



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN THE AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

**Report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture
and Agri-Food**

Pat Finnigan, Chair

**MAY 2019
42nd PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION**

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

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**Pat Finnigan
Chair**

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NOTICE TO READER

Reports from committee presented to the House of Commons

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.

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THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

has the honour to present its

SEVENTEENTH REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the Committee has studied the support of Indigenous Canadians in the Agriculture and Agri-Food Industry and has agreed to report the following:

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY	1
LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS	3
SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN THE AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY	5
INTRODUCTION	5
OVERVIEW OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN CANADA’S AGRICULTURE SECTOR	5
A. Socio-Economic Profile of Indigenous Farmers	6
B. What Is Indigenous Agriculture? The Various Perspectives Heard	9
CHALLENGES THAT INDIGENOUS PEOPLES FACE IN THE AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY	11
A. Barriers to Developing Agricultural and Agri-Food Businesses	13
1. Access to Capital	13
2. Access to Land	15
3. Access to Infrastructure	17
SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES	18
A. Current Initiatives and Their Limitations	18
B. Ways to Better Support Indigenous Peoples	22
1. Provide Sufficient Funding Tailored to Local Needs	22
2. Support Indigenous Food Product Exports	24
3. Promote Teaching and Sharing of Agricultural Knowledge	25
CONCLUSION	25
APPENDIX A: LIST OF WITNESSES	27
REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE	29

SUMMARY

From 11 December 2018 to 26 February 2019, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food studied the support for Indigenous Canadians in the agriculture and agri-food industry.

According to Statistics Canada a total of 15,765 people in Canada's agricultural population identified as Indigenous in 2016, making up 2.7% of that population. This figure includes 5,160 Indigenous agricultural operators, or 1.9% of the 270,720 agricultural operators in Canada. Indigenous farm operators live all across Canada, but are especially numerous in Western Canada. However, individuals who identify as Indigenous are under-represented in the Canadian agriculture sector and bring in significantly lower revenues than non-Indigenous farm operators.¹

Indigenous agriculture takes various forms. Some Indigenous communities own major export-oriented operations, but most Indigenous agriculture is small-scale and focuses on meeting the needs of the community and improving its food security.

The evidence helped the Committee members understand the scope of the food insecurity problem that is affecting some reserves and most Inuit communities. A number of witnesses linked support for Indigenous peoples in the agriculture sector to Indigenous communities' food sovereignty.

The Committee recognizes that limited access to capital, land and high-quality agricultural infrastructure remains a major barrier to the development of agricultural and agri-food businesses in Indigenous communities.

The Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food and its provincial and territorial partners have developed programs for Indigenous Canadians. However, a number of witnesses maintained that Indigenous agriculture can and should be better supported. Providing adequate funding that is tailored to Indigenous peoples' local realities, supporting exports of Indigenous food products and promoting teaching and sharing of agricultural knowledge are some of the solutions set out in this report.

1 Nicolas Gauthier and Julia White, [*Aboriginal peoples and agriculture in 2016: A portrait*](#), Statistics Canada, 17 January 2019.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of their deliberations committees may make recommendations which they include in their reports for the consideration of the House of Commons or the Government. Recommendations related to this study are listed below.

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada recognize in its policies and programs the role that traditional and local food supply play in supporting the health of Indigenous communities, as well as the traditional importance of the land and agriculture for Indigenous communities..... 11

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada, in partnership with Indigenous communities, ensure that Indigenous financial institutions have the resources they need to operate and make the current funding conditions more flexible to promote Indigenous entrepreneurship in the agriculture and agri-food industry. 15

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada consult Canada's Indigenous communities to assess how better financial support could be provided in the agriculture and agri-food industry. 23

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada develop collaborative approaches to food and nutrition policy development in which Indigenous peoples can participate and be directly consulted. 24

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada make sure that Indigenous communities are aware of support for exports available to Canadian small businesses and can take full benefit of it. 24

SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN THE AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

INTRODUCTION

On 1 November 2018, the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food (the Committee) agreed to undertake a study on strengthening support for Indigenous Canadians in the agriculture and agri-food industry, pursuant to the following motion:

That the Committee conduct a study on strengthening indigenous support in the Canadian agriculture and agri-food industries, in order to better understand the unique needs, challenges, and opportunities of indigenous Canadians, and how the government of Canada can better develop agricultural programs and policies that are more inclusive and support greater indigenous participation and growth in the agriculture and agri-food sector.²

The Committee devoted five meetings to this study between 11 December 2018 and 26 February 2019 and heard 23 witnesses. At these meetings, the Committee gathered evidence from First Nations and Inuit representatives, band chiefs, First Nations farmers and entrepreneurs, organizations that work with Indigenous communities, officials from the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food, and academic researchers. Given the limited availability of witnesses and time constraints, the Committee recognizes that the study is not exhaustive.

The evidence heard helped the Committee better understand the needs, challenges and opportunities facing Indigenous communities in Canada's agriculture and agri-food sector.

OVERVIEW OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN CANADA'S AGRICULTURE SECTOR

In 2016, 1,673,785 Canadians identified as Indigenous persons, a figure that represents 4.9% of the population. Indigenous peoples belong to three main groups: members of

2 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food (AGRI), *Minutes of Proceedings*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 1 November 2018.



First Nations, Métis and Inuit.³ This section provides an overview of Indigenous peoples in the agriculture sector.

A. Socio-Economic Profile of Indigenous Farmers

According to the 2016 Census of Agriculture, 15,765 people in Canada's agricultural population identify as Indigenous, which is 2.7% of that population. This figure includes 5,160 Indigenous agricultural operators, or 1.9% of the 270,720 agricultural operators in Canada. Métis are the largest group (69.5% of the Indigenous agricultural population), followed by First Nations (26.2%) and Inuit (0.7%). The Indigenous agricultural population grew by 21.4% between 1996 and 2016.⁴ This increase was due not only to the growth of the overall Indigenous population (which resulted from a longer life expectancy and higher birthrate), but also to the increasing number of people who identify as Indigenous persons each year.⁵

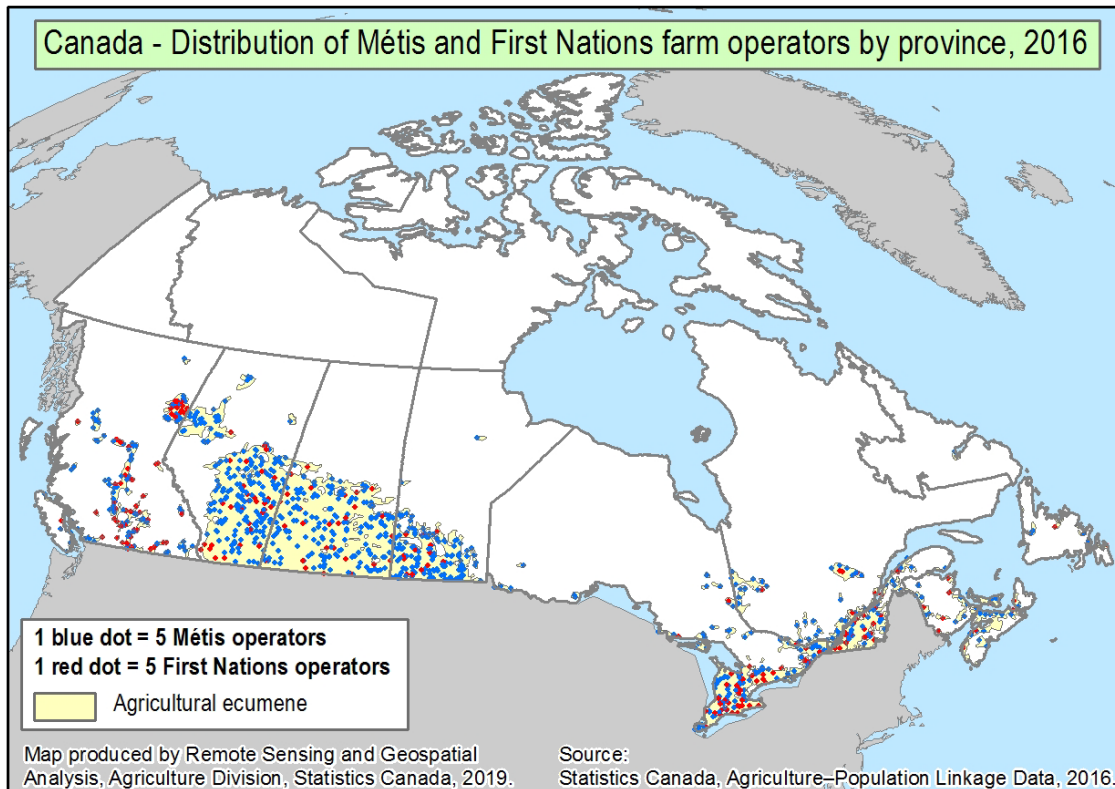
Indigenous farm operators live in all regions of Canada where agriculture occurs (Figure 1). The four Western provinces are home to 70% of Indigenous farm operators. Alberta has the most Indigenous operators, followed by Saskatchewan and British Columbia. Alberta also has the largest number of Métis operators (965), while British Columbia (218) and Ontario (215) have the most First Nations operators. Note that, because there are so few Inuit farmers – they account for only 0.7% of Canada's Indigenous agricultural population – they are not included in the geographic and demographic data presented below.

3 Statistics Canada, [*Aboriginal peoples in Canada: Key results from the 2016 Census*](#), 25 October 2017.

4 Nicolas Gauthier and Julia White, [*Aboriginal peoples and agriculture in 2016: A portrait*](#), Statistics Canada, 17 January 2019.

5 Statistics Canada, [*Aboriginal peoples in Canada: Key results from the 2016 Census*](#), 25 October 2017.

**Figure 1 – Geographic Distribution of Métis
and First Nations Agricultural Operators by Province, 2016**



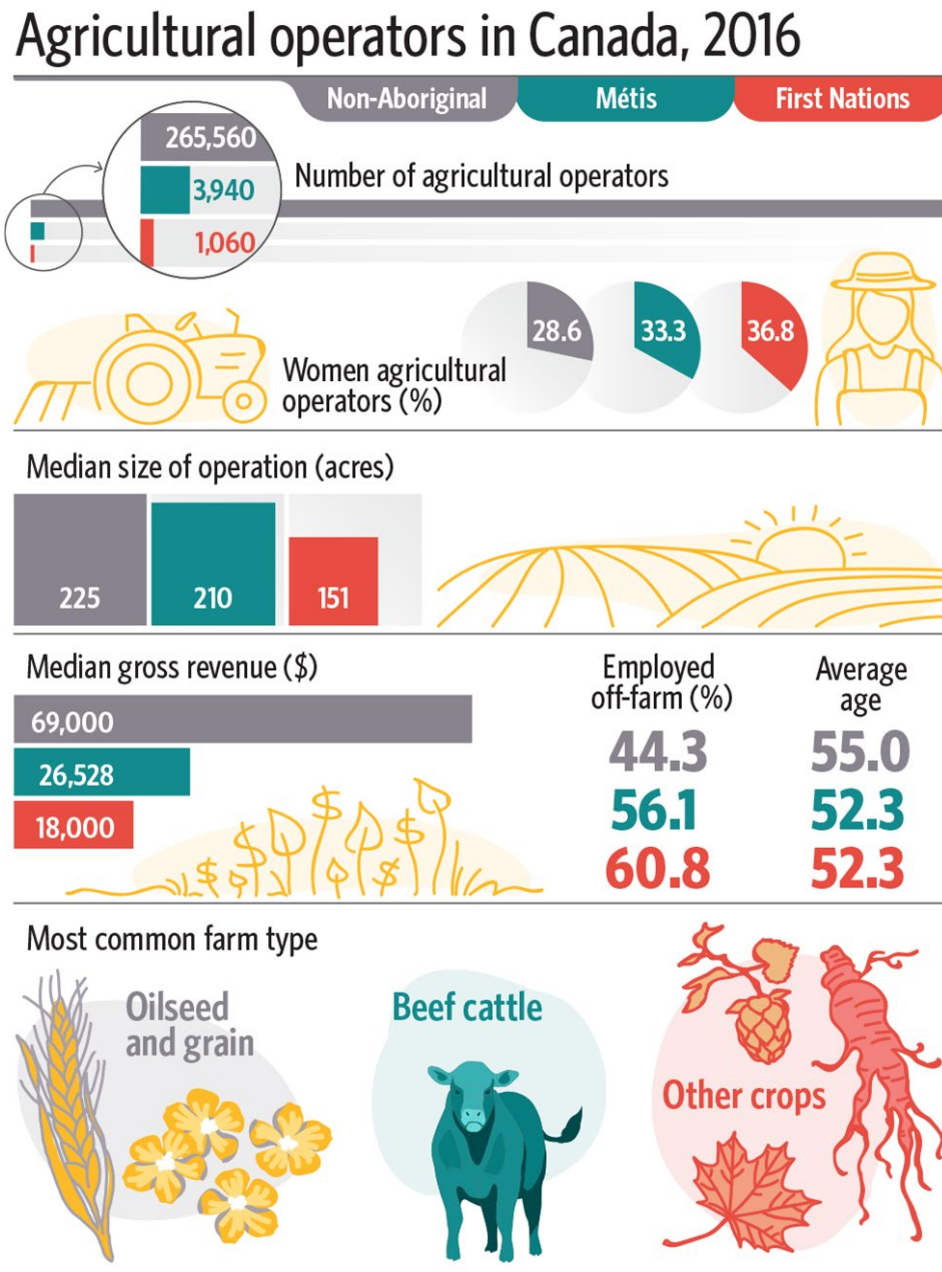
Note: The national agricultural ecumene includes all dissemination areas with “significant” agricultural activity. Agricultural indicators, such as the ratio of agricultural land on census farms relative to total land area, and total economic value of agricultural production, are used (Statistics Canada, [Ecumene](#)).

Source: Nicolas Gauthier and Julia White, [Aboriginal peoples and agriculture in 2016: A portrait](#), Statistics Canada, 17 January 2019.

The 2016 Census of Agriculture also revealed that median agricultural operation size was smaller and operators’ median gross revenue was lower for Indigenous operators than for non-Indigenous operators. Likewise, the off-farm employment rate was higher among the Indigenous population, particularly for members of First Nations. Figure 2 compares non-Indigenous, Métis and First Nations farm operators in Canada.



Figure 2 – Comparison of Non-Indigenous, Métis and First Nations Agricultural Operators in Canada, 2016



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Source: Nicolas Gauthier and Julia White, *Aboriginal peoples and agriculture in 2016: A portrait*, Statistics Canada, 17 January 2019.

In 2016, the average age of Métis and First Nations agricultural operators was 52.3 years, while the average age of their non-Indigenous counterparts was 55.0 years.⁶ The average age of farm operators continues to rise as the need for replacement farmers goes unmet.

Jamie Hall, General Manager of the Indian Agricultural Program of Ontario, told the Committee that Indigenous communities could help meet the agriculture and agri-food sector's labour force needs:

The first nations community is quite young and growing very fast. The median age is 32. We have a young population seeking meaningful economic opportunities, and agriculture can be part of that, whether farming or agri-food. If we look at the impact of that within the industry, it's important to consider the succession crisis that might be facing the Canadian farm industry. With the average age of producers being 55, and only 8% of them having succession plans, there's an opportunity to bring two worlds together.⁷

However, Mr. Hall believes that seizing this opportunity will require narrowing the education gap between Indigenous people and the Canadian average. Despite notable improvements, First Nations and Métis farm operators remain on average less educated than farm operators in general.

The statistics show that 18.4% of Canadian farm operators have no certificate, diploma or degree. This figure rises to 20.1% for First Nations farm operators. It is, however, lower among Métis operators, at 17.4%. Similarly, while 17.9% of all farm operators hold a university certificate, diploma or degree⁸, this percentage falls to 12.7% among Métis operators and 16.2% for First Nations operators.⁹

B. What Is Indigenous Agriculture? The Various Perspectives Heard

The evidence revealed to the Committee the different approaches to Indigenous agriculture. As Chief Byron Louis of the Okanagan Indian Band explained, Indigenous agriculture can take various forms:

6 Nicolas Gauthier and Julia White, [*Aboriginal peoples and agriculture in 2016: A portrait*](#), Statistics Canada, 17 January 2019.

7 House of Commons, AGRI, [*Evidence*](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 December 2018, 0850 (Jamie Hall, General Manager, Indian Agricultural Program of Ontario).

8 Statistics Canada, [*"Canadian farm operators: An educational portrait."*](#)

9 Nicolas Gauthier and Julia White, [*Aboriginal peoples and agriculture in 2016: A portrait*](#), Statistics Canada, 17 January 2019.



What you see out in the east is what they call the planting of the “three sisters,” which are corn, beans and squash. The uses of that were very well-thought-of in how they have the corn and the beans, which are a nitrogen fixer, going up on the corn stalk, and then the squash, the pumpkins, that actually provide seeds so you use less water.... Going out west, there’s often the assumption that agriculture only went so far north, the southern end of North Dakota, but they’re having studies in Winnipeg where pollen from corn is actually being dug up in some of the archeological finds outside of Winnipeg. If you go further west, what we used was predominantly fire for agricultural purposes and production. Even for some of the waterborne uses of such things as wapato, an aquatic plant that grows in rivers, along riverways, there are sites that were prepared that go back 5,000 years.¹⁰

In Inuit communities, agriculture as it is generally understood remains uncommon, but the Inuit nonetheless modify their land to support their way of life. Natan Obed, President of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, offered the following explanation:

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

On the other hand, we don’t just randomly go out into our homeland and magically find animals that we then harvest and prepare. We have a history of ensuring that the populations we interact with, say, a caribou population, are healthy. We have a history of improving fish habitat and creating spawning grounds in areas by strategically placing rocks or changing riverbeds. We have used the entirety of our homelands in the way in which you might have used five or 10 acres. We might not have been growing wheat, but we are still interacting with all living things in our environment and ensuring the health and success of all.¹¹

While some witnesses reported that some Indigenous communities now own major export-oriented operations, most Indigenous agriculture is small-scale farming to meet the community’s needs and improve its food security. Indeed, food security and access to drinking water remain major challenges for a number of Indigenous communities in Canada.

Indigenous agriculture takes multiple forms and must be viewed as part of a broad spectrum of activities that includes both traditional practices and modern industrial agriculture in order to understand the needs, challenges and opportunities facing

10 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 December 2018, 0845 (Byron Louis, Chief, Okanagan Indian Band).

11 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 7 February 2019, 1225 (Natan Obed, President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami).

Indigenous peoples in the agriculture sector. Furthermore, it is important to recognize and understand the traditional, cultural and spiritual connections that Indigenous peoples have with agriculture, the foods they eat or use for traditional medicine and, more broadly, the land they live on.

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada recognize in its policies and programs the role that traditional and local food supply play in supporting the health of Indigenous communities, as well as the traditional importance of the land and agriculture for Indigenous communities.

CHALLENGES THAT INDIGENOUS PEOPLES FACE IN THE AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

A number of witnesses stated that Indigenous agriculture as it is practised today is inextricably linked to Canada's colonial history. Michel Gros Louis, Director of the Agricultural Society for Indigenous Food Products, pointed out that "indigenous farming suffered the effects of residential schools, acculturation and oppression."¹²

Hannah Tait Neufeld, Assistant Professor in the Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition at the University of Guelph, presented issues that to some Indigenous communities may be facing:

Colonial policies ... have disrupted, denied access to, and in many cases decimated traditional food sources and medicines. A lack of access to clean drinking water and adequate food remains a key health concern for many Indigenous families and communities.¹³

Most witnesses said that food insecurity – the inability to obtain adequate amounts of healthy and nutritious foods on a regular basis – remains the main challenge for Indigenous agriculture.¹⁴ Food insecurity is also a major public health issue for a number

12 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 31 January 2019, 1250 (Michel Gros Louis, Director, Agricultural Society for Indigenous Food Products).

13 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 5 February 2019, 1110 (Hannah Tait Neufeld, Assistant Professor, Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition, University of Guelph).

14 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 7 February 2019, 1115 (Natan Obed).



of Indigenous communities. Stephen Penner, doctoral student at the University of Guelph, described the problem as follows:

Indigenous people lead the list of food-related diseases, such as diabetes, stroke, heart disease and kidney disease, due to decreased access to traditional or country foods....¹⁵

Mr. Obed discussed the food insecurity problems that are plaguing Inuit Nunangat.¹⁶ Depending on the region, food insecurity affects between 54% and 70% of residents.¹⁷

Food insecurity is not just a challenge for Inuit and remote Indigenous communities; those located in urban and near-urban areas experience similar issues. Erica Ward, Program Coordinator at the Natoaganeg Community Food Centre, cited the example of the Eel Ground Mi'kmaq community in New Brunswick, near the city of Miramichi. Despite its proximity to the city, "[t]here are an estimated 230 homes in Eel Ground of which around 90 struggle to secure healthy food on an ongoing basis."¹⁸

Food insecurity in Indigenous communities is also exacerbated by climate change. Witnesses reported that, in Canada's North, the season for winter roads – which enable food to be trucked in to Northern communities – is becoming shorter and shorter as temperatures rise. Mr. Penner explained that climate change also affects the routes of some migratory species, including caribou. These changes are particularly challenging for the Fort McPherson First Nation in Yukon, which is no longer on the caribou's migration route. Unable to hunt caribou itself, the community now has to ask the Gwich'in First Nation, further north, in Old Crow, to send it caribou meat.¹⁹

Patrick Michell, Chief of the Kanaka Bar Indian Band, in British Columbia, told the Committee that climate change is already having a major impact on food supplies and could worsen in the years to come:

Kanaka intuitively knows that what we are experiencing on the ground here today—forest fires, flooding, air quality, smoke inversion layers, wind events, power failures,

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- 15 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 5 February 2019, 1100 (Stephen Penner, University of Guelph).
- 16 The Inuit Nunangat consists of four regions (Inuvialuit, Nunavut, Nunavik and Nunatsiavut) that include parts of Yukon, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, northern Quebec and northern Labrador. Mr. Obed told the Committee that "all of [these regions] have settled modern treaties or land claim agreements with the Crown." House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 7 February 2019, 1100 (Natan Obed).
- 17 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 7 February 2019, 1100 (Natan Obed).
- 18 Ibid., 1105 (Erica Ward, Program Coordinator, Natoaganeg Community Food Centre).
- 19 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 5 February 2019, 1145 (Stephen Penner).

changed precipitation patterns and heat—will be growing in frequency, duration and intensity, with even greater adverse impacts on local area agriculture production and food availability.²⁰

Moreover, Chief Michell explained that his community, which is located on the banks of the Fraser River, no longer has access to its traditional food – salmon – because the species is in severe decline and conservation measures were implemented in 2017. He told the Committee how important it is for his band to adapt to this new reality, remarking that “the people of the salmon must become the people of the potato.”²¹

In addition to these systemic issues that have historically posed major problems for Indigenous peoples and continue to be important food insecurity challenges, some witnesses referenced financial and regulatory barriers to developing agricultural and agri-food businesses in Indigenous communities.

A. Barriers to Developing Agricultural and Agri-Food Businesses

Multiple witnesses told the Committee that developing agricultural and agri-food businesses in Canada’s Indigenous communities not only increases food security and food sovereignty, but also brings economic and social prosperity to some communities. However, the witnesses identified three main challenges that Indigenous peoples face in developing agricultural and agri-food businesses: access to capital, access to high-quality land and access to suitable infrastructure.

1. Access to Capital

A number of witnesses reported that it is difficult for Indigenous people living on reserve to obtain financing. Mr. Hall effectively summarized the situation:

The Indian Act prevents individuals residing on reserve from pledging their assets as security, whether it be land, equipment or whatever else. That is an incredible roadblock to wealth creation and financing. The farm industry has expanded in Canada based on acceleration of land values and being able to borrow against that and leverage it for further growth. That opportunity does not exist among first nations in first nations communities.²²

20 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 7 February 2019, 1135 (Patrick Michell, Chief, Kanaka Bar Indian Band).

21 Ibid.

22 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 December 2018, 0850 (Jamie Hall).



Vincent Lévesque, a member of the Huron-Wendat Nation and Founder of the Agricultural Society for Indigenous Food Products, described the difficulties he faced when starting an agricultural business:

When we want to obtain funding, we are often told to buy what we need and that we will be reimbursed later. That is often how programs work. We have to ask for loans, but since our assets can't be seized, putting up collateral for the loan is an issue.²³

Some witnesses believe that band councils can also impede access to capital. Members of Indigenous communities sometimes have to obtain their band council's approval to seek funding. Jackoline Milne, a Métis woman who lives in Hay River, Northwest Territories, and President of the Northern Farm Training Institute, said that, in some cases, "the different funders are forcing the people to be administered through the band."²⁴ She views this practice as a "disproportionate problem where the individual is not being recognized."²⁵

Limited access to capital is also a problem for Indigenous persons living off reserve. Documents submitted by the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association led the Committee to note that Indigenous entrepreneurs living off reserve still have trouble obtaining financing because of low financial literacy rates, a lack of credit history and lower home ownership rates and lower average net home values than the general population.

Despite the challenges numerous communities face in gaining access to capital, several witnesses pointed to currently available solutions. For example, the Committee heard from the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association, which represents 59 Indigenous capital corporations and financial institutions across Canada that "provide developmental lending to hundreds of indigenous entrepreneurs of first nations, Métis and Inuit heritage," worth a total of \$2.5 billion to date.²⁶ These financial institutions have developed a financing structure to address the current gaps in Indigenous agricultural financing. Shannin Metatawabin, a member of the Fort Albany First Nation of the Mushkegowuk Nation in James Bay and Chief Executive Officer of the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association, reported, "[i]n 2017-18, 8.9% of the businesses that received a loan from our network were in the agricultural sector. This

23 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 31 January 2019, 1230 (Vincent Lévesque, Founder, Agricultural Society for Indigenous Food Products).

24 Ibid., 1245 (Jackoline Milne, President, Northern Farm Training Institute).

25 Ibid.

26 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 26 February 2019, 1210 (Shannin Metatawabin, Chief Executive Officer, National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association).

has accounted for about \$3 million in lending activity and delivers broad socio-economic results.”²⁷

The National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association maintains that the federal government could take three tangible measures to improve access to capital for Indigenous agricultural businesses:

- 1) make additional public investments in Indigenous financial institutions;²⁸
- 2) instruct the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food to partner with the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association to deliver its business financing and support services;²⁹ and
- 3) make the funding conditions for Indigenous agricultural projects more flexible.³⁰

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada, in partnership with Indigenous communities, ensure that Indigenous financial institutions have the resources they need to operate and make the current funding conditions more flexible to promote Indigenous entrepreneurship in the agriculture and agri-food industry.

2. Access to Land

A number of witnesses consider access to land critical to developing Indigenous agriculture, increasing food security and meeting the needs of young and growing Indigenous populations. However, the situation may vary across Canada based on farmland availability, and other regional differences. Reginald Bellerose, Chief of the Muskowekwan First Nation in Saskatchewan explained the particular issue his community is facing as follows:

We have a land base of 64,800 acres. We believe this is our way to a better future. Part of it is that we have to correct the wrongs of the past. The way settlement took place was by moving the first nation people on to settled areas. With that came a loss of land.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., 1215.

30 Ibid.



Our populations are growing, and our perspective is that we need to increase the land base. That is our solution.³¹

Likewise, Chief Patrick Michell told the Committee that his band “wound up purchasing six adjacent fee simple lands off reserve for the purposes of securing and developing food, shelter and water certainty for the community.”³²

Mr. Hall noted that First Nations land claims could increase the land area available to Indigenous farmers:

[W]ith land claims, land under reserve control continues to grow. Between 2006 and 2014, almost 3,500 square kilometres of land were added, and with 40% of Canada’s landmass still under land claim, we expect that the vast quantities of land will continue to increase. We have a tremendous opportunity in terms of resources.³³

However, gaining access to land is not always easy. For example, Mr. Penner found that a number of Indigenous communities cannot purchase high-quality land because it is priced too high: “[i]n and around the [Greater Toronto] and London areas, many of the communities I worked with, such as the Chippewas of the Thames and the Oneida First Nation, have very strong agricultural traditions but not a lot of access to land.”³⁴

Conversely, Sheri Longboat, Assistant Professor in the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development at the University of Guelph, explained that, in Northern Ontario, the poor quality of the land poses a challenge for current farming practices.³⁵

31 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 7 February 2019, 1145 (Reginald Bellerose, Chief, Muskowekwan First Nation).

32 Ibid., 1135 (Patrick Michell, Chief, Kanaka Bar Indian Band).

33 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 December 2018, 0850 (Jamie Hall).

34 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 5 February 2019, 1130 (Stephen Penner).

35 Ibid., 1150 (Sheri Longboat).

3. Access to Infrastructure

A lack of infrastructure was also cited as one of the main challenges to developing Indigenous agricultural businesses. Canada's Indigenous communities often have limited access to technology, drinking water and adequate irrigation systems, and clean energy sources.

Mr. Hall argued that there is a “technology gap” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous farm operators:

It's widely known that access to and utilization of technology by aboriginal businesses are lower. Four in 10 aboriginal businesses report that they have either no or unreliable Internet connection, whereas 81% of farm operators report using the Internet regularly for email, product information and research.³⁶

Access to drinking water and modern irrigation systems also remains a challenge. Drinking water shortages in some regions of Inuit Nunangat are preventing commercial use of water to develop agricultural or agri-food businesses. The current focus is meeting the needs of individuals. To illustrate the issue, Mr. Obed pointed out that “there was a new brewery that was proposed in Iqaluit, Nunavut, but the project did not proceed because of water shortages within the community.”³⁷

Moreover, some communities looking to practise intensive agriculture have found that a lack of water infrastructure is frustrating their ambitions. As Chief Patrick Michell told the Committee, the Kanaka Indigenous community “could use financial supports to pay for the design and construction of legacy water diversions, lines, storage and treatment” in order to develop commercial agriculture that is viable over the long term.³⁸

A lack of reliable and environmentally friendly energy sources is a further barrier to agricultural development. Many Northern and remote Indigenous communities still depend on diesel-powered electricity systems. As a result, growing fruits and vegetables in greenhouses is hardly viable. The operating costs are too high, as Mr. Obed explained:

Right now, there are only four greenhouses that exist across the 51 communities in Inuit Nunangat, and they do not contribute significantly to the food needs of communities. They are helpful, but they are not providing a significant replacement. We need to figure out how to do that. Because of the cost of doing business, the cheaper option is still to

36 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 December 2018, 0855 (Jamie Hall).

37 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 7 February 2019, 1220 (Natan Obed).

38 Ibid., 1135 (Patrick Michell).



fly in fresh produce rather than grow it locally in greenhouses. The cost-benefit ratio is just not there yet.³⁹

Despite the challenges Indigenous Canadians in the agriculture and agri-food industry face, they also have access to a number of support programs. The next section outlines the programs the federal government and private organizations have established to date, including their limitations.

SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The federal government has extensive jurisdiction over administering services to Indigenous peoples. During this study, the Committee learned about the programs and initiatives established by the federal government and private organizations to support Indigenous communities active in the agriculture sector.

A. Current Initiatives and Their Limitations

Through the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food, the federal government has established a number of programs to support Indigenous agriculture initiatives and enhance food security and sovereignty in Canada's Indigenous communities.

The *Canadian Agricultural Partnership* (CAP) – a federal-provincial-territorial (FPT) framework agreement for the agriculture and agri-food sector worth \$3 billion over five years (2018–2023) – includes various programs for Indigenous peoples.

Tom Rosser, Assistant Deputy Minister of the Strategic Policy Branch at the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food, told the Committee about various programs, including AgriDiversity, a five-year (2018–2023), \$5-million program to increase the participation of under-represented groups in the agriculture sector. To date, two Indigenous initiatives have received funding under the program: the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers and the Northern Farm Training Institute.⁴⁰

The department has also established the Indigenous Agriculture and Food Systems Initiative. Mr. Rosser described the program as follows: “[t]his five-year, \$8.5-million initiative is designed to increase economic development opportunities for Indigenous

39 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 7 February 2019, 1220 (Natan Obed).

40 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 31 January 2019, 1100 (Tom Rosser, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy Branch, Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food).

people by supporting their capacity to participate and succeed in the agricultural sector.”⁴¹

Jane Taylor, Assistant Deputy Minister of the Programs Branch at the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food, added, “[i]n the Canadian agricultural partnership, there are federal programs, but there are also provincial and territorial programs. Most or perhaps all provinces and territories have indigenous programs.”⁴² She also noted that “this is the first time this year that, across programs, there are federal programs specifically for indigenous people.”⁴³

Mr. Rosser provided further information:

[The department] has begun to make a more conscious effort to measure progress in indigenous engagement throughout federal-only programs under CAP. Applications received to date range from providing business planning and financial management services that assist indigenous peoples in starting or expanding an agricultural operation, to piloting growing traditional foods in a greenhouse and community garden, and transferring knowledge to indigenous women and communities.⁴⁴

Mr. Rosser was also asked about Canada’s food policy. While this policy was still being developed when he appeared before the Committee, he offered that, “through the food policy and through other changes to our existing programming, we hope to be able to better support indigenous agriculture in Canada.”⁴⁵ The national food policy was eventually announced in Budget 2019 on 19 March 2019. The policy includes \$134.4 million over five years to improve Canadians’ access to healthy food, support food security in Northern and Indigenous communities and reduce food waste, among other objectives.⁴⁶

The officials told the Committee that their department is the first to establish the position of Indigenous Elder. The purpose of the position is

first, to provide an indigenous perspective within the department; second, to serve as an indigenous liaison, whereby [the Elder] helps to facilitate partnerships with indigenous communities and businesses; third, to provide cultural and emotional

41 Ibid.

42 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 31 January 2019, 1155 (Jane Taylor, Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Branch, Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food).

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., 1100 (Tom Rosser).

45 Ibid., 1130.

46 Government of Canada, *Budget 2019 – Investing in the Middle Class*, Ottawa, 19 March 2019, p. 162.



support to indigenous employees within the department; and, finally, to raise cultural awareness within the department through various cultural awareness sessions that are made available to all of our employees.⁴⁷

Mervin Traverse, a member of the Lake St. Martin Ojibway First Nation, in Manitoba, is the department's first Indigenous Elder. He has held the position since 2016. Since assuming this role, he has seen the department make great progress in supporting Indigenous agriculture. Mr. Rosser explained that the department is developing a number of projects aimed at Canada's Indigenous communities:

In terms of upcoming initiatives, the department is working with Métis partners to develop a Métis outreach strategy. We will continue to work with the Assembly of First Nations and other national indigenous organizations to support their efforts to build a first nations agriculture strategy. We'll continue to examine ways to support food security initiatives in the north. We'll work with other government departments to better understand the federal programming landscape. We will maintain an FPT dialogue on indigenous policies and programs.⁴⁸

Crown–Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) administers the Nutrition North Canada program, which was launched in 2011 to bring affordable healthy food to isolated Northern communities. A number of witnesses criticized this program. They believe that Nutrition North, as Mr. Penner said, “does not serve the communities well.”⁴⁹ Mr. Obed asserted that the program is underfunded: “you have almost \$7 billion in subsidies that go into agricultural practices in this country, and then you have approximately \$80 million that goes into the nutrition north program, of which 80% is utilized by Inuit communities.”⁵⁰ He said that Nutrition North “must be a social program, first and foremost,” and that the government must “ensure that not a penny on the dollar of that program is being utilized in ways that don't lead to increased food security for those intended.”⁵¹

Some witnesses remarked that, because of the wide variety of programs for Indigenous communities that are managed by various departments and sometimes even different

47 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 31 January 2019, 1110 (Brian Gray, Champion, Indigenous Network Circle, and Assistant Deputy Minister, Science and Technology Branch, Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food).

48 Ibid., 1100 (Tom Rosser).

49 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 5 February 2019, 1145 (Stephen Penner).

50 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 7 February 2019, 1115 (Natan Obed).

51 Ibid., 1210.

orders of government, it can be difficult to know how to learn more about them. As Stephen Penner mentioned:

There are several systems designed to grant funds, but none of them allow you to reach the people you need to reach. No one works with the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, the Cando organization, or community economic development officers to let them know that funds are available. The system is fragmented. There are funds available, but no one knows how to get them to the communities.⁵²

After the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food held public consultations with Indigenous groups where similar concerns were raised, the department decided in 2018 to establish the Indigenous Pathfinder service. This initiative offers personalized support to Indigenous Canadians looking for information about current programs or services relating to the Canadian agriculture and agri-food industry. Ms. Taylor explained how the program works:

When a call or an email comes in, we work with that person or organization to help match and find. It could be a program in our department or a program in another federal department, but we'll also look in the province or territory where they're located.⁵³

The Committee also learned about the role that non-governmental organizations play in supporting agricultural development and improving food security in Canada's Indigenous communities.

The Northern Farm Training Institute, founded by Ms. Milne, is taking actions to increase the food sovereignty of Northern communities. For example, it is addressing the lack of "domestic skills in domestic food production" by providing members of Indigenous communities with agricultural training so that they can build gardens in their communities and pass on their newly acquired skills.⁵⁴ The institute focuses on practical training and experiential learning.

The Natoaganeg Community Food Centre works to reduce food insecurity in the Eel Ground First Nation by providing food education, creating community gardens and operating a food bank.

52 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 5 February 2019, 1150 (Stephen Penner).

53 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 31 January 2019, 1145 (Jane Taylor).

54 Ibid., 1215 (Jackoline Milne).



The Going Off, Growing Strong project in Nunatsiavut enables youth to accompany experienced hunters on hunting trips. Mr. Obed explained the initiative:

They go off, they harvest foods, they fill community freezers and then those community freezers are accessed by elders and other parts of the community. It combines the ability for young people to learn new skills, but also for them to be a part of their society and their community in a way that overcomes the effects of things like residential schools and intergenerational trauma. It also has the very practical use of serving those in need with traditional foods in a way that is consistent with the sharing practices of the Inuit.⁵⁵

Debra Brown, Executive Director of 4-H Ontario, told the Committee that her organization works to engage youth in agriculture and raise awareness about jobs in the agriculture sector.⁵⁶ 4-H aims to help youth flourish in the agriculture sector and has been working with Indigenous communities to that end for nearly 20 years. As Mr. Bellerose noted, investing in education is essential in order to introduce Indigenous youth to agriculture and increase their awareness of food security issues.⁵⁷

B. Ways to Better Support Indigenous Peoples

A number of witnesses argued that supporting Indigenous peoples in the agriculture and agri-food industry would undoubtedly stimulate the economic development of Indigenous communities, improve their food security and help preserve their cultures and traditions. The Committee heard about proposals that could be implemented to achieve these goals.

1. Provide Sufficient Funding Tailored to Local Needs

The witnesses often discussed the importance of providing adequate and ongoing funding for Indigenous peoples. Ms. Tait Neufeld argued that “it is timely to provide longer-term funding and infrastructure to support Indigenous food producers, both on and off reserve.”⁵⁸

55 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 7 February 2019, 1120 (Natan Obed).

56 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 5 February 2019, 1215 (Debra Brown, Executive Director, 4-H Ontario).

57 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 7 February 2019, 1145 (Reginald Bellerose).

58 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 5 February 2019, 1115 (Hannah Tait Neufeld).

Moreover, some witnesses emphasized that Indigenous communities require funding that meets their needs. Accordingly, funding needs must be determined by and for Indigenous peoples. Mr. Obed explained the issue:

We hope to reclaim some of our food sovereignty. That will require more subsidies and more interest in trying to figure out how Inuit can create the best possible conditions for a diet and for participation within the Canadian economy in the way that we would like to see, rather than the way that the Canadian government or southern interests would like to see.⁵⁹

Mr. Penner said the government needs to “engage with communities to define agriculture and agri-food needs and solutions locally” in order to “respect, reinforce and protect the sacred relationship that Indigenous food systems hold within indigenous communities.”⁶⁰ Ms. Longboat added that policies need to be “place-based policies that reflect local dynamics and also local social, cultural, political and economic realities within those regions, because of great diversity.”⁶¹

The Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food officials recognized the need to establish a dialogue with Indigenous communities. Mr. Rosser said that “understanding what the communities’ views, preferences and visions are for realizing the potential of agriculture in the community” is critical.⁶² In discussing the situation in Canada’s North, Brian Gray, Champion of the Indigenous Network Circle and Assistant Deputy Minister of the Science and Technology Branch at the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food, confirmed the value of a personalized approach: “[i]n general, I think our approach to the north, whether it’s in the treeline or with the Inuit, is to go to the community and find out what they want and what they need.”⁶³

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada consult Canada’s Indigenous communities to assess how better financial support could be provided in the agriculture and agri-food industry.

59 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 7 February 2019, 1100 (Natan Obed).

60 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 5 February 2019, 1105 (Stephen Penner).

61 Ibid., 1140 (Sheri Longboat).

62 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 31 January 2019, 1200 (Tom Rosser).

63 Ibid., 1140 (Brian Gray).



Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada develop collaborative approaches to food and nutrition policy development in which Indigenous peoples can participate and be directly consulted.

2. Support Indigenous Food Product Exports

Some witnesses advocated that the federal government support Indigenous food product exports, in part by improving access to international markets and foreign capital. For example, Mr. Bellerose suggested that developing and promoting an Indigenous brand image that highlights the quality of Indigenous land would help market Canadian Indigenous agricultural and agri-food products. However, he did not say what role the federal government could play in this regard.

Some witnesses asserted that showcasing traditional Indigenous agriculture is essential to developing markets for Indigenous food products. However, Mr. Obed pointed out that it may prove difficult to sell Indigenous country food products commercialized by small-sized businesses on supermarket shelves. He said that “part of that is the regulatory barriers of sale of country food in this country. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency licensing is mandatory, especially when any food is crossing interjurisdictional lines.”⁶⁴ As he explained, “[t]he expense of that process then creates prohibitively high price points for country food when it enters into any sort of secondary store.”⁶⁵

Some witnesses declared that the solution is greater recognition of the Indigenous practices and ancestral knowledge that enable Indigenous people to determine the quality of the products they consume and seek to sell in stores.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada make sure that Indigenous communities are aware of support for exports available to Canadian small businesses and can take full benefit of it.

64 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 7 February 2019, 1130 (Natan Obed).

65 Ibid.

3. Promote Teaching and Sharing of Agricultural Knowledge

A number of witnesses highlighted the value of promoting agricultural education, particularly among youth, and better sharing agricultural knowledge and best practices among Indigenous communities.

On the issue of education, Ms. Milne believes that the federal government could help Indigenous communities establish agricultural training centres that meet local needs:

We need to empower local people to restore their food systems according to what they want, through direct capacity building, and have local Indigenous people running newly created training and support centres that are around the theme of food. It can be domestic food and wild food. We need these two systems to complement each other.⁶⁶

As for knowledge sharing, Ms. Tait Neufeld told the Committee that “there are some great things occurring, very diverse and innovative things, but there isn’t really a way of connecting those pieces and allowing communities to learn from each other.”⁶⁷ She said the federal government could help build bridges between communities so that they can share their most effective agricultural practices. Similarly, Mr. Louis suggested that it would be “good to actually have something like that—a national organization looking at how we can share best practices in different areas.”⁶⁸

CONCLUSION

The Committee heard witnesses from Canada’s Indigenous communities describe how their agricultural businesses develop high-quality products for export and help pass on traditional Indigenous knowledge to future generations. The Committee also learned about the serious food insecurity challenges that continue to affect some reserves and most Inuit and Northern communities, as well as the importance of developing local agriculture to mitigate this problem. The Committee would like to reiterate that the study is not exhaustive given the limited number of witnesses heard. Nonetheless, the discussions revealed that support for Indigenous farmers in Canada must be diversified and tailored to varying local needs. Farming provides significant economic opportunities benefiting the Indigenous communities living in Canada.

66 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 31 January 2019, 1215 (Jackoline Milne).

67 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 5 February 2019, 1130 (Hannah Tait Neufeld).

68 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 December 2018, 0900 (Byron Louis).

APPENDIX A LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the Committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the Committee's [webpage for this study](#).

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Indian Agricultural Program of Ontario Jamie Hall, General Manager	2018/12/11	124
Okanagan Indian Band Chief Byron Louis	2018/12/11	124
Agricultural Society for Indigenous Food Products Michel Gros Louis, Director Vincent Lévesque, Founder	2019/01/31	126
Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food Brian T. Gray, Champion, Indigenous Network Circle and Assistant Deputy Minister Science and Technology Branch Tom Rosser, Assistant Deputy Minister Strategic Policy Branch Jane Taylor, Assistant Deputy Minister Programs Branch Mervin Traverse, Departmental Elder	2019/01/31	126
Northern Farm Training Institute Jackoline Milne, President	2019/01/31	126
As individuals Sheri Longboat, Assistant Professor School of Environmental Design and Rural Development University of Guelph Stephen Penner University of Guelph Hannah Tait Neufeld, Assistant Professor Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition University of Guelph	2019/02/05	127

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
4-H Ontario Debra Brown, Executive Director Meaghan Moniz, Coordinator Volunteer Support, First Nations Engagement	2019/02/05	127
Northern Lights Foods Jean Poirier, Owner	2019/02/05	127
Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami Natan Obed, President Oana Spinu, Senior Energy Policy Advisor	2019/02/07	128
Kanaka Bar Indian Band Chief Patrick Michell	2019/02/07	128
Muskowekwan First Nation Chief Reginald Bellerose	2019/02/07	128
Natoaganeg Community Food Centre Chad Duplessie, Manager Erica Ward, Program Coordinator	2019/02/07	128
National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association Andrew Leach, Chair Board of Directors Shannin Metatawabin, Chief Executive Officer	2019/02/26	130

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* ([Meetings Nos. 124, 126 to 128, 130, 131, 141 and 142](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Pat Finnigan
Chair

