisions need to be based on evidence, transparency, inclusiveness, and open dialogue.

We welcome the federal government's political commitments, but we continue to have serious concerns with the process and approach that Health Canada officials continue to take towards the placement of warning labels on the front of food packages. There are other ways to improve public health, like education, that take a more informative approach to how people eat. Our own research shows that consumers prefer a more informative approach than warning labels. There's no evidence to suggest that Health Canada's proposals will improve public health outcomes.

Following a meeting on September 18 with Health Canada and other stakeholders, we were very disappointed that the department communicated broadly in writing, on September 27, that we had arrived at an agreement on criteria for front-of-pack labelling, which we had not. This was a clear misrepresentation of the record. Health Canada's criteria is so narrow that it would actually exclude exploring labelling options adopted by our major trading partners. It's important to get this right.

Finally, eighth, we therefore jointly request, with the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, for this committee to study front-of-package labelling, including the approaches taken by our major trading partners in North America and Europe to determine the best approach for Canada. It is critical to study how a front-of-pack approach will, number one, impact the objectives of a national food policy, and number two, impact the ability of the agri-food industry to meet the growth targets identified by Mr. Barton and the federal budget.

In conclusion, I think we should build on Canada's strengths. We have the potential to become international leaders in food production and innovation, and a national food policy can help get us there.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ventin.

We shall start our questioning round, but before I do that, I would like to welcome Ms. Cathay Wagantall, who is replacing Luc Berthold, and also Mr. Larry Bagnell, who is replacing Francis Drouin.

The first round of questions will go to Madame Boucher.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor for six minutes.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, ladies.

Good afternoon, everyone.

Before I ask my question, I would like to speak to the motion that I tabled two weeks ago. I will read it to you:

That the committee invite the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the Minister of Finance to provide a briefing on the government's consultations titled "Tax Planning Using Private Corporations" and how this will impact family farms and the Canadian agriculture and agri-food economy.

Could we please take two minutes to talk about this?

• (1550)

The Chair: Are there any comments on the motion?

Mr. Pierre Breton (Shefford, Lib.): I would just like to take the time to reread the motion; it won't be long.

The Chair: Excuse me, we are going to wait a moment.

[*English*]

You have the motion in front of you. It says:

That the Committee invite the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the Minister of Finance to provide a briefing on the government's consultation titled "Tax Planning Using Private Corporations" and how this will impact family farms and the Canadian agriculture and agri-food economy.

Are there any comments on the motion?

Mr. Longfield.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): This is unfortunate. We have witnesses here who I really want to talk to.

As the last time a motion like this came forward, we had just completed consultations. We don't have a policy that we can look at. We have a study going on in another committee, at finance, so I don't see duplicating that study as worthwhile. We're at the end of the consultation period, but we don't have a policy to discuss at this committee, so I won't be supporting the motion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Longfield.

[*Translation*]

Are there any other comments?

Mrs. Boucher, you have the floor.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I tabled this motion simply because we are hearing a lot about affordable food in our committee these days.

It's important to talk about it, given the new tax and everything that is currently going on in agri-food. Our current study is on ways to make food affordable. Should the taxes we don't understand be added, the monologue must become a dialogue. Some witnesses who have appeared before us are, themselves, stuck in this situation.

I think it's a very good motion. We should at least discuss this matter at the next meeting.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Barlow.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just really quickly, I want to assure you that my colleague is being forthright here. My colleague is using her question time to do this motion.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes.

Mr. John Barlow: It's not taking up any time at all for you to question the witnesses.

In terms of your being concerned about duplication of studies, Health Canada is doing almost the exact same study that we're doing, and there doesn't seem to be an issue in terms of duplicating this study. I think the implications of these tax changes are quite profound, and I think it really is important for us to take a look at them and the impacts they will have on the agriculture industry.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barlow.

Are there any other comments?

[Translation]

I guess not.

We'll proceed with the vote.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I request a recorded vote.

[English]

The Chair: We'll have a recorded vote.

(Motion negatived: nays 5; yeas 4)

[Translation]

The Chair: You have a minute and a half left, Mrs. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I found the testimony of Ms. Ventin of the FCPC very interesting.

You said that, despite your disagreement with labelling, you agreed with the government's moving forward with this.

Could you tell me a little more about front-of-package labelling?

[English]

Ms. Carla Ventin: Yes, and thanks for the question. At Food and Consumer Products of Canada, our position is that we do support Health Canada's healthy eating strategy, part of which is the objective of front-of-package labelling. What we think is important to do is to engage with stakeholders in an open and meaningful manner, in a way that is respectful of different views.

What we are concerned about is Health Canada's approach to the process, the timelines, and most recently, a lack of representation of a meeting we had with them, a misrepresentation of the public record.

•(1555)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mrs. Boucher, you have only five seconds left.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you, I'm done. I have my answer: it's a monologue.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Boucher.

[English]

Mr. Longfield, you have six minutes.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

To go back into this study, I'm very interested in the food policy as it relates to different scales or sizes of business. Each of you touched on that in certain ways.

Maybe I could start with Ms. Ventin about the labelling issue and how large retailers could look at labelling by putting information on the shelves versus the products, or by using different technologies, and whether that's an option that would play out with smaller manufacturers in terms of different ways of getting the same information versus going to a label. Does your group have an option in terms of suggestions for labelling?

Ms. Carla Ventin: Sure. We know that for packages of food products on grocery store shelves you can't put everything on a label. I think that's really important. In terms of what FCPC has done, we've launched a digital label in Canada. It's called "SmartLabel". It was launched south of the border as well, very successfully.

What this means is that while we do want to provide consumers with information, we can't put all of the information on a package, and consumers may very well be interested in where the wheat was sourced for the specific product and also in other information. That is available to us.

It's interesting, and I always like to reiterate what the Canadian Food Inspection Agency says on this, which is that most Canadians get their nutritional information online and digitally, so we should regulate for tomorrow, not today.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Is it available for different ranges and sizes...?

Ms. Carla Ventin: Yes, it is. We are expanding it to other products as well. It's something that FCPC is bringing to Canada, and it is very widely supported throughout government, especially by CFIA.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Great. Thank you.

Ms. Knezevic, you mentioned making sure the food policy covers small-scale operations. Do you have some specific concerns that we should make sure we include in our study?

Ms. Irena Knezevic: I can give you a couple of examples. I'm sure our membership would have a wide range of recommendations. For meat producers, for instance, there's a variety of different standards—provincial and federal regulations—regarding food safety. Many of the small meat producers don't even have proper access to abattoirs. Alberta has been doing some really interesting experimentation with mobile abattoirs, and this links directly to our first recommendation, which is to think of innovation differently.

Mobile abattoirs, for instance, are not about inventing new technologies to check food safety. They're really about making existing technologies more accessible to small-scale producers. That would be one example of what we have in mind.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Great. Thank you. It's really helpful for us to be working on the pillars, so that we can try to get information for each pillar.

Ms. Cloutier, you mentioned what was being omitted in the study. That's actually exactly what we're trying to do, to fill in areas that we might not have been studying before. Things like reciprocal standards or local purchasing, access to markets, and labour and productivity—we have all that on the record.

In terms of priorities, is there a priority area that you see from your members that we should make sure we don't miss, or is that all we need to cover?

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Cloutier: The workforce, productivity, new technologies and innovation are certainly priorities for the food industry.

[English]

If we do not innovate, we won't be competitive. With all the new agreements with Europe, and hopefully with the U.S. again, we need to be competitive and productive. Right now, there's a labour shortage in Canada for the manufacturing sectors and ours is very much affected by this, so for us that's among the top priorities.

• (1600)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: We see that in Guelph. The university has just updated a study showing four jobs for every graduate in a certain program.

In the limited time left, if we look at the idea of a supercluster around food, could each of you provide a short answer on where a supercluster might be able to provide value that would help us with our food strategy?

Maybe we'll go left to right with Ms. Knezevic.

Ms. Irena Knezevic: I'm quite familiar with some of the current efforts around superclusters. To the best of my knowledge, they are very much focused on digital agriculture technologies, and they are really looking at the smart agriculture approach.

We don't see a problem with that necessarily, but many of our members are concerned that it does not pay attention to the social and environmental impacts these technologies have, and it also does not give enough credit to the social and environmental innovation that is already happening on the ground in Canada.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Great. Thank you.

Ms. Sylvie Cloutier: We have a submission in with Guelph, so we're talking more about intelligence with regard to innovation, accessibility of innovation, and information on what's available out there to make our industry more productive.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Yes. I know Guelph is focused on humanities as well. I think they had nine departments looking at food.

Ms. Carla Ventin: I would echo Sylvie's comments. I also think there's a real role for the clusters to be focused on technology. For example, the 2014 KPMG report on automation and robotics in the food processing sector showed that our industry is lagging far behind those of our competitors. If you look at the auto sector, it is highly automated. The food processing sector is not.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ventin. Thank you, Mr. Longfield.

[Translation]

Ms. Brosseau, you have six minutes.

[English]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

I'm really happy the government is going forward with the promise to elaborate a food strategy. Our party has worked really hard over the last few years on developing a food strategy from farm to fork. It's going to be important that they get it right.

One of the themes is access to food. We know that Canada is a rich country. We produce a lot of food—amazing quality food—and we export a lot of food, but there are still millions and millions of Canadians who are food insecure. There are 900,000 Canadians who go to food banks. Food banks were created to be a temporary solution. I have nothing against the food banks, but I would hope to see the day where we don't have food banks in Canada.

In 2012, the UN special rapporteur came to Canada and talked about the importance of the right to food. In these four themes, we don't adequately address food insecurity and how to make sure people have access to good quality food. I was wondering if you could speak about the importance of underscoring that right to food. Does the government adequately deal with the fact that we have so many food-insecure people in Canada?

Ms. Ventin. Then I guess we can go back that way.

Ms. Carla Ventin: Sure. Thank you.

I know that previously at committee, there was Food Banks Canada. I know that although Canadians spend about 10% of their disposable income on food, there are definitely regions and remote areas in Canada where people spend far more, and food is not affordable for those segments of the population. It disproportionately affects those segments of the population across the country, so we absolutely recognize that this is an issue.

This goes back to the importance of having the national food policy as a whole-of-government approach. We really do need to bring in other federal departments and the provinces to coordinate on an approach to address food affordability across the country.

For FCPC's part, we play an active role in supporting Food Banks Canada. Our member companies individually play active roles in contributing and working closely with Food Banks Canada as well as participating in breakfast programs, for example, across the country. That's company-driven as well. But absolutely, food and security is a big issue and a big challenge in Canada.

[Translation]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Would you like to add anything, Mrs. Cloutier?

Ms. Sylvie Cloutier: I would like to add some information.

In Quebec, for example, the food industry is the largest contributor to Moisson Montréal, Moisson Québec and other Moisson organizations, as well as La Tablée des Chefs. These organizations collect food scraps or offer classes to teach people how to cook them. There are also programs such as the Club des petits déjeuners, a program that was created in Quebec.

There are gaps in large urban centres. Some neighbourhoods have no grocery stores where you can buy fruits and vegetables, among other things. For example, there are parts of Montreal where, aside from at convenience stores, citizens don't have access to fresh food.

Remote areas also suffer from this lack of access. However, the problem is mainly related to the transport of fresh products, of course.

As for cities, there are more and more urban agricultural programs. It is an increasingly important movement. Having said that, you have to make sure there are enough product distributors, so that residents in each neighbourhood can have access to fresh produce.

With respect to remote areas, this is a problem that needs to be addressed in collaboration with the departments involved. Food is actually available, but transportation is difficult. That is another issue, but certainly we need to look at it.

•(1605)

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Places that have no grocery store nearby are called food deserts. As you explained, the only option to get food is to go to the convenience stores where the choices are not necessarily very healthy.

As you mentioned, Mrs. Cloutier, there is one thing we are doing very well in Quebec. In Montreal, Mauricie and Lanaudière, there is a project under which Moisson operates with retailers. It collects unsold products to bring them to the various community organizations that help people in need. However, there is an infrastructure problem. There aren't enough refrigerators and trucks. That could be a very important recommendation in our report.

[English]

Ms. Ventin, you talked about food packaging. One of the pillars we talk about is environment. Sometimes when you go to the supermarket, you can see bananas that are packaged up in plastic and styrofoam and stuff like that. Can you maybe talk about some measures that the industry is going ahead with?

The Chair: Unfortunately, we're out of time, Ms. Brosseau. Perhaps you'll have a chance for another question.

[Translation]

We will now go to Mr. Breton for six minutes.

Mr. Pierre Breton: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank our witnesses for their excellent briefs and their comments, which are extremely important for our current study.

Mrs. Cloutier, it's always a pleasure to have you here. Your organization is in my riding. It is always nice to see witnesses from home.

All three of you talked a lot about innovation and how we are a leader in this area. I listened to Ms. Knezevic speak about the right to food. These are subjects that I find very interesting.

There is one element I consider important. Obviously, we know that healthy eating habits are also made by educating consumers. At the end of the day, it's the people who decide what they're going to eat and what they're going to get at the grocery store, from the producer or elsewhere.

Could you tell me about each of these aspects?

In terms of learning, how can we strategically better integrate consumer education and skills training so that they know what they are eating? This is an important aspect.

I'll start with you, Mrs. Cloutier.

Ms. Sylvie Cloutier: Education is obviously the number one aspect. We must collectively work to launch a campaign that will allow consumers to better understand product labelling, know what they are eating and decide what is good for them as individuals. That is the first thing.

There is also the whole aspect of the exercise. We tend to put a lot of emphasis on diet, and it is indeed a primary consideration, but physical activity is also part of an overall balance. We believe that physical activity needs to be re-established in schools and made part of an education campaign on healthy lifestyles.

That is an important element. People say that children don't get outside anymore and are spending a lot of time on electronic games. People must absolutely start moving again. I think that would be an essential part of a campaign that the government could launch.

•(1610)

Mr. Pierre Breton: Ms. Knezevic, do you have anything to add?
[English]

Ms. Irena Knezevic: Yes, I do. Most of our evidence shows that despite the great deal of information we have about food, we are not eating any more healthfully than we have in the past. The main determinants of what we eat are habit and convenience. In other words, in line with social determinants of health, we know that it is not a knowledge of nutrition but the food environments, cultural and physical environments—what kind of food we're surrounded with, what kind of people we eat with—that will influence our eating habits the most.

To that end, if we're thinking about the education of children and youth, and thinking about classes on nutrition, for instance, I would say it's more important to think about things like a national school food program, which I know you heard about from previous witnesses and will probably be hearing more about, and integrating education that is more broadly looking at food literacy with such things as cooking and gardening classes. Rather than just delivering information and transmitting it to our young students, we should be thinking about creating an environment where they integrate food into their lifestyle in a different way.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Breton: I love your answer.

[English]

Ms. Carla Ventin: Consumer education is extremely important. That's why five years ago FCPC launched the consumer education program in partnership with Health Canada. It was very successful. Basically, it educated Canadians on understanding the nutrition facts table on the back of the pack. Health Canada determined that there was a gap there and that people did not quite understand. It was very successful, and it showed a fantastic working relationship between industry and Health Canada. It educated consumers. It got them to understand about balance and to understand individual choices. For example, if I've just finished running a marathon, I'm okay with a little bit of sodium in my food products. If I'm a sedentary person suffering from some chronic disease, that may not be good for me.

We are very concerned, however, that Health Canada did cancel that consumer education program at the same time they introduced their proposals for warning labels on the front of food packages. That does not build on the consumer education efforts made to date.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Breton: I have a minute left.

Ms. Knezevic, you caught my attention with the right to food. Ms. Brosseau just spoke about it a little. In 50 seconds, could you tell us how you see this? Do you have one or two specific recommendations?

[English]

Ms. Irena Knezevic: First, we heard a great deal about income inequality during the June food summit, and I think that should be taken very seriously. A significant part of the problem with access to food in Canada is really about income. Many of the other costs in people's lives are inflexible, so they have to be flexible with their food budget and that is one of the big challenges for Canadians. I hope that the comments that came from Employment and Social Development and other ministries, especially Indigenous Affairs, during the June summit will be taken very seriously.

Another aspect is to think about rural community development in a more holistic way, and how small-scale agriculture and food enterprises can be integrated into community development to benefit particularly rural communities in Canada and help them realize that access to the right to food.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Breton: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Breton.

[English]

Now we have Mr. Bagnell for six minutes.

[Translation]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here.

[English]

I have two questions.

You probably know that people of the Arctic are the most starving people in the country, with the farthest access from food. My first

question is a general one. Do you have any suggestions for improving the food security of the poorest people?

Second, when they changed the food mail program to nutrition north, they said it wouldn't really work. We are looking at improving nutrition north. Do you have any suggestions?

If there is any time left.... Irena Knezevic, when you talked about social policy and innovation, does that mean GMO foods to help increase food for the poor? There is a big movement about labelling GMO foods. Do you have any comment on that?

These are all the questions I have. Any one of the three can answer.

● (1615)

Ms. Carla Ventin: I'll touch on the most recent question you asked, on the GMO labelling of foods. We believe that the food packages should be reserved for health and safety labelling, since there is limited space. We can't put everything on the label. There is no health or safety reason to label GMO foods. Therefore, we would like the government to stay committed to the science-based approach to labelling.

It's important to point out, as well, that Canada has gained international, global recognition for food safety standards because we are committed to science-based labelling.

Ms. Sylvie Cloutier: I won't repeat what Carla just said on GMO foods.

[Translation]

With respect to remote areas, specific crop projects need to be tailored to different regions to allow people in remote areas to meet their needs in part. Greenhouses should be installed or agriculture suitable for their region should be adopted, of course, but they also have to be able to get supplies on a year-round basis. Animals may need to be moved from the east to the north. We really need to rethink how we feed our remote communities.

[English]

Ms. Irena Knezevic: I will not presume to have answers for the north, but from what I know, having talked to people who live in the north and do their research in the north, supportive initiatives are already happening on the ground. The Northern Farm Training Institute, for instance, has been delivering farm training to northern communities in a culturally sensitive way.

Thinking about moving farming, greenhouses, and gardens to the north is actually a very culturally sensitive issue for very significant historical reasons. Programs like the Northern Farm Training Institute and also programs that exist in northern communities that try to rebuild traditional access to country foods and to re-establish traditional diets are some of the critical points that are needed, in conjunction with the sorely needed reform of nutrition north.

With respect to your question about genetically modified foods, I'll reiterate that technologies are really, I think, a flawed approach to solving what are fundamentally social issues. We have social inequality and we're trying to resolve it through technology, and it's not going to work. If we want to realize that right to food, we need to think about social innovation, and we need to think about what the communities themselves see as a solution to their food access problems.

With regard specifically to GMOs, there is a scientific consensus right now that they're as safe to eat as any conventional food, but that does not eliminate the social and environmental consequences that are associated with genetically modified foods that are evidenced the world over.

I think the recent report, which you mentioned earlier, by Olivier De Schutter—the former UN special rapporteur on the right to food who led the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems—called “From Uniformity to Diversity”, is one of the most significant reports on food systems in the world right now. It really emphasizes that those new technologies that promote large-scale monoculture growth of basically three crops that form half of our world diet represent the most troublesome trend in food systems right now. It states that we need to look at diversifying, in terms of the types of practices that our food production entails, the scale, and the kinds of social organizations, including things like co-ops and thinking about the food industry as something that isn't just about business and corporate entities but also includes social enterprises and co-ops. It will be a really significant step if we want to take that seriously.

I hope that answers your question.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: You all support the innovative-type greenhouses and the funds we're giving to aboriginal people to train their people in agriculture in the north.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bagnell.

Now we'll go to Ms. Wagantall for six minutes.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for being here today.

I'm from Saskatchewan, and my riding is very focused on agriculture and agri-foods. Obviously, this topic is really important to me on a number of different levels.

When I look at these four key themes, the one that I would like to focus on is conserving our soil, water, and air. I was able to attend an Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan, APAS, prairie agriculture summit on carbon this summer. With a number of the topics—for example, the science of carbon sequestration, nutrient management and rotations—I was able to see cover crops this summer that just amazed me with how they can quickly improve the quality of the soils.

Also, there was a topic entitled “Frontiers of Research in Carbon and Agriculture”, and for that particular section the speaker was Maurice Moloney, Ph.D., executive director and CEO of the Global Institute for Food Security. He was also an agri-sciences research professor in the department of biological sciences at the University

of Calgary. These are high-quality people bringing their perspectives. He commented on the reality that, in Saskatchewan, we already have 25 years of documented research on how best to do this, and we are already doing it. We're the best carbon sequesterers in the world, actually. Many other countries are now coming to us to learn about zero tillage, how we take care of our pasture lands, and that type of thing.

Saskatchewan has been doing this already for 25 years. The incentive is there because of the love of the land and because, of course, we need to take care of it if we want it to yield the yields we want to see. He also indicated that, moving forward already with what's being innovated and done naturally here, we will within the next decade take care of any carbon sequestering related to the oil sands from what Saskatchewan does already.

When we're talking about access to affordable food and the cost of food production, do you have any comments on what imposing a carbon tax will do to the production of food in Canada and how that will impact food insecurity—I myself faced food banks at one point in my life, as a student—and that type of thing? I'd just like some comments on that, Irene, if you'd like to respond.

• (1620)

Ms. Irena Knezevic: I'm reluctant to comment on a specific tax because I represent a really wide network of researchers.

What you're commenting on, though, these practices that have to do with carbon sequestration and regenerating the soil, take our approach to sustainable agriculture a step beyond the pillar that just talks about conservation. It brings the lens into something we discussed at the June food summit, which is regeneration of our ecosystems.

There is real promise in thinking about those agro-ecological approaches that not only minimize the damage we're doing to our soil and the rest of the environment, but can also help us rebuild the soil and ecosystems. The pillar also requires us to think about biodiversity, so what kinds of species of insects and soil microorganisms exist in the soil. Those are the things that can not only benefit the larger society but the farmers as well, because in the long run it minimizes the cost of inputs they need to use in the soil.

I am reluctant to comment on the tax.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: I appreciate that. Thanks.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Cloutier: I can't answer you with respect to agriculture, but in terms of food processing, it's an industry that is currently emitting low levels of carbon dioxide, because we are using energy that is considered clean, especially in Quebec and Ontario. Food processors work according to the field-to-table chain, and they work very closely with scientists and environmental groups to improve the condition of soils and agriculture, at least in Quebec.

Our industry is also upgrading all of its organic and other wastes. Our industry is taking charge because we know very well that sustainable development will allow us to survive in the next hundred years.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Thank you.

Quickly, we're talking about educating and encouraging people to eat healthier. My husband was diagnosed as diabetic, was told it was a progressive disease, and was started on medication. He said, "No, I'm not going to do it this way." Basically, he controls his own diet. That involved removing pretty well anything that had a sugar or a simple carb in it, eating real foods, and exercising. Much to his doctor's amazement, that controls his diabetes—when he's behaving.

However, it took an awful lot of effort. At the same time, the majority of Canadians don't want to go to that effort. How do we educate a younger generation and yet have all those yummy things in their faces all the time?

Diabetes is a huge issue in Canada. We don't want to comment on these things, yet in reality it's costing our health system.

• (1625)

Ms. Irena Knezevic: Pat Vanderkooy from Dietitians of Canada is going to speak in the next session. She's probably better equipped to answer that question.

The Chair: Unfortunately, we're out of time, Ms. Wagantall. You might have a chance in.... No, I guess not, this is the last speaker.

This is all the time we have for this session. I want to thank all of you for being with us today.

Ms. Knezevic, Madame Cloutier, and Ms. Ventin, thanks for being here.

Before we break, we will be suspending at 5:15. There's a vote, so at 5:15 sharp we will go. I request that we perhaps move the business section to Thursday, if it's okay, since both Monsieur Drouin and Monsieur Berthold are not here.

Mr. John Barlow: That would be great.

• (1630)

The Chair: We'll suspend for the change, and thanks again to the panel.

• (1625)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1630)

[Translation]

The Chair: Welcome to hour two of the meeting. Actually, this hour will be reduced to 45 minutes because of a vote.

We will begin right away.

During this second hour, we will hear from Cam Dahl, president of Cereals Canada.

[English]

We have Dietitians of Canada, Pat Vanderkooy, manager of public affairs, food and nutrition. Also, with Pulse Canada, we have Gordon Bacon, chief executive officer. Welcome everyone.

We'll start with an up-to-seven minute presentation, if you want, Mr. Dahl.

Mr. Cam Dahl (President, Cereals Canada): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Members of the committee, it's very good to be before you again. My name is Cam Dahl and I'm the president of Cereals Canada.

Just to briefly touch on who Cereals Canada is, we are a value chain organization. We bring together farmers, crop development and seed companies, exporters, and processors. The goal of this broad, diverse collaboration of partners is to enhance the domestic and international competitiveness of Canadian cereals industries. Cereals Canada is guided by a board of 18 directors that draws representation from each of these key stakeholder groups.

Just as a bit of an introduction, Cereals Canada supports the efforts of the Government of Canada to develop a comprehensive food policy. We agree that the four broad themes cover the key areas in which interdepartmental and cross-commodity policy would be helpful, specifically, increasing access to affordable food, improving health and food safety, conserving our soil and water, and growing more high-quality food.

Each of these four policy areas is individually large and complex. Developing overarching goals that reach consensus across different departments of the Government of Canada, provincial and territorial governments, non-governmental organizations, farm leaders, and companies is not a simple task, neither will be developing policies aimed at accomplishing these goals.

It is because of this complexity of issues that Cereals Canada makes our most important recommendation: do not rush this process and do not be driven by deadlines. We understand that there is a strong push from many quarters to have a national food policy in place quickly. We think that would be a mistake. A hastily constructed policy will undoubtedly miss key elements that are important both to Canadian society as a whole and to Canadian agricultural producers.

Taking the necessary time to get this policy right is more important than meeting specific deadlines. The first step in getting this process right is the development of strong and effective governance that will drive the process forward towards consensus. The development of effective governance is the focus of this submission from Cereals Canada. We believe an appropriate framework for the engagement on policy development is critical to achieving consensus on broad policy goals.

Targeted input on the four key policy themes is something we'll touch on later, but I would like to focus on governance.

Cereals Canada proposes the development of a national food policy council, the broad mandate of which would be to provide advice and guidance to the federal, provincial, and territorial governments as we move forward with the development of a national policy.

The council will also serve to bring together diverse stakeholders while creating linkages to the existing framework surrounding Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. Cereals Canada believes that the key elements for good governance for the national food policy include agriculture, civil society, and interdepartmental representation from the Government of Canada, provincial, and territorial governments, and that they will provide a pathway for issue- and commodity-specific research and policy development.

The need for broad representation from across Canada, from various sectors of the economy, and from federal, provincial, and territorial governments will result in a national food policy that is large. That is simply unavoidable. However, good governance indicates that the council should be limited if it is to be effective. Cereals Canada suggests that the overall size of the council be capped at 60 individuals in total. We propose 16 representatives to be drawn from agriculture and agri-food, 16 representatives to be drawn from civil society, and 24 representatives to be drawn from federal, provincial, and territorial departments, including the chair, which we suggest should be drawn from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

I would like to touch on agriculture and agri-food representation. Cereals Canada believes that the basic structure for consultations with and input from the Canadian agriculture and agri-food sectors is already in place through the value chain round tables. We therefore propose that the industry chairs of the following round tables comprise the industry representation for the national food policy council.

I want to read them out, because doing so will show the complete nature of this representation. We have a committee on food safety, the beef round table, the national environmental farm plan, the food processing round table, the grains round table, the horticulture round table, an organics round table, a pork round table, a poultry round table, a pulse round table, seafood, seed, sheep, special crops, the round table for sustainable beef, and the round table for sustainable crops.

● (1635)

There are key advantages to this structure. First, the round tables as a whole are representative of Canadian agriculture and agri-food. In addition, each of the round tables draws from a broad representation from the individual sectors that they represent. This includes, where appropriate, representation from non-governmental organizations and civil society, and in particular at the round table for sustainable beef and the round table for sustainable crops. Second, and this is important, linking to the round tables provides the national food policy council with the ability to delegate specific aspects of research and policy development to the appropriate industry and government representatives. This will allow the council to deal with the complexity of the issues that were outlined in my introduction.

To touch on civil society, I will not presume to name the individual groups or representatives from civil society that would be appropriate representatives for the national food policy council; however, we do strongly hold that the principles applied to the recommendations for agriculture be applied to the selection for civil society, namely, a broad representation of viewpoints. Representatives should have a national perspective, and representation should

be selected to allow the national food policy council to delegate areas of specific research and policy development.

Finally, Cereals Canada supports Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's leadership of the development of the national food policy and leadership of the food policy council. This includes a recommendation that the food policy council be chaired by a senior representative of the department. As the lead department for the Government of Canada, AAFC would provide secretariat services to the council.

It is important to have a broad representation of the various government departments involved. I have listed them in the brief. I am not going to read them out, but they include Health research, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, of course, Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Social Development, and Trade. There is a significant list—

The Chair: Unfortunately, we are out of time. I thank you for your presentation.

Ms. Vanderkooy, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Pat Vanderkooy (Manager, Public Affairs, Food and Nutrition, Dietitians of Canada): Thank you.

I'm Pat Vanderkooy, and I'm here with Dietitians of Canada. We're the national professional association for our regulated health profession. We provide leadership in shaping food and nutrition policy.

We too congratulate the government on leading in the development of a food policy for Canada. We're very excited about that. To ensure the mandate and vision for a food policy, we offer today five recommendations. I'll probably spend the majority of my time on the first two.

Our first recommendation is that a food policy for Canada must include nutrition and health as key policy drivers to ensure a sustainable food system that promotes healthy diets.

Change is needed in our food consumption patterns to reduce the burden of diet-related disease. We need full policy integration with a common vision for population health and sustainability of the food system in its social, environmental, and economic aspects. High-calorie intakes and over-consumption of food and beverages that are high in sodium, sugars, saturated fat, and trans fat contribute to these diseases. These diseases have further complications that impact physical and mental health, decrease capacity for work, and increase premature death, so they have impacted our economy very directly.

We need more change in our food supply, specifically in the composition of the value-added portion of our food supply. Evidence from the past five decades shows how consumer eating habits have changed, with serious consequences to health and substantial costs to the health system and the environment. These are external costs. The food system players that we often mention in agriculture and agri-food are not paying directly for these costs. Consumers need healthy food environments where healthy choices are the default, where I can buy a can of tomatoes without salt as the default price instead of having to pay extra for the privilege of the salt withheld, so to speak.

What are these costs of diet-related diseases? In Canada we estimate that the five main diet-related diseases in Canada cost \$26 billion annually in direct and indirect health expenses alone. PHAC has estimated that the total expenses, when they talk about the cost to the workforce and premature death, are around \$68 billion. We're paying for that. All of us are paying for that. We're paying for it in money and we're paying for it in the costs to our society, really. As you know, once you get involved with the health care system, it's time-consuming. It's a lot of anguish. Our health system is overburdened. We're having to make more and more difficult choices.

The revenue that we put toward our publicly funded health care is in contrast to the revenue we get from food manufacturing firms, which provide an injection of \$21 billion into the Canadian economy on an annual basis. I'm getting these cost estimates from the nutrition labelling cost analysis that was put forward when the nutrition facts table was updated. Compare \$26 billion, or a total cost of \$68 billion, with the \$21 billion that is injected from the food industry. That's not really a sustainable business case.

I'm not suggesting that we could get rid of all diet-related disease, or that it's all due to what we have done within our agri-food industry. I am saying that there's an urgent need here to re-examine the priorities within our food system and to change the composition of our food supply—what we emphasize in growing, what we emphasize in producing, and how we produce it—to make the healthy choices the default choices. Today's agri-food industry must keep on reformulating, wherever and whenever possible.

I need to emphasize that this is work that is already being done and that needs to keep on being done. That's why we support Health Canada's mandated healthy eating strategy. It's a mandate just like the food policy is a mandate.

• (1640)

We're working toward healthier food products. That includes a shift to eliminating trans fat, monitoring sodium, initiating extra labelling in the form of front-of-pack labelling, and restricting child-directed marketing. Within "A Food Policy for Canada", the new dietary guidance, with evidence-based guiding principles and environmental considerations, must inform the policy direction.

Our second recommendation is that a food policy for Canada must address the urgent challenges and unique food systems in northern and remote communities, and especially food insecurity amongst indigenous peoples.

Household food insecurity affects one in eight. I think one in eight is also what we say about the impact from food safety concerns. In fact, when you look at the prevalence in the population, one in four is the impact from just one diet-related disease—diabetes and prediabetes. When thinking about that one in eight being affected by some degree of household food insecurity, where we talk about food affordability, that first pillar, it's about the sufficiency of income.

• (1645)

The Chair: I'll have to ask you to conclude. We're just about out of time.

Ms. Pat Vanderkooy: The sufficiency of income means that food is affordable in some regions where people have good incomes, but

it's not affordable where people have low incomes. There, we talk about income supports and local supports.

Nutrition north Canada subsidizes transportation only to selected communities for fresh foods in retail stores. It is not targeting food insecurity or the population that specifically suffers food insecurity, and it is not facilitating greater access to traditional and country foods.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vanderkooy. We will have to end it there.

Mr. Bacon, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Gordon Bacon (Chief Executive Officer, Pulse Canada): Thank you.

I'm going to jump right into a discussion of one of the pillars, improving health and food safety.

Improving the health of Canadians should, in my mind, be the lead statement in a Canadian food policy. In the past, government has been particularly fixated on introducing regulations as the primary way to improve health. Regulations to reduce salt or sugar content in foods do not change the use of the salt shaker or the sugar bowl.

Government can play a bigger role in educating consumers about a dietary approach to food choices. Communicating the positive nutrition and health attributes of foods on food packaging is a way to educate consumers and incentivize the food industry to innovate and reformulate to feed the demand for healthier and more sustainable products. A greater presence of credible information sources, such as government-issued dietary guidelines, will be critical in establishing the benchmark that ensures consumers are educated about healthy diets. The food policy presents an opportunity to take action against obesity and diet-related diseases among Canadians, and judge the success by measurable reductions in diet-related disease.

Food safety is important enough to be included both in the pillar of improving health and food safety and in the pillar of access to affordable food. Access to safe food and water is a fundamental human right. What has to be clear in any discussion of food safety is what the exact problem is that needs to be addressed. Canada already has very good food safety rules in place. More rules and higher standards are not a substitute for ensuring that the current rules are being addressed. We all need to question whether more rules will make food safer. Perhaps the focus ought to be on consumer education for safety at home, and working with the food industry to ensure that the current rules are being followed along the entire value chain.

In the pillar of increasing access to affordable food, I would like to differentiate between food and diets. Individual foods can help meet nutrition needs, but overall dietary patterns have the greatest impact on long-term indicators of health. The objectives of a food policy can have a bigger impact if the focus is on ensuring access to an affordable balanced diet, rather than access to individual foods.

The next pillar is conserving our soil, water, and air. Let me spend some time on what is emerging as the biggest shift in global food innovation and the area that needs the most policy attention to ensure that we get it right in Canada and around the world. All of us recognize that the global production of food has a big impact on the planet. I'll save you the statistics. I am supportive of the need to be focusing on food as part of our environmental sustainability plan.

The policy discussion that is needed is about food consumption and ensuring that consumers understand the implications of their decisions. Dr. Jason Clay, of the World Wildlife Fund, raised a very interesting question at the recent Canadian Centre for Food Integrity meeting when he asked, "Should people have a choice about sustainable products, or should all choices be sustainable?"

In my view, we are overly fixated on farming and commodities, when we should be measuring the ecological impact of diets. It will not be enough to simply make incremental improvements to what we already do at the farm level. Thinking inside the box, or whatever the food is packaged in, will give us the opportunity to look at diet, formulations, and innovations in processing and food storage that can reduce water use, food loss, and a range of environmental impacts. You miss all of this when you focus solely on sustainability at the farm level.

The food policy for Canada has to focus on food and the choices that are made by consumers. At a minimum, the focus on sustainability within the food policy has to ensure that it gives consumers the sustainability information they need to make informed choices about which food item they take off the grocery store shelf and take home. Focus first on what goes into the grocery cart, not what goes into the grain cart.

We need dietary metrics for human health and ecological sustainability. The Swedish food policy, which I have a copy of here, opens with this statement:

When it comes to food, it's easy to concentrate on individual nutrients or foods to the exclusion of everything else. But all aspects are interlinked, so it's important to maintain a holistic approach.

This statement emphasizes that a new approach is needed, and many nations have already made the shift. We have to make sure that Canada takes a holistic approach, and not a simple rehash of the easy, old approach.

I can't leave sustainability without mentioning the role that Canadian agriculture plays in feeding the world. The food policy for Canada must recognize that we are an exporting nation and our decisions will have global reach, impacting consumers outside of Canada.

The current approach to environmental policy and food fails to address critical success factors, such as consumer education, a direct link between the policy and a measurable outcome of reduction in greenhouse gas, the need for affordable food, and how it positions

Canada for attracting investment necessary for economic growth in food production and processing. This is clearly a scorecard that says we don't yet have the right approach to food and the environment.

● (1650)

Canada's food policy must align with the goals of economic growth and job creation. Government can foster competitiveness and innovation by providing incentives to place food that meets the health and sustainability goals in front of consumers. Think first of how tax policies and regulations can provide positive motivation for change. Governments, too, can think more about carrots and less use of the stick.

As a relatively small market, Canadian businesses must look beyond our borders for areas of growth. The Canadian government should, therefore, understand how its policies and regulations align with those of our trading partners, such as the U.S. and Europe. Between nations, our goals in health and sustainability are not dissimilar. One can then ask why our approach to tackling these challenges should be different.

There are 36.7 million Canadians, and every one of us has an opinion on food. The success of our food policy will be tested every time one of us goes to the grocery store to shop or looks at a restaurant menu. Clearly, education is needed to reshape a consumer's approach to food. The needed change in consumer behaviour should form the basis of how government chooses to regulate what a company can do and what it can say to keep food safe and ensure that consumers are informed of a bright future. Finally, a Canadian food policy must create economic opportunities and, at the same time, provide a healthy diet to Canadians that's within reach of the food insecure in Canada.

Therefore, the three elements of food policy success will include education, progressive regulation, and action to foster innovation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bacon.

We'll start our questioning round with Mr. Barlow for six minutes.

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for some great information. It's been enlightening. I'm going to drink water, not tea, for the rest of the day, since you talked about some of the numbers on diet-related diseases. I know that's something we have to address in terms of dealing with the root cause, and not the consequences, of some of these problems. I appreciate what you're saying.

One of the concerns I have about food policy is that I believe it's going to be the basis of a new Canada food guide. I think Mr. Bacon showed the Swedish food guide. What concerns me is that it seems that we're picking winners and losers in the agriculture sector. We are going away from animal proteins, such as chicken and beef. We're encouraging Canadians to have only vegetable-based proteins. For us, as a government, and as the ag committee specifically, I don't believe it is our job to be picking winners and losers in the agriculture sector. I think those are all healthy choices.

I would like your opinion. Is this something you've spoken with your members about? What would be your view on what I would consider drastic changes to our Canada food guide in terms of selecting winners and losers in the agriculture sector?

Mr. Dahl, go ahead.

Mr. Cam Dahl: This isn't something Cereals Canada has taken on, but I know it's something that some of my members have significant concerns about. Again, it gets back to ensuring that we're basing our decisions, especially by our regulatory agencies, on science and not what's on the Internet.

• (1655)

Mr. John Barlow: Ms. Vanderkooy.

Ms. Pat Vanderkooy: I would say that the message we've been hearing from Health Canada in the food guide is very much like what the food guide has been saying in the past, so I'm a little bit puzzled by some of the reactions we've heard. I'm not sure that the food guide, and the emphasis on plant-based sources of protein along with animal-based sources of protein, is different from what the message has been in the past.

If you look at the quantities that were suggested for serving sizes, they were small in comparison to what many people in Canada consider to be a regular serving size. In actual fact, I think it's just that you're hearing the message differently now. The emphasis on a balance between animal and plant-based protein sources is not different from what we've seen in the past in the food guide. To me, it's not a crisis, and it's not lacking in evidence because the evidence is there.

Health Canada undertook a comprehensive evidence review. If we have really large amounts of red meat and processed meats in our diets, we know that there's a higher incidence of cancer. That is why they made that particular comment about reducing the amount of red meat in high amounts, but other than that, they just talked about plant-based in general from an environmental sustainability point of view and good health in general.

Mr. John Barlow: Gordon, do you have anything?

Mr. Gordon Bacon: Yes. I don't like to characterize it as animal protein versus plant protein. I think it's a continuum. I think that what we need to look at is the opportunity to address the outcomes that we are looking for—human health, environmental sustainability, affordability of food items—and the pathway we can use to get there.

I think that the current food guide is out of date in a lot of ways. That really needs to be changed. The opening statement in the food guide here is the old approach: to look at individual nutrients or specific foods.

Here's one quick example of change, and it's an example for Cam of the cereals and pulses working together. You can go to a grocery store shelf and find loaves of bread that have differences of three times the fibre and twice the protein of option A versus option B. How do you make a recommendation for how much bread a person should consume when you have this tremendous variability across products?

I think if we're going to foster food innovation, diversification, and affordability, then we need to take a look at the outcomes. This is why I said the approach needs to shift to a dietary approach and not to an individual nutrient or specific food recommendation. I think the evidence shows that we need to look at dietary approaches and provide guidance to consumers on that basis, and I'm sure dieticians would agree.

Ms. Pat Vanderkooy: That's what guiding principle one in Health Canada's newly released document is about.

Mr. John Barlow: Yes, and I appreciate that. I hope Health Canada takes your input to heart because—and I think most of us have seen the first draft for the Canada food guide—explicitly, it doesn't talk about balance. It talks about eating a lot less animal protein and it encourages us to eat vegetables. Anyway—

Ms. Pat Vanderkooy: That's not how I read it. The guiding principle talked about a balance of foods and it named all of those in there.

Mr. John Barlow: Well, that's not how I read it. I appreciate that.

Ms. Pat Vanderkooy: Okay. Dieticians wouldn't teach it as “vegan is the way to go”.

Mr. John Barlow: Sure. I appreciate that.

Ms. Pat Vanderkooy: Vegan is one way, but it's not the only way.

Mr. John Barlow: My last question is for Mr. Dahl and Mr. Bacon.

I met with some of your stakeholders and members in Winnipeg a month ago or so. One of the things that they brought up quite adamantly—and it's a big part of this—is access to affordable food. How do we maintain being able to provide affordable food for Canadians if there are these small business tax changes that might be implemented by the Liberal government, the carbon tax, and the elimination of deferred cash grain tickets? All of these things are going to make life much more expensive for our producers in the field.

Are there any comments from your members on that?

The Chair: On that note, I have to end it there. Perhaps they will have a chance with the other questions.

Thank you, Mr. Barlow.

Madame Nassif, you have six minutes.

[Translation]

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

I would like to thank our three guests for their presentations.

My question will be for Ms. Vanderkooy.

Some people say that there should be intergovernmental cooperation, cooperation with industry leaders, as well as a governance mechanism. Some say that this mechanism could take the form of a council, but it could be something else.

The question is ultimately linked to authority and governance. In your opinion, what concrete power should this governance mechanism have? What would the mission be?

• (1700)

[English]

Ms. Pat Vanderkooy: My third point that I didn't have an opportunity to speak to was about a governance mechanism. An intersectoral group of us just submitted—and I participated in that—a white paper on governance. We did talk about, in fact, what Cam spoke to, which was a national food policy council. I think my only point to add to Cam's description of a national food policy council would be that there be representation to speak to the pillars equally. In civil society, there are a lot of organizations that speak to health and environmental sustainability.

That would be my only comment, that the food policy council represent the diverse views, including the views of the different pillars in the food policy, so that there would be the affordability—therefore, poverty reduction and addressing food insecurity—health, the environment, and the economic implications for the agriculture business.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Would you like to add something, Mr. Dahl?

Mr. Cam Dahl: Yes, I would like to add something.

The reason that we have focused almost exclusively in our initial comments on governance is because of how important it is. If the governance is not right, it doesn't matter what other policies we talk about, it will fail. If Canadians and agriculture producers and the rest of the industry do not see themselves represented in a food policy council, it will not be viewed as being representative of Canadians. If it's not being viewed as being representative of Canadians, it will not be a success.

The rest of what we talk about is not immaterial—it's very material—but if the governance of this process is not right, the rest of what we do will be unsuccessful.

That is why we have focused in our brief—I think you have a copy of the brief that we have submitted—on getting the governance right and ensuring that there's representation from all parts. Of course, I am focused on agriculture, ensuring that there's adequate representation, but beyond that, ensuring there are avenues for consultation and ensuring there's accountability to the specific sectors.

If we don't do that, it doesn't matter what the rest is that we talk about, it won't be successful.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Mr. Bacon, would you like to add something?

Mr. Gordon Bacon: My view might be slightly different.

We have so many government departments, I think a food policy can start out as an aspirational statement, and then we leave it to the players to focus on how they're going to achieve it. Our group has focused less on governance. We don't see it so much as an ongoing operational matter, as it is to establish a vision for where we want to go and then let all of the different departments—all of the food industry and all of primary agriculture—focus on how we're going to achieve that. Then, come back and review it to see what kind of progress we're making.

I'm not putting the same emphasis on a governance structure for something as vast as food policy.

[Translation]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: My colleague Mr. Barlow spoke about choices in the food guide. Red meat is virtually banned and not recommended.

You represent the Dietitians of Canada. How do you think a food policy could bridge the gap between the potential benefits of healthy eating and the economic success of farmers?

[English]

Ms. Pat Vanderkooy: We have not said that we are looking to cut out red meat production, by any means.

[Translation]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: We often hear that red meat isn't recommended.

[English]

Ms. Pat Vanderkooy: It's not recommended to be consumed in large quantities every day. There's a difference between consuming smaller quantities of some of these higher carbon footprint sources of protein on a daily basis compared with not eating it at all.

That goes back to looking at a variety of sources of protein. We are one of the biggest pulse producers I believe in the world. They are a fabulous source of protein. I'm not saying that pulse farmers need to be out of business or that meat growers need to be out of business. There's a balance. We can get our protein from all of these sources, and none of that is bad. I don't think that that's what Canada's food guide is saying either. In the principles, if you look at their examples of protein, it includes all of them.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you. I'm going to have to cut it off there.

I must apologize, Ms. Vanderkooy, that I had cut your time by about 10 seconds. I was looking at the clock in a different way, so I gave you an extra 30 seconds on this one.

Thank you so much, Madame Nassif.

Now Mr. Peschisolido, you have six minutes.

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

I was very impressed with all your presentations. There was so much—

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Chair—

The Chair: I'm so sorry, Madame Brosseau. I keep doing that. Go ahead.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for their presentations today.

We have the four pillars, as the priorities for the government in this food strategy. I think our priority needs to be dealing with poverty. We have so many working poor. When I visit food banks in my riding, community groups tell me that every year it goes up and it changes. There are more families, more kids, and more seniors. I don't think we talk enough about how the government is going to take care of reducing poverty in Canada.

I'm a single mom. There were moments when I worked two and three jobs and I couldn't make ends meet. I think we need to deal with precarious work or maybe we should look at the \$15 hourly wage. We need to deal with the right to food and safe drinking water across Canada.

Madam Vanderkooy, at the end of your presentation, you spoke about nutrition north. In Canada, the price of food varies across the country and in first nation communities, it costs a lot more. Could you talk about how nutrition north works or doesn't work, what you think needs to be done, and what needs to be included in the elaboration of a food strategy?

Ms. Pat Vanderkooy: Nutrition north Canada currently subsidizes for the benefit of everyone at the retail stores. It doesn't focus on providing food access for people who have difficulty with food access. Their focus has been fresh food, which we all know is difficult to transport and has had its own challenges.

We would suggest that the priorities be looking at staples in the food supply when it comes to market food, remembering that country and traditional foods are different than the market foods that we typically talk about as our only food sources. As well as the staples for market foods, we would suggest enhancing their ability to have access to country foods, which is land and water access, and having enough financial resources to hunt and fish.

Also, we suggest providing some supports for local agriculture to increase their ability to have fresh foods locally and some storage infrastructure, so that we aren't having to transport in, at times when it's really difficult to do the transportation, but can have infrastructure for storage that is good for dry storage as well as frozen storage.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Dahl, you spoke about the food council. I think it is really important to have an ongoing discussion and make sure that we have all actors around the table. We know that there are different commodity round-table groups and they've done amazing work.

Could you elaborate a little more on the importance of having this table?

Mr. Cam Dahl: Yes. It gets back to that point of governance and for all parts of agriculture and civil society. I think we need to have that dialogue and something like an adequately representative food council would allow for that dialogue. Something that would be of benefit as well would be to get parts of civil society and agriculture

talking to each other about food policy to increase understanding of how agriculture works and the sustainability of our industry.

I think one of the key factors is to ensure that there is accountability back. If Gordon was my representative on the food council and he wasn't doing a good job, then I should be able to fire him to ensure there is accountability and representation.

Also, we need to ensure there's that ability to ask direct research questions, whether they are to dieticians or specific sectors of agriculture. I don't think a food policy council is going to have that capability within itself. If we link back to the value chains and back to agriculture directly, we would have that capability to ask those direct research questions.

● (1710)

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Were our first nations included on this council?

Mr. Cam Dahl: Again, from my perspective, I was looking at where the agriculture would be represented. I think there should be equal representation from civil society, and I'm not going to pretend to figure out how that selection should be done.

Ms. Pat Vanderkooy: Typically civil society ends up doing health, environment, and indigenous concerns. All of those concerns are wrapped up in civil society if you take agriculture as the one piece and governments at FPT levels as the other.

Mr. Cam Dahl: I would very much disagree that environment and sustainability are not part of agriculture, because they very much are.

Ms. Pat Vanderkooy: They are, but they would be separately represented. There's a difference between how agriculture would represent its own sustainability issues and how another environmental group would represent them, or how health considerations would be rolled in versus the case with a group that's very focused on health, so that's where civil society would be represented.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vanderkooy.

We have a couple of minutes.

Joe, it's your turn.

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: Mr. Dahl, you mentioned earlier that we shouldn't go ahead quickly. We shouldn't rush the process. Elaborate. What do you mean? What are your timelines. Why do you think we're going a bit too fast?

Mr. Cam Dahl: I think my key point is to not set deadlines and say we are going to have a national food policy by January 15 or whatever the day is, because these are incredibly complex questions and they're incredibly complex national policies. To me, it is more important to get the structure right to ensure that we can have those conversations, because I think, getting back to the food policy council, that's where we can facilitate some of those discussions for which there might not be an understanding across various sectors. We need to get that right, and that is going to take some ongoing dialogue, because that is very complex.

If we haven't completed the task by a particular day, let's not just close our tents and say this is it and make a decision and move on, because inevitably a rushed solution will not be the right solution.

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: Madam Vanderkooy, I was intrigued by your numbers. Your argument seemed to be that it's not sustainable, not just in terms of health and environment but also economically our food system doesn't make sense. On your ledger you have "good" at \$21 billion and "bad" at \$68 billion and \$26 billion. Basically, we're out \$73 billion as a society. Is that an accurate description of what you said?

If that is the case, how would you change that?

Ms. Pat Vanderkooy: What I was showing was the cost to society. It would be \$68 billion, if you do the accounting PHAC's

way, and if you're really specific to the health care system, then it would be \$26 billion.

Specifically the agri-food industry, where a lot of the sugars, salts, and fats are added with the way food is processed—it's not grown that way but those extra things are added to it—brings in a revenue injection of \$21 billion. So I'm talking about the revenue injection versus what society is paying for at large, and that's where the whole of government comes in. We have government paying for health care on the one hand, and on the other hand, we're celebrating a cash-revenue injection but we're forgetting that it's related to diseases and other concerns.

• (1715)

The Chair: You had your six minutes. We said 5:15 and I think we're already there. We're going to have to finish.

Mr. Joe Peschisolido: Thank you.

The Chair: I know Ms. Cloutier wanted to ask a question, but I invite you to maybe consult with the panel.

I want to thank the panel so much for being here. It was very interesting.

Mr. Dahl, Ms. Vanderkooy, and also Mr. Bacon, thank you for your input on this important study.

The meeting is adjourned.

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