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MENTAL HEALTH: A PRIORITY FOR OUR FARMERS

Report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture
and Agri-Food

Pat Finnigan, Chair

MAY 2019
42nd PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

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**Pat Finnigan
Chair**

MAY 2019

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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

SIXTEENTH REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the Committee has studied the Mental Health Challenges that Canadian Farmers, Ranchers, and Producers Face and has agreed to report the following:

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SUMMARY

From 13 June 2018 to 29 January 2019, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food conducted a study on the mental health challenges facing Canadian producers.

Recent data shows that 7% of Canadians perceive their mental health as fair or poor. Some studies indicated that farmers are more at risk of such challenges. Many witnesses told the Committee that mental health issues are prevalent in their occupation. Some even shared their own experiences in dealing with mental distress.

This report identifies the many stressors that make producers particularly vulnerable to mental health problems. They live with many uncertainties that put them under significant pressure, such as weather events, environmental challenges, market fluctuations, debt, regulations and paperwork. The isolation that many farmers experience and the stigmatization they sometimes face, particularly on social media, amplify this stress.

The report also looks at initiatives across the country to support producers facing mental health challenges. They have been implemented both provincially and nationally by associations, governments and groups of individuals in the agriculture and health sectors. This support takes several forms—telephone help lines, consultations with mental health and agricultural professionals, and funding from the federal government and agricultural producers' organizations.

However, all of this is not enough. Access to mental health care is still limited in rural areas, health professionals are still not familiar with the unique nature of agriculture, and current efforts to help farmers are not consistent across the country. A number of witnesses pointed out the need to coordinate existing initiatives through a national mental health strategy for farmers. They also recommended allocating more resources to address the root causes of mental health problems, particularly by raising public awareness of the value of farming and providing adequate economic support to the sector.

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 examine the process of audits and labour reviews in order to 1) ensure the least amount of stress and disruption to the agricultural producer and those dependent on them for work since extremely negative impact on the mental well-being of the producers and those around them can result from poorly managed audits and labour reviews, and 2) whenever possible, give consideration to practical experience when filling positions of auditors as they best understand the processes that the producers go through..... 18

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada and pertinent departments, when considering and implementing regulatory change, take into account the impact any changes may have on agricultural producers and related industry persons and mitigate potential stressors by 1) giving ample time for consultation, 2) ensuring that all persons affected by the changes are kept informed from beginning to end and 3) give full consideration to withdrawing said changes or amending them if the impact is found to be of great negative impact on the Canadian agricultural sector. 19

Recommendation 3

Given the prevalence of government initiatives, studies, and programs to combat cyber bullying and other forms of intimidation and coercion targeted at students and vulnerable Canadians, the Government should engage with farmers and agricultural stakeholder groups to develop public awareness campaigns and strategies to combat the growing incidence of cyber bullying, intimidation, and threats targeted at Canada’s agricultural workers which results in a significant increase in stress. In addition, the Committee recommends that the Government of Canada consider including any form of intimidation or cyberbullying targeted at any group of Canadians based on their occupation or place of residence as a Criminal Code offense..... 22

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada accelerate the deployment of high-speed Internet infrastructure in Canada’s rural and remote regions..... 23

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada work with the recognized and accredited organizations to better tailor mental health care and insurance coverage to farmers’ specific needs. 24

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada invest in educating business partners and other stakeholders who work with farmers to detect the signs of psychological disorders and distress in order to refer them to resources that can help them. 26

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada contribute to building capacity in mental health awareness and prevention so that future farmers are informed of the challenges they may face. 27

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada, in cooperation with its provincial and territorial counterparts, fund the activities of recognized and accredited organizations that provide mental health assistance to farmers and their families. 33

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada oversee the national coordination of various research and prevention activities targeting the mental health of farmers..... 38

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada facilitate, coordinate and promote telephone help lines and e-mental health services for farmers and Canadians living in rural areas..... 38



MENTAL HEALTH: A PRIORITY FOR OUR FARMERS

INTRODUCTION

Farming is hard work: debt, long days, loneliness and stress. Farmers have to deal with many factors outside their control, such as unpredictable weather, government regulation and market volatility and which are often major stressors. As a result, many farmers struggle with depression or other mental health problems. Some even goes as far as suicide.

More than one in five Canadians experience a mental health problem at some point in their lives.¹ Because of the many impacts that mental health problems can have on people and society, the Committee looked into the issue of mental health in the agriculture sector.

At its meeting on 23 April 2018, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food (the Committee) agreed to undertake a study on mental health challenges in the agriculture community.² The Committee held 12 public meetings between 13 June 2018 and 29 January 2019, during which it heard testimony and received written briefs from various mental health groups, government officials and agriculture organizations.

The members of the Committee sincerely thank everyone who appeared before the Committee and are pleased to present the results of its study and recommendations based on the evidence gathered.

1 Mental Health Commission of Canada, *Why Investing in Mental Health will Contribute to Canada's Economic Prosperity and to the Sustainability of our Health Care System*.

2 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food (AGRI), *Minutes of Proceedings*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 23 April 2018.



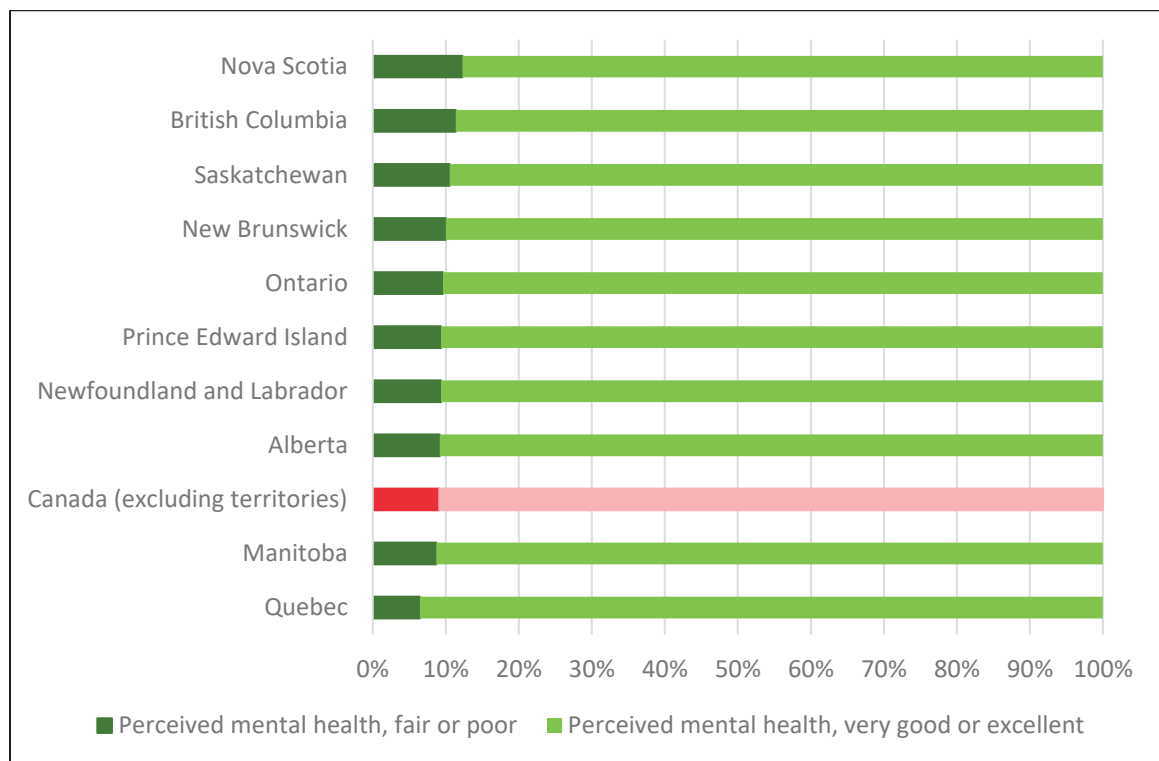
CURRENT SITUATION

The Committee heard from many witnesses who expressed concern about farmers’ mental health problems and highlighted the particular vulnerabilities of this population.

A. DATA ON MENTAL HEALTH IN CANADA

Statistics Canada’s Canadian Community Health Survey found that 7% of respondents perceive their mental health as fair or poor. However, there are regional variations, ranging from 5.1% in Quebec to 9.2% in Nova Scotia (Figure 1).

Figure 1—Perception of mental health by province (2017)



Source: Figure prepared by the Committee based on Statistics Canada, [Health characteristics, annual estimates](#).

According to Patrick Smith, National Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Canada lags behind other developed countries in spending on

mental health.³ Fred Phelps, Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Social Workers, added that Canada spends only about 7% of its health budget on mental health.⁴ This figure, which corresponds to World Health Organization data for 2011, is presented in Figure 2, which compares the percentage of mental health expenditures in OECD countries in the same year. Karen R. Cohen, Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Psychological Association, pointed out that psychological services provided outside hospitals and schools are not publicly funded.⁵ She highlighted the difficulty of recruiting and retaining mental health professionals in rural areas where there was 1 psychologist for every 28,500 people in 2012, compared to 1 for every 3,848 in urban areas.⁶

3 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 October 2018, 0925 (Patrick Smith, National Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Mental Health Association).

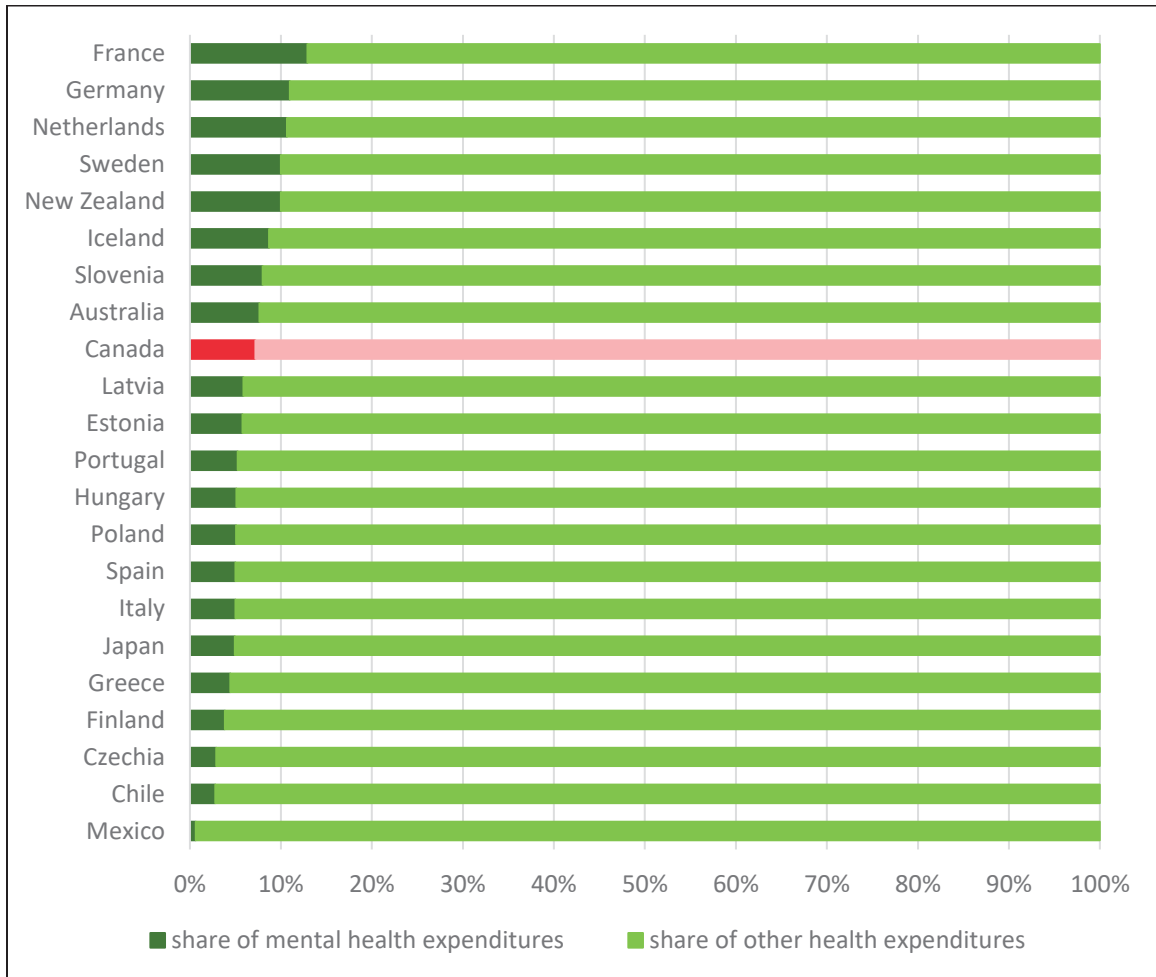
4 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 1 November 2018, 0900 (Fred Phelps, Executive Director, Canadian Association of Social Workers).

5 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 22 November 2018, 0950 (Karen R. Cohen, Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Psychological Association).

6 Ibid.



Figure 2—Government expenditures on mental health as a percentage of total government expenditure on health in OECD countries (2011)



Source: Figure prepared by the Committee based on World Health Organization data, [Mental health governance: Data by country](#).

Note: Data for the following OECD countries are not available: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Israel, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Slovakia, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States.

Farmers are not immune to mental health problems, and current studies suggest that they are a particularly vulnerable group. According to a survey of Canadian farmers conducted by Andria Jones-Bitton, Associate Professor at the Ontario Veterinary College at the University of Guelph, 45% of respondents reported high stress levels, 58% anxiety

and 35% depression.⁷ In a survey conducted in Quebec between 2010 and 2011, Ginette Lafleur, a PhD candidate in community psychology at the Université du Québec à Montréal, said that 42% of Quebec farmers felt that their days were somewhat or extremely stressful, compared with 20% for other Quebec men.⁸

This issue is not unique to Canada. According to Nicholas Carleton, Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Regina, a 2018 study found that suicide among agriculture, forestry and fishery workers was higher than in the rest of the population worldwide.⁹ He said these results differed from those from the late 1990s in Canada, which showed that suicide among farmers was lower than in the rest of the population.¹⁰ Ginette Lafleur pointed out that, unlike Scotland or France, Canada does not gather statistics on deaths by suicide by employment sector, which makes it difficult to adequately assess the extent of the problem.¹¹

Among other mental health risks that particularly affect farmers, Dairy Farmers of Canada cited a 2017 U.S. study finding that 74% of U.S. farmers and farm workers were impacted by opioid addiction (i.e. either by knowing someone, having a family member addicted, having taken an illegal opioid, or dealing with addiction themselves). This proportion is higher than the rest of the rural adults population (45%).¹² While there are no statistics for Canada, Keith Currie, President of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, said that there was no reason to think that the situation here was any different.¹³

Mental health problems do not affect all farmers the same. Ginette Lafleur said that, worldwide, male farmers have a much higher risk of dying by suicide.¹⁴ Patrick Smith, National Chief Operating Officer of the Canadian Mental Health Association, added that, in general, men are less likely to seek help when they experience mental health

7 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 27 September 2018, 0855 (Andria Jones-Bitton, Associate Professor, Ontario Veterinary College, University of Guelph).

8 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 October 2018, 0950 (Ginette Lafleur, PhD Candidate, Community Psychology, Université du Québec à Montréal, Centre for Research and Intervention in Suicide, Ethical Issues and End-of-Life Practices).

9 Klingelschmidt et al., Suicide among agricultural, forestry, and fishery workers: a systematic literature review and meta-analysis, 2018, *Scandinavian journal of work, environment & health*, 44(1), 3-15.

10 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 23 October 2018, 0850 (Nicholas Carleton, Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Regina).

11 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 October 2018, 0950 (Ginette Lafleur).

12 American Farm Bureau Federation, [The Opioid Crisis in Farm Country](#).

13 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 16 October 2018, 0850 (Keith Currie, President, Ontario Federation of Agriculture).

14 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 October 2018, 0950 (Ginette Lafleur).



problems and that this is even more pronounced in farming communities.¹⁵ According to him, seasonal farmers are another group that is particularly vulnerable to mental health problems.¹⁶

B. MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS IN FARMERS' DAY-TO-DAY LIVES

While there are no comprehensive statistics to assess the extent of mental health problems among farmers, the Committee heard from many Canadian farmers who shared their personal experiences. Without statistics, their testimony helped the Committee understand the extent of distress among farmers. Several witnesses mentioned suicide, and some even shared their personal experiences with the Committee:

The financial stress triggered a depressive period. The bottom for me came on a cold winter morning in December 2012. I had an extension cord in my hand, walking through the barn, trying to figure out where I could hang myself. In my darkest moment, a voice fought through and convinced me to call my parents for help, which started my pathway to recovery.¹⁷

Several farmers also pointed out the pervasiveness of suicide in their community or family. For example, Mehgin Reynolds, Owner-Operator of LPG Farms in Saskatchewan, said that at a meeting of about 400 producers in her area, the vast majority of them said they had lost a family member or friend to suicide.¹⁸ Chris van den Heuvel, Director and Past President of the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture, shared his personal experience of losing a loved one:

My first cousin, Joe, grew up on the family farm. He raised hogs and grew hay. He had an off-farm job as a welder and was very well-respected in the community. We didn't know that he struggled with mental health issues. Two years ago, we buried him. My uncle found him on an abandoned road with a shotgun on the seat of the truck beside him. That was the last visual my uncle had of my cousin.¹⁹

Suicide is not the only consequence associated with mental health issues that witnesses mentioned to the Committee. Farmer Sean Stanford, from Southern Alberta, said he

15 Ibid., 0855 (Patrick Smith).

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 0845 (Stewart Skinner, Chief Farming Officer, Imani Farms, as an individual).

18 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 2 October 2018, 0955 (Mehgin Reynolds, Owner-Operator, LPG Farms).

19 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 1 November 2018, 0855 (Chris van den Heuvel, Director and Past President, Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture).

suffers from anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Often, the difficulties of working on a farm relate to mental health problems. For example, Ron Bonnett, President of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, said he was on the verge of depression during the 1980s farm crisis, which impacted interest rates. Similarly, Mehgin Reynolds described her distress when her crop was destroyed by hail:

While 2016 may have been my fourth crop year, it was the first time I stood and watched while my crop, worth literally hundreds of thousands of dollars, was destroyed in a 10-minute hail storm. It was also the first time in my life that I felt like a complete failure—a failure as a farmer, a failure as a spouse and a failure as a provider for my family. It was the first time, and sadly not the last, that I felt my only worth to my family was in my life insurance policy.²⁰

20 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 2 October 2018, 0955 (Mehgin Reynolds).

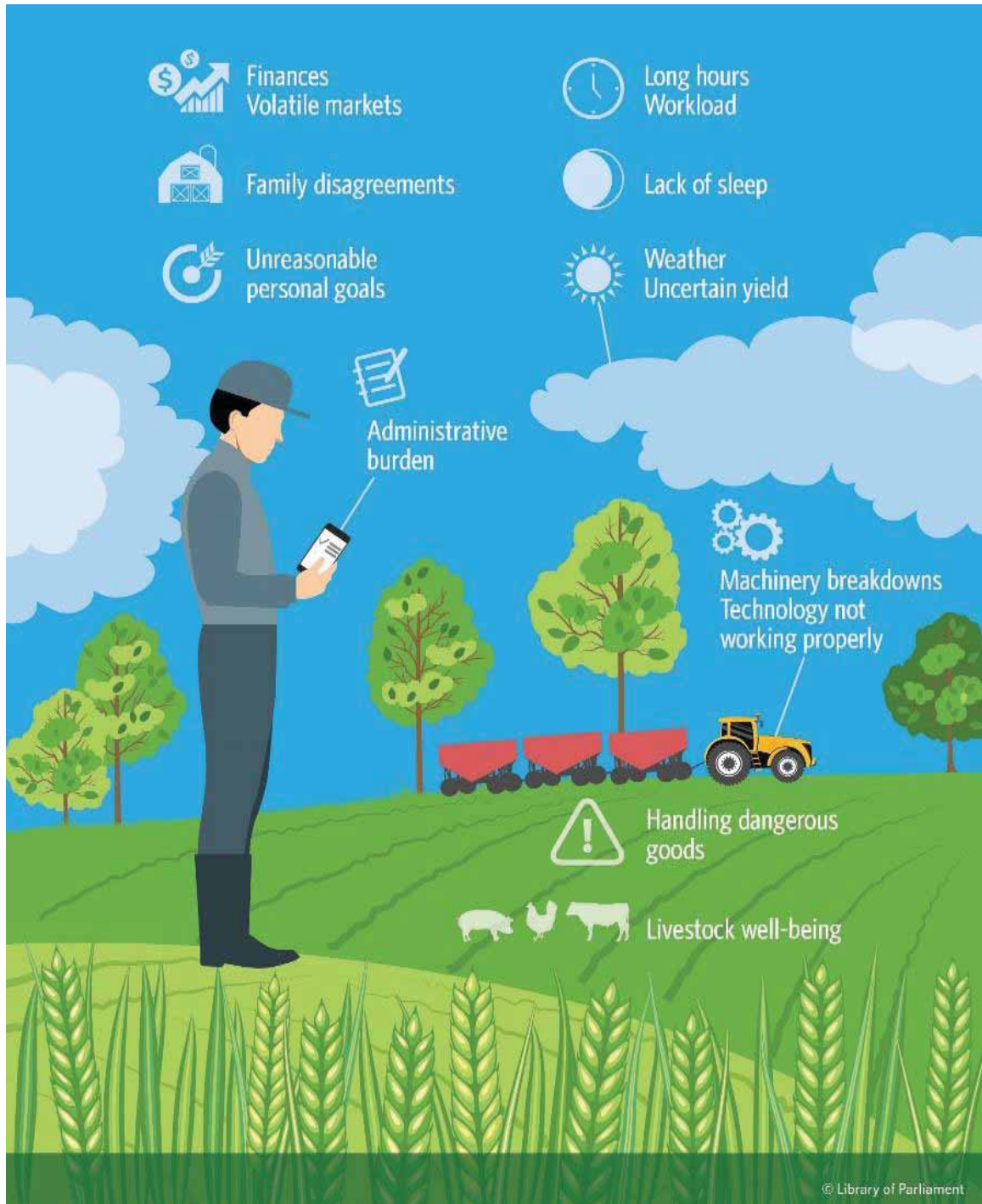


CHALLENGES FARMERS FACE AND STRESSORS ON MENTAL HEALTH

The testimony heard by the Committee helped it better understand the various challenges Canadian farmers face and highlighted the main stressors on mental health in the agriculture sector.

Farm Credit Canada submitted a booklet to the Committee that describes the challenges farmers face and offers solutions to reduce their stress and help them develop healthy lifestyles. The booklet *Rooted in Strength: Taking Care of Our Families and Ourselves* presents 14 common stressors on the farm, shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3—Key Stressors for Canadian Farmers



Source: Figure prepared by the Committee based on Farm Credit Canada, *Rooted in Strength: Taking Care of Our Families and Ourselves*.



Most of the stressors raised by Farm Credit Canada were mentioned by the witnesses who participated in the study. The Committee believes it is important to examine the uncertainty farmers face and their limited control over a variety of sector-specific elements, address the isolation and stigmatization farmers face and highlight sector-specific mental health risks.

As well, it is important to note that the stressors and challenges mentioned to the Committee by various witnesses and summarized in this report would be shared by all farmers.²¹

A. UNCERTAINTY AND LIMITED CONTROL

Farmers face several sources of uncertainty and limited control over sector-specific factors, including plant and animal diseases, weather conditions, the national and international regulatory framework and economic fluctuations. This can cause considerable stress for farmers and, as Janet Smith, Program Manager at Manitoba Farm, Rural & Northern Support Services, said “when this stress goes for on [sic] a long time without resolution, it can turn to distress.”²²

1. Financial challenges and economic uncertainties

Farmers’ financial challenges (debt levels, access to finance, transferring the business, etc.) and economic uncertainties (changes in commodity or input prices, trade agreements, etc.) are major stressors.

Debt levels and legacy are two particularly sensitive issues for farmers. Amber Fletcher, Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Regina, told the Committee that the farmers she interviewed as part of her research said that farm debt increases their vulnerability and is a major source of stress.²³

Witnesses also brought up the issue of legacy. Some of them worry that they will not be able to transfer their business to their children or grandchildren because of the significant capitalization of total agricultural assets. Union des producteurs agricoles

21 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 4 October 2018, 0925 (Jennifer MacTavish, General Manager, Ontario Sheep Farmers).

22 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 25 October 2018, 0845 (Janet Smith, Program Manager, Manitoba Farm, Rural & Northern Support Services).

23 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 23 October 2018, 0850 (Amber Fletcher, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Regina).

mental health consultant Pierre-Nicolas Girard believes that this issue plays a major role in the challenges related to the intergenerational transfer of farm properties.²⁴ Stewart Skinner, a sixth-generation farmer, shared this fear with the Committee: “one of my greatest fears is that I will be the generation responsible for destroying the family farm, that I would become responsible for destroying years of hard work by previous generations by losing the farm.”²⁵

The Committee was also made aware of economic and trade uncertainties that cause stress. Several witnesses brought up changes in commodity or input prices and new trade agreement negotiations (most notably the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement and the Transpacific Partnership) as sources of uncertainty and stress for farmers.

Some witnesses said that uncertainty surrounding the new trade agreements is particularly heightened among farmers operating under the supply management system. As Chris van den Heuvel, Director and Past President, Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture, pointed out:

Our government of whatever political stripe that negotiates these trade deals has to stop using agriculture as a pawn when it comes to negotiating. When you look at every major trade deal that has happened, these three major trade deals, CETA, CPTPP, and the new NAFTA, USMCA, agriculture was always the last one to be resolved, specifically supply management. Why is that? They know these other countries want access to our market, so we're going to hold that off and we know we're going to give up 2% or 3%, or whatever....

When we look at our governments and we see they're negotiating trade deals and using our industry, our sector particularly, as the last negotiating point, that doesn't leave us in a very good place. We brace ourselves. We go through these trade deals with uncertainty. They constantly tell us, yes, we're going to protect, we're going to support. In the end, they never do.

That weighs heavily on us. We're losing millions of dollars. That has ramifications not just on our farms, but in our communities as well.²⁶

Au cœur des familles agricoles field worker Nancy Langevin agreed:

24 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 27 September 2018, 0925 (Pierre-Nicolas Girard, consultant en santé psychologique, Union des producteurs agricoles).

25 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 October 2018, 0845 (Stewart Skinner).

26 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 1 November 2018, 0915 (Chris van den Heuvel).



I have spoken to a number of farmers and I can tell you that they feel as though they have been abandoned. They are saying that a good supply management system gives them a certain quality of life and helps them to be able to predict their income and expenditures.

We talked about expansion earlier. Many dairy farmers made big investments and now find themselves in debt and in very difficult circumstances.²⁷

2. Stressors related to environmental and weather risks

Several witnesses said that the weather is a source of constant stress for farmers. Although they have been used to living with the vagaries of the weather for generations, climate change and extreme climate fluctuations add to this uncertainty, as the Committee heard from witnesses across Canada. For instance, Chris van den Heuvel, Director and Past President of the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture, said that “[e]xtreme weather events, such as droughts and floods, are on the rise and they put our crops at risk. In addition to that, pests and disease outbreaks can pose dire threats to the industry.”²⁸ Mehgin Reynolds also added that :“Weather extremes sabotage our ability to grow the bushels we need to make a profit.”²⁹

Environmental and weather challenges create additional financial stress for farmers. To quote Andrew Campbell, Partner at Bellson Farms in southern Ontario, “Things that we can’t control in agriculture lead to those sleepless nights spent worrying about whether or not we’ll be able to write all of the cheques by the end of the year.”³⁰

3. Regulatory burden

A few witnesses criticized agriculture regulations. Farm Credit Canada, for example, reports that “regulations and paperwork”³¹ are one of the stressors on the farm.

27 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 2 October 2018, 0920 (Nancy Langevin, Field Worker, Le travailleur de rang, Au cœur des familles agricoles).

28 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 1 November 2018, 0850 (Chris van den Heuvel).

29 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 2 October 2018, 0955 (Mehgin Reynolds).

30 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 16 October 2018, 0845 (Andrew Campbell, Partner, Bellson Farms, as an individual).

31 Farm Credit Canada, [Rooted in Strength: Taking Care of Our Families and Ourselves](#), 2018.

Some witnesses said that a change in government “can cause unintended stress on farmers”³² because of possible changes in government regulations and policies. The Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program was brought up several times as an example. Elizabeth Connery, president of the Canadian Horticultural Council’s labour committee, said the system for hiring temporary foreign workers “has become more complicated as we go along,”³³ adding, “[c]ertainly, 25 years ago the paperwork was not nearly at this level.”³⁴ She believes this administrative burden and delays in the application approval process can cause considerable stress for farmers who rely on the program during the harvest season.

Eduardo Huesca told the Committee that “the programs allowing for the hiring of migrant workers in Canada were themselves a federal solution to stresses experienced by Canadian farmers around labour shortages in the industry.”³⁵ However, the uncertainty surrounding access to these programs can become a major source of stress. As Lisa Ashworth with the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick explains, “when you’re reliant on people who may or may not come to work, it’s an incredible stress—and it’s on the whole family.”³⁶

Moreover, farmers who recruit foreign workers are not necessarily trained to deal with mental health challenges that may arise among the workforce. Eduardo Huesca described the situation of a farmer in Guelph, Ontario, who had to deal with a depressed employee who was hospitalized for alcohol poisoning after learning of the sudden death of a family member in Mexico. It was an incredibly stressful time for both the farmer and the seasonal worker. To prevent these situations from happening again, Mr. Huesca believes it must be understood that the “mental health of farmers and that of the migrant farm workers they hire are linked.”³⁷

Witnesses also raised concerns about the inspection process conducted by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) for employers using the Temporary Foreign

32 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 1 November 2018, 0850 (Chris van den Heuvel).

33 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 4 October 2018, 0900 (Elizabeth Connery, Chair, Labour Committee, Canadian Horticultural Council).

34 Ibid.

35 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 October 2018, 0900 (Eduardo Huesca, Community Outreach and Program Coordinator, Migrant Farm Worker Program, Hamilton, Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers Inc.).

36 Ibid., 0915 (Lisa Ashworth, Director, Region 6, Board of Directors, Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick).

37 Ibid., 0850 (Eduardo Huesca).



Worker Program. ESDC can conduct inspections once a Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) has been issued and the foreign worker has received a work permit and started working. There are three reasons an employer could be selected for an inspection:

- there is reason to suspect non-compliance (in other words a tip was received);
- previous non-compliance; or
- random selection.³⁸

Murray Porteous, Past National Labour Chair of the Canadian Horticultural Council and Vice-President of Lingwood Farms Limited, explained that, when an inspection is based on concerns about an employer's compliance, it puts significant psychological pressure on the individual in question. He believes the ESDC inspection process should have an appeal component led by people who understand agriculture and can determine whether there is a genuine threat to workers.³⁹ Mr. Porteous also reported that ESDC did not approve any new workers for him during the inspection process, which threatened his harvest:

They're good people, but they have a box to tick and they don't see the overall picture. They don't understand that taking a three- or four-month window out of a business puts that business in jeopardy or the amount of stress that puts on the family, which is horrendous.⁴⁰

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada examine the process of audits and labour reviews in order to 1) ensure the least amount of stress and disruption to the agricultural producer and those dependent on them for work since extremely negative impact on the mental well-being of the producers and those around them can result from poorly managed audits and labour reviews, and 2) whenever possible, give consideration to practical experience when filling positions of auditors as they best understand the processes that the producers go through.

38 Government of Canada, *Temporary Foreign Worker Program compliance*.

39 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 16 October 2018, 0955 (Murray Porteous, Past National Labour Chair, Canadian Horticultural Council, and Vice-President, Lingwood Farms Limited, as an individual).

40 *Ibid.*, 1035.

The uncertainty and limited control over their work that farmers have to deal with has a number of consequences. Chris van den Heuvel explained the situation:

Farmers are constantly faced with these multiple events. It's not just the one event. It's the multitude of events. It's year after year of constantly being barraged. One year it's a drought. The next year it's too wet. The year after that, pests come through. The year after that, it's a barn fire. The year after that, you fall off the roof.⁴¹

This cumulative impact of stressful events over which farmers generally have limited control can become a more serious problem among individuals predisposed to or already living with mental health disorders. Moreover, the isolation and stigmatization pervading the agriculture sector – described in the next section – does not help matters.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada and pertinent departments, when considering and implementing regulatory change, take into account the impact any changes may have on agricultural producers and related industry persons and mitigate potential stressors by 1) giving ample time for consultation, 2) ensuring that all persons affected by the changes are kept informed from beginning to end and 3) give full consideration to withdrawing said changes or amending them if the impact is found to be of great negative impact on the Canadian agricultural sector.

B. ISOLATION AND STIGMATIZATION OF FARMING

The Committee's study revealed how isolated many Canadian farmers are. As Lesley Kelly, Co-Founder of the Do More Agriculture Foundation, explained, "As farmers, we spend a lot of time in rural and remote locations, usually on our own, often in a piece of equipment, which is not conducive to seeking professional help or having a conversation with someone."⁴² Solitary work is not inherently a problem, but Katy Kamkar, a clinical psychologist and Director of Badge of Life Canada, noted that "this can translate into feeling lonely, suffering in isolation and feeling withdrawn, making it more difficult to ask

41 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 1 November 2018, 0910 (Chris van den Heuvel).

42 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 27 September 2018, 1000 (Lesley Kelly, Co-Founder, Do More Agriculture Foundation).



for help if in need.”⁴³ Many of the farmers that Lesley Kelly meets in her work have told her they do not know where to go for help.⁴⁴

This situation is hardly reassuring given how reluctant farmers are to talk about mental illness. According to Keith Currie, President of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, “[t]he perception remains that mental health challenges are one’s own and not to be discussed openly.”⁴⁵ Heather Watson, Executive Director of Farm Management Canada, pointed out that the “stigma about the strong and silent type” still exists in the agriculture sector.⁴⁶ Multiple witnesses told the Committee the same thing.

However, some witnesses were slightly more optimistic, remarking that the situation is starting to change. For example, Ms. Ashworth said that young farmers are more open to discussing the stresses of farming.⁴⁷ While Ms. Lafleur argued that “the stigma associated with asking for help” still needs to be eliminated, she also noted that people in Quebec have been speaking about mental health much more openly over the past 15 years because of the initiatives launched during that period, such as the agricultural sentinels and rural outreach workers.⁴⁸

1. Difficult Work-Life Balance

Witnesses repeatedly discussed the stress created because farmers have trouble balancing work and family life. René Beaugard, Director General of the organization Au cœur des familles agricoles, noted that, “for farmers, their workplace and their business is also their home.”⁴⁹ As a result, it is difficult for many farmers to take a step back from their work. Indeed, Mr. Girard pointed out that “farmers are connected to their farms for 24 hours a day. In many cases, they can no longer take weekends off because they’re needed at their business. This reality causes stress.”⁵⁰

43 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 23 October 2018, 0955 (Katy Kamkar, Clinical Psychologist and Director, Badge of Life Canada, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health).

44 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 27 September 2018, 1015 (Lesley Kelly).

45 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 16 October 2018, 0850 (Keith Currie).

46 Ibid., 0930 (Heather Watson, Executive Director, Farm Management Canada).

47 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 October 2018, 0915 (Lisa Ashworth).

48 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 October 2018, 1025 (Ginette Lafleur).

49 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 2 October 2018, 0925 (René Beaugard, Director General, Au cœur des familles agricoles).

50 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 27 September 2018, 0925 (Pierre-Nicolas Girard).

The centrality of work in farmers’ lives and the proximity of that work to their home can become a source of tension not only for farmers, but also for their families.

Mr. van den Heuvel underscored “the effects that mental health issues and stress have on the family, the spouses and children of farmers who literally live and breathe in the same environment where the stress can be so high.”⁵¹

2. Stigmatization of Farming

Various witnesses reported that farmers are victims of stigmatization and that this is a significant source of stress. In their view, the public has a negative impression of farming that weighs heavily on farmers, who feel that people do not understand their occupation and sometimes fail to value it.⁵² Ms. Connery said that some of the stress farmers feel stems from “the difference between the public perception of what a farm is and the reality of what a farm is, including how we treat our animals, our land, our water supplies, and all of the resources we use.”⁵³

This lack of understanding of farmers’ work can sometimes cause distress, especially when individuals question the integrity of certain farmers. Some witnesses told the Committee that activist groups use social media to put pressure on livestock producers. Ms. Desrosiers argued that “animal rights activists” are “a growing threat” to livestock producers.⁵⁴

Mr. Campbell described to the Committee how he has been cyberbullied: “I’ve been told online that I’m a murderer. My wife has been asked why she would ever be with someone who rapes animals.”⁵⁵ Mr. Skinner had a similar experience: “there is also a small minority of people who attack my integrity and question my morality because I

51 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 1 November 2018, 0850 (Chris van den Heuvel).

52 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 4 October 2018, 0935 (Marcel Hacault, Executive Director, Canadian Agricultural Safety Association).

53 Ibid., 0920 (Elizabeth Connery).

54 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 2 October 2018, 0850 (Pierrette Desrosiers, Occupational Psychologist, Pierrette Desrosiers Psychoaching).

55 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 16 October 2018, 0845 (Andrew Campbell).



raise animals for food.”⁵⁶ He admitted that being targeted in this way has had a serious impact on his mental health.⁵⁷

However, some witnesses stated that social media offers a useful way to break the isolation that many farmers face. Online interactions enable them to forge links with peers and ask for help, if necessary. Farmer Sean Stanford told the Committee the following: “I have learned a lot and made many connections using social media and the Internet. Twitter has been a huge help for me to find many resources, links and friends to help me through the tough times.”⁵⁸

Sean Stanford also recommended that Internet service in rural parts of Canada be improved: “Proper cellular service in rural Canada is essential for this reason. Contact with the outside world when you’re isolated is more possible, so the use of smart phones and mobile Internet has been a huge help for me.”⁵⁹

Furthermore, Ms. Bradley views the Internet as a potential way of increasing access to mental health services that are tailored to the needs of farmers, who are known to work long hours and have little time to travel to in-person appointments.⁶⁰

Recommendation 3

Given the prevalence of government initiatives, studies, and programs to combat cyber bullying and other forms of intimidation and coercion targeted at students and vulnerable Canadians, the Government should engage with farmers and agricultural stakeholder groups to develop public awareness campaigns and strategies to combat the growing incidence of cyber bullying, intimidation, and threats targeted at Canada’s agricultural workers which results in a significant increase in stress. In addition, the Committee recommends that the Government of Canada consider including any form of intimidation or cyberbullying targeted at any group of Canadians based on their occupation or place of residence as a Criminal Code offense.

56 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 October 2018, 0845 (Stewart Skinner).

57 Ibid.

58 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 2 October 2018, 0950 (Sean Stanford, Farmer, as an Individual).

59 Ibid.

60 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 16 October 2018, 1030 (Louise Bradley, President and Chief Executive Officer, Mental Health Commission of Canada).

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada accelerate the deployment of high-speed Internet infrastructure in Canada’s rural and remote regions.

C. FARMERS: A HIGH-RISK GROUP

The sources of stress cited by the witnesses and summarized above can result in great distress when they accumulate and persist. In addition, farmers are a high-risk group. Farming is a male-dominated occupation, and as Fred Phelps, Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Social Workers, explained, “[w]e know that men die by suicide more often than women in Canada, and that men are more reluctant to seek help and services.”⁶¹

Ms. Smith pointed out that farmers have easy access to means of ending their lives, “such as guns, pesticides and even tractor rollovers.”⁶² She added, “[u]nfortunately, we in the ag industry know of many farm suicides that are not publicly identified as such.”⁶³

Furthermore, farmers generally live in rural areas that have fewer health services than urban areas. Karen R. Cohen, Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Psychological Association, explained that travelling to the city to obtain mental health care imposes a considerable cost on farmers, and some believe that cost outweighs any potential benefits: “It means leaving families and support networks and losing revenue. For some farmers, ranchers and producers, seeking mental health services may not seem worth the cost of recovery.”⁶⁴ In fact, having to leave the farm for treatment can create more stress for farmers.

These facts led some witnesses to note that Canada’s health care system has trouble making allowances for the constraints farmers face, especially as regards their mental health needs. Ms. Fletcher reported that the farm stress line is staffed with crisis intervention workers who have no background in agriculture, which can be disconcerting for farmers seeking help.⁶⁵

61 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 1 November 2018, 0900 (Fred Phelps).

62 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 25 October 2018, 0845 (Janet Smith).

63 Ibid.

64 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 22 November 2018, 0950 (Karen R. Cohen).

65 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 23 October 2018, 0920 (Amber Fletcher).



Other witnesses pointed out that farmers are unable to rest at home; often, the family home is also their workplace and a cause of their stress. Ms. Kamkar said that, to address this problem, “therapy—either in person or through other formats such as phone or Internet-based therapy—would need to be considered. Group therapy and a community of support should also be considered.”⁶⁶ It is also worth noting that a lack of support is likewise a problem for seasonal farm workers.⁶⁷

“I can’t tell farmers to return home to rest. Farmers are home, and that place is the source of their stress.”

Alain d’Amours,
General Director,
Contact Richelieu-Yamaska,
27 September 2018

A further problem identified during the study is the lack of insurance coverage for farmers who develop mental health disorders. Marcel Hacault, Executive Director of the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association, said that “there’s a real deficiency ... in terms of proper disability coverage, and there is an almost non-existent ability to access mental health insurance.”⁶⁸

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada work with the recognized and accredited organizations to better tailor mental health care and insurance coverage to farmers’ specific needs.

66 Ibid., 1000 (Katy Kamkar).

67 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 October 2018, 0855 (Eduardo Huesca).

68 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 4 October 2018, 0935 (Marcel Hacault).

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR FARMERS

Farming poses a number of health risks. The risk of accident and injury in agriculture is well known. Numerous initiatives exist to prevent accidental injury or death on the farm. Witnesses acknowledged that farmers need to be physically healthy to do their work. However, they pointed out that mental health is important too. When farmers are both physically and psychologically healthy, their businesses will be healthy as well, enabling them to contribute to economic growth in Canada.

Keeping agriculture healthy means keeping agriculture in business. The economic health of the farm contributes to the vitality of the outreach and that of its municipality. The impact of the economic health of family farming extends beyond regional and national borders.⁶⁹

Although the veil over mental health issues in the agriculture sector is just beginning to be lifted, many witnesses said they are pleased that mental health has become a priority for various community, regional, provincial and national organizations.

A. OVERVIEW OF EXISTING INITIATIVES

Canada's health care system is a shared responsibility of the federal, provincial and territorial governments. The federal government plays a role in the system, but the provinces are responsible for providing health care to Canadians.⁷⁰

In recent years, both federal and provincial initiatives have been launched to support farmers who are dealing with mental health challenges. The Committee found that each province has developed its own mental health support programs and initiatives.

1. Regional and Provincial Initiatives

In Quebec, Ms. Duchesneau founded the organization Au cœur des familles agricoles in 2003 to address the increase in cases of distress among farmers and the lack of support tailored to the agriculture community. René Beaugard explained that this

69 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 October 2018, 0850 (Maria Labrecque Duchesneau, Founder, Au cœur des familles agricoles and Le travailleur de rang, as an individual).

70 Government of Canada, "[Canada's Health Care System](#)."



organization employs rural outreach workers who make contact with farmers to detect the warning signs of distress and suicide.⁷¹

The specific nature of Au cœur des familles agricoles as an organization is based on the street worker model, but it is tailored to the agricultural sector. We established a “field worker” service, which provides proactive and preventative responses. We don’t wait for producers to seek out our assistance. We travel to see people on the farm. This is what distinguishes our services from those offered by the Quebec health care network.⁷²

To spread the word about the services that Au cœur des familles agricoles offers, the rural outreach workers do “milk runs,” which refers to the routes taken by truckers who drive from farm to farm collecting milk. Rural outreach workers make impromptu stops at farms to meet farmers and detect and prevent mental health problems. These workers intervene with farmers in distress and, to the best of their knowledge and abilities, help them find support. Au cœur des familles agricoles also offers a respite service that takes in farmers who need rest away from the farm.⁷³

To prevent suicide, the Association québécoise de prévention du suicide and Quebec’s Union des producteurs agricoles have joined forces to train individuals who work with farmers to serve as “sentinels.” The role of sentinels is to be the eyes and ears on the ground that detect signs of distress.⁷⁴ Since 2016, more than 1,200 professionals such as agronomists, veterinarians and accountants have been trained to identify the signs of distress among farmers and to refer them to existing support resources. Lucie Pelchat, Training Advisor at the Association québécoise de la prévention du suicide, is delighted by the success of the sentinel training initiative, but remarked that the efforts should continue, as more than 10,000 professionals work with farmers, and they could all become sentinels.⁷⁵

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada invest in educating business partners and other stakeholders who work with farmers to detect the signs of

71 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 2 October 2018, 0845 (René Beaugard).

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

74 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 October 2018, 1025 (Ginette Lafleur).

75 Ibid., 1025 (Lucie Pelchat, Training Advisor, Association québécoise de la prévention du suicide, Centre for Research and Intervention on Suicide, Ethical Issues and End-of-Life Practices).

psychological disorders and distress in order to refer them to resources that can help them.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada contribute to building capacity in mental health awareness and prevention so that future farmers are informed of the challenges they may face.

In Saskatchewan, Lesley Kelly, a farmer from the province, recently co-founded the Do More Agriculture Foundation. This national non-profit organization raises public awareness about mental health in the agriculture sector. The organization also works to fight the stigma surrounding mental health issues and provides farmers with the support and resources they need. The organization has “three main focuses: creating awareness, building community and supporting research.”⁷⁶

While the Do More Agriculture Foundation’s initiatives were launched only last year, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture has recognized the problems that farmers and families in rural areas experience since 1989. That is why the ministry mobilized human and financial resources to establish a farm stress line for farmers and rural residents. The calls to this line cover a wide variety of topics: mental health issues, stress, depression, suicidal thoughts, family conflict, teen-parent conflict, seniors’ health problems, abuse and neglect, relationship issues, parenting, addiction, gambling, alcoholism and substance abuse.⁷⁷

In 2012, the farm stress line was contracted to Mobile Crisis Services and it provides a 1-800 number to farmers and rural families to access confidential telephone crisis counselling support, information and referral.⁷⁸

Similar telephone support initiatives were set up in Manitoba. The Manitoba Farm, Rural & Northern Support Services agency has provided free telephone and online counselling to the province’s farmers and rural and northern residents since 2000. For the services offered to farmers, the agency “employs solely counsellors with farming backgrounds.”⁷⁹

76 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 October 2018, 0855 (Devyn Brook, Community Manager, Do More Agriculture Foundation, Issues Ink).

77 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 23 October 2018, 0950 (John McFadyen, Executive Director, Mobile Crisis Services).

78 Ibid.

79 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 25 October 2018, 0850 (Kim Hyndman-Moffat, Counsellor, Manitoba Farm, Rural & Northern Support Services).



All staff have both professional counselling and farming backgrounds. We also do outreach and public education, and we run a volunteer training program and a monthly suicide bereavement support group.⁸⁰

Janet Smith, Program Manager at Manitoba Farm, Rural & Northern Support Services, said the agency's services are gaining in popularity, to the point that people outside the province are asking how to access its services. Since these services are funded by the Manitoba health department, they are reserved for Manitoba residents. Ms. Smith told the Committee that there is a need for mental health supports across Canada and that she wishes she had the resources to meet it.⁸¹

In Prince Edward Island, the province's agriculture federation partnered with its agriculture department to implement the Farmer Assistance Program (FAP) in 2004. This program was established after a virus was found in the potato crop and bovine spongiform encephalopathy hit the beef industry. These problems caused a great deal of stress for farmers, as they were shut out of markets. Following these events, many farmers and their family members sought support and follow-up services. The FAP is designed to "help address issues that impact mental health and well-being, [and] offers confidential sessions with a professional counsellor."⁸²

The Committee also heard about programs and initiatives developed by various farmers' groups and mental health organizations. Last year, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture held a mental health symposium to assess the state of farmers' mental health and to review existing initiatives to support farmers.⁸³

The Canadian Mental Health Association is a national organization that has launched a program called "Not Myself Today" to foster mental health in the workplace.⁸⁴ In addition, the Mental Health Commission of Canada has begun a community suicide prevention project entitled "Roots of Hope." The project has very specific components, including stakeholder training, specialized supports such as peer support and support groups, public awareness and research. The project's goals include improving mental

80 Ibid., 0845 (Janet Smith).

81 Ibid., 0900.

82 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 22 November 2018, 0955 (Mary Robinson).

83 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 27 September 2018, 0945 (Ron Bonnett, President, Canadian Federation of Agriculture).

84 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 October 2018, 0900 (Patrick Smith).

health care and carrying out suicide prevention interventions that are tailored to local circumstances.⁸⁵

The committee has heard about many mental health programs and services for farmers across Canada. These include the excellent awareness-raising efforts by Do More Ag, the U of Guelph’s research on agricultural mental health and their soon-to-be-released farmer mental health training, and the peer-to-peer support programs in Quebec, among others. While these are all positive programs, there is still a patchwork quilt of farm-specific mental health services across Canada, particularly when it comes to direct services.⁸⁶

2. Federal Government Initiatives

The federal government’s responsibilities for health services include funding initiatives that foster mental health, provide access to health services and deliver these services across Canada. It also provides health care services to specific groups, such as First Nations people living on reserves, Inuit, members of the Canadian Forces, veterans, inmates in federal penitentiaries and some groups of refugee claimants.⁸⁷

In 2006, a major national mental health and addiction study was conducted for the first time by the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology. In response to the recommendations made in the Senate Committee’s report, *Out of the Shadows at Last: Transforming Mental Health, Mental Illness and Addiction Services in Canada*, the federal government established the Mental Health Commission of Canada in 2007.⁸⁸ To support this organization, whose mandate is to stimulate improvements to the mental health care system, the federal government provided it with \$130 million over 10 years.⁸⁹

The various levels of government consider mental health to be a priority and have launched initiatives to improve the mental health and well-being of people in the agricultural sector.

Although health is a provincial jurisdiction, the federal government is committed to working with the provinces, as well as industry partners, to support the mental health of

85 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 16 October 2018, 0950 (Louise Bradley).

86 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 25 October 2018, 0850 (Kim Hyndman-Moffat).

87 Government of Canada, “*Canada’s Health Care System*.”

88 Mental Health Commission of Canada, “*Who We Are*.”

89 Government of Canada, “*Overview of federal initiatives in suicide prevention*.”



farmers, ranchers, and producers. For example, budget 2017 confirmed \$5 billion over 10 years directly to provinces and territories to improve mental health and addiction services.⁹⁰

On 20 November 2018, the Government of Canada announced its support to improve the mental and physical well-being of farmers and others in the agricultural sector. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food Canada mandated Farm Credit Canada (FCC) to provide resources to help producers who are dealing with mental health issues. The FCC is working with 4-H Canada and industry partners to establish a national program that supports the mental and physical health of 4-H youth.⁹¹ The FCC is also working with Farm Management Canada “to explore the connection between business management practices and mental health.”⁹²

In November 2018, in cooperation with mental health experts, the FCC produced and distributed a publication entitled *Rooted in Strength*, which promotes mental health in the agricultural community. The FCC also created “print and radio public service announcements that direct people to resources they can access in times of need.”⁹³ In addition to its recent mental health initiatives, the FCC told the Committee that it administers the Ag Crisis fund, which helps clients who are dealing a variety of issues.

In times of crisis, we support our customers through the FCC ag crisis fund, which helps them through disasters like floods or tornados, barn or house fires, the death of a customer or family member, farm accidents, or critical illnesses. During our last fiscal year, we reached out to 287 customers impacted by crisis.⁹⁴

Farmers have access to risk management programs through the [Canadian Agricultural Partnership](#) (CAP). These programs help farmers handle risks related to market volatility and adverse climate events, and their costs are shared between the federal, provincial and territorial governments. Witnesses told the Committee that these programs offer producers an income safety net. In addition, Tom Rosser explained that “there is sufficient flexibility within our federal-only programming that we can support activities

90 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 13 June 2018, 1630 (Tom Rosser, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy Branch, Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food).

91 Government of Canada, [Government of Canada supports efforts to improve mental and physical wellbeing of farmers and others in the agricultural sector](#), 20 November 2018.

92 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 29 January 2019, 1115 (Michael Hoffort, President and Chief Executive Officer, Farm Credit Canada).

93 Ibid., 1110.

94 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 13 June 2018, 1625 (Michael Hoffort).

or projects related to mental health that are brought forward by other partners.”⁹⁵ He reminded the Committee that the federal government has allocated \$1 billion over five years for these programs.⁹⁶

For its part, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada supports action through federal/provincial cost-shared funding under the Canadian agricultural partnership, which can be used by provincial governments to tackle issues that are creating challenges and stress for the producers in their jurisdictions. This funding can also be used by provinces to directly support mental health initiatives in the sector, including farm stress lines and crisis counselling for individuals, youth, and families living on the farm.⁹⁷

B. LIMITS OF CURRENT SUPPORT

Although various organizations have developed many mental health initiatives and programs for the agricultural sector and rural areas, witnesses stated that access to services is hampered by cost and distance. They also noted other limitations to mental health support, such as restricted access to care, lack of financial resources, the medical community’s lack of understanding of the unique features of agriculture, and the lack of a clear mental health mandate for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

1. Lack of a clear mental health mandate for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

Officials from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada acknowledged that their department lacks a clearly defined mandate to address mental health in the agricultural sector, even though the department is responsible for many agricultural issues. According to Tom Rosser, the CAP offers programs that support mental health related projects :

While it is true that we don't have a formal mandate to address mental health, we nevertheless have programs and a mandate to support the well-being of Canada's agricultural sector. We have long had programs to assist with funding, falling prices, and drought challenges, just to name a few. As I mentioned a few times, we do have some flexibility when it comes to the programming we deliver to support the various sectors in accordance with their specific priorities. Both stakeholders and industry are realizing

95 Ibid., 1645 (Tom Rosser).

96 Ibid., 1705.

97 Ibid., 1630.



that mental health is a priority. We have the flexibility to factor that into our program funding.⁹⁸

2. Restricted access to mental health care and lack of resources

Witnesses stated that access to mental health care is one of the main problems facing the health system. Louise Bradley specified that “[l]ack of access to services is a huge problem among the farming community and anyone right across Canada but particularly those in rural settings.”⁹⁹ Keith Currie of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture added that rural communities often have limited access to effective and affordable treatment for substance abuse problems.¹⁰⁰ Karen R. Cohen explained that mental health professionals are in short supply in rural areas and, in fact, “the per capita ratios of all health providers are lower in rural than in urban areas.”¹⁰¹

The trend is that the doctors and the assistants, those kinds of medical labs and emergency centres, are moving into the bigger centres. We don't have good access to those. A farmer suffering from mental health concerns has to travel further to a city centre. That puts more stress on the farm.¹⁰²

In addition to having limited access to mental health care in rural areas, witnesses noted that people must also miss work and travel long distances to receive psychological care. Waiting lists for care are also very long.

In 2012, a Canadian Institute for Health Information report on rural and remote Canada showed that of 11 countries, Canadians waited the longest for care. Since then, conditions have only deteriorated, with the Mental Health Commission of Canada identifying harms directly correlated to these waits. With the acute mental health challenges that can be brought on by this volatile, massively debt-loaded and unpredictable thing we call farming, wait times can be all that more harmful.¹⁰³

98 Ibid., 1705.

99 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 16 October 2018, 1015 (Louise Bradley).

100 Ibid., 0850 (Keith Currie).

101 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 22 November 2018, 0950 (Karen R. Cohen).

102 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 16 October 2018, 1010 (Ray Orb, President, Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities).

103 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 1 November 2018, 0900 (Fred Phelps).

To counter this problem, witnesses emphasized that people with mental health problems need to receive service as soon as they reach out for help. The proper services also need to be delivered early in the care process.¹⁰⁴

Paul Glenn pointed out that individuals must pay out of their own pocket for mental health services. However, farmers will choose to invest in their operations rather than in themselves.¹⁰⁵ Sean Stanford echoed this view, stating that psychologists and therapists are expensive and this cost constitutes a real obstacle to mental health care.¹⁰⁶ Farmers do not want to put their money into psychological services. That is why various farm support agencies offer their services free of charge. However, locating funding to maintain their activities is an ongoing struggle for mental health agencies.¹⁰⁷

The main problem that we have had with the sentinels and the network of field workers we have established in Quebec is the uncertain funding. However, the formula works. The field workers are trained to respond and they know agriculture. The two go hand-in-hand because knowing agriculture makes establishing trust with farmers a great deal easier. The formula works and I believe in it, but we are always looking for funding. Money makes the world go around, as they say.¹⁰⁸

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada, in cooperation with its provincial and territorial counterparts, fund the activities of recognized and accredited organizations that provide mental health assistance to farmers and their families.

3. The medical community's poor understanding of the unique features of agriculture

Many witnesses told the Committee that it is not enough to have access to mental health services; these services must be adapted to farming. In their view, mental health professionals do not know much about farming. Elizabeth Connery explained that

104 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 October 2018, 1030 (Ginette Lafleur).

105 Ibid., 0945 (Paul Glenn, Past Chair, Canadian Young Farmer's Forum).

106 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 2 October 2018, 1010 (Sean Stanford).

107 Ibid., 0930 (René Beaugard).

108 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 October 2018, 1025 (Ginette Lafleur).



“farmer is what they are; it is not what they do.”¹⁰⁹ Alain d’Amours, Director General of Contact Richelieu-Yamaska, stated as follows:

It is a different kind of work, a different world. That is what you have to understand. That is what the public has to understand. That is what the health system has to understand. It is the system that needs to adapt to farmers, and not the other way around.¹¹⁰

Lesley Kelly commented that it is very hard to find resources specific to farming and that this constitutes a gap in mental health care.¹¹¹ To provide farmers with the proper supports, witnesses believe mental health practitioners need to understand agriculture and what it means to be a farmer. Studies by the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association and the University of Guelph reached the same conclusion.

Research conducted by both the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association in 2005 and the University of Guelph in 2016 concluded that when farmers reach out for help, it is of the utmost importance that the person is knowledgeable about farming.¹¹²

Pierrette Desrosiers explained that farmers may decide to abandon the process and stop seeking care if they think that health professionals do not understand how a farm works or the difficulties farmers face.¹¹³ A number of witnesses stated that a strong relationship of trust develops quickly between farmers and practitioners when the latter fully understand farmers’ needs and issues. Sean Stanford, a farmer from southern Alberta, noted that “a lot of times the only ones who understand us are other producers.”¹¹⁴ Many witnesses emphasized peer support as an important factor in recovery.

Bob Guest, Chairman of the Canadian Farmers with Disabilities Registry, stated that the stress and difficulties experienced by farmers and their families are greatly increased when they must deal with both the psychological and physical aspects of disabilities.¹¹⁵

109 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 4 October 2018, 0850 (Elizabeth Connery).

110 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 27 September 2018, 850 (Alain d’Amours).

111 Ibid., 1040 (Lesley Kelly).

112 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 25 October 2018, 0850 (Kim Hyndman-Moffat).

113 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 2 October 2018, 0930 (Pierrette Desrosiers).

114 Ibid., 1010 (Sean Stanford).

115 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 23 October 2018, 0845 (Bob Guest, Chairman, Canadian Farmers with Disabilities Registry).

According to Mr. Guest, the sooner the intervention, the greater the chance that the persons concerned will go back to farming.¹¹⁶ Understanding what another person is going through and meeting a farmer who is experiencing the same situation can be useful in the mental health care process.

We're the only national organization that works with farmers and ranchers with a disability. Our organization is made up of disabled volunteers committed to helping other disabled farmers. Our volunteers experienced their own challenges, yet they take time to work tirelessly with others.¹¹⁷

116 *Ibid.*, 0915.

117 *Ibid.*, 0845.



POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

There is a long way to go before the mental health problems facing farmers are addressed properly and the causes of these problems are reduced. However, the Committee heard a number of proposals that could be introduced immediately across the country to mitigate these problems.

A. COORDINATE NATIONWIDE INITIATIVES

Many witnesses mentioned the need for national coordination of existing initiatives to support farmers' mental health.

There is a strong desire for a national resource that all members of agriculture and their support network can easily access. Having one national resource would avoid duplication and maximize resources. It needs to be simple, and it needs to be readily accessible if you have any hope of people knowing about it and feeling comfortable using the service. A national service would need to be open to everyone involved in agriculture and their support networks as well.¹¹⁸

Andria Jones-Bitton criticized the lack of a national strategy for farmers. She stated that duplication of effort was a problem and suggested introducing a "Canadian network for farmer mental health."¹¹⁹ Ron Bonnett supported this idea, adding that this network should ensure practical research is conducted in order to develop effective supports.¹²⁰ Heather Watson stated that establishing a round table beforehand would bring all stakeholders together to determine existing resources and requirements, and thereby help to identify needs.¹²¹

What specific objectives should a national initiative have? According to Ron Bonnett, a priority objective should be to encourage the development of programs supporting mental health and resilience. He also suggested to explore the possibility of extending existing programs from other provinces nationally, such as [Agir en sentinelle pour la prévention du suicide — Déclinaison agricole](#) in Quebec, or Manitoba Farm, Rural &

118 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 4 October 2018, 0940 (Mary Ann Doré, Team Leader, Online Services, Ag Women's Network).

119 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 27 September 2018, 0900 (Andria Jones-Bitton).

120 Ibid., 0950 (Ron Bonnett).

121 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 29 January 2019, 1155 (Heather Watson).

Northern Support Services mental health counselling services.¹²² Louise Bradley stated that the mental health distance training offered online by the Strongest Families Institute is another resource that should be extended across the country.¹²³

Andria Jones-Bitton specified that the strategy should include research and development of evidence-based mental health training programs and awareness programs. Coordinating these resources through a national strategy would foster connections between agriculture and the academic community.

Through participatory action research, it would produce practical research that farmers actually want, effective training programs that farmers will actually use, and would help implement wellness and training curricula for students in agricultural and veterinary colleges, so that we can train people early. To do this, we need to create a transdisciplinary network across all provinces and territories and produce the resources that are specific for agriculture and delivered by people who know agriculture. By doing this, we help strengthen our farmers, our agricultural sector and help them be poised for growth and innovation.¹²⁴

Lastly, Chris van den Heuvel believes that this initiative should also aim to introduce mental health professionals to farmers' unique circumstances.¹²⁵ Keith Currie noted that training and awareness efforts should be directed at all stakeholders who are in contact with producers, including "farm input suppliers, farm advisers and government inspection agents."¹²⁶ Some witnesses highlighted that government inspection procedures may lead to an important stress.

This past year has been extremely stressful: we've survived two tornadoes, which struck four of our nine farms; I had a knee shattered in June, which I'm hoping to have back to normal by January; but the worst part was undergoing an integrity audit through Employment and Social Development Canada.¹²⁷

122 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 27 September 2018, 1010 (Ron Bonnett).

123 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 16 October 2018, 0950 (Louise Bradley).

124 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 27 September 2018, 0855 (Andria Jones-Bitton).

125 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 1^{er} November 2018, 0915 (Chris van den Heuvel).

126 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 16 October 2018, 0850 (Keith Currie).

127 Ibid., 0955 (Murray Porteous).



Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada oversee the national coordination of various research and prevention activities targeting the mental health of farmers.

Telephone help lines are another initiative that could be coordinated across the country. Janet Smith explained that a help line could be introduced in each province or a centralized line could be introduced nationally in both official languages, to reflect the country's linguistic diversity.¹²⁸ Karen R. Cohen commented on the introduction of e-mental health services, which have proven effective in treating some mental health problems like depression, social anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and eating disorders. She believes that Internet-delivered cognitive behavioural therapy, offered through the University of Regina in Saskatchewan, shows how effective this approach is, particularly for reaching people in rural areas.¹²⁹

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada facilitate, coordinate and promote telephone help lines and e-mental health services for farmers and Canadians living in rural areas.

However, Lisa Ashworth noted that before e-mental health services can be introduced, reliable high-speed Internet must be available and there must be enough people trained in mental health first aid to provide services.¹³⁰ Ron Bonnett suggested that e-services supplement other tools and not replace the human interaction gained by talking on the phone or receiving individual, face-to-face support.¹³¹

B. INTRODUCE NEW RESOURCES

Many witnesses said that farming needs to be promoted across the country to increase the public's understanding of and confidence in the agricultural sector. Mehgin Reynolds recommended working with government to introduce outreach programs in the schools

128 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 25 October 2018, 0900 (Janet Smith).

129 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 22 November 2018, 0950 (Karen R. Cohen).

130 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 October 2018, 0850 (Lisa Ashworth).

131 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 27 September 2018, 1035 (Ron Bonnett).

that are compatible with the curriculum.¹³² Pierrette Desrosiers commented that all children should have the opportunity to visit a farm at least once during their education.¹³³ In Quebec, in order to raise awareness about agricultural activities, the Union des producteurs agricoles invites the public to annual open house events at farms and applies strict biosecurity measures during these events.¹³⁴ On a more general note, Philippe Roy remarked that Canadians do not always understand what farming is all about and a “bridge must be built between Canadians and farmers” through programs.

Activities could be created for adding value to agriculture. A bridge must be built between Canadians and farmers. In the countryside, farmers feel like they are bothering people on the road when they drive their tractor, for example, when someone on vacation follows them in their convertible. That person is on vacation, but the farmer is working. Those kinds of situations anger farmers.

That should be recognized. It has to do with civility, but there is also a political aspect to it. The government must ensure that its organizations are highlighting the work of agricultural producers.¹³⁵

Bridges also need to be built between some groups in the agriculture industry that do not understand each other well. For example, Eduardo Huesca spoke of the lack of mutual understanding between producers and the seasonal foreign workers they hire regularly. Employers are sometimes unaware of the pressures on foreign workers, while these workers can have a distorted view of farmers given the privileged status of landowners in some developing countries. According to Mr. Huesca, the federal government should introduce awareness programs for employers and temporary foreign workers so that the “relationship may have space to have a bit of empathy and vice versa.”¹³⁶

Maria Labrecque Duchesneau believes that the relationship between farmers and their input suppliers is unbalanced and needs to be corrected. She suggested creating an ombudsman to help farmers in legal disputes with their industry partners:

Many producers told me about their frustration with disputes that were going nowhere because the cost of legal counsel was far too high and the process was far too long.

132 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 2 October 2018, 1005 (Mehgin Reynolds).

133 Ibid., 0910 (Pierrette Desrosiers).

134 Holstein Québec, *Qu'est-ce que la Biosécurité?* [AVAILABLE IN FRENCH ONLY]

135 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 25 October 2018, 0925 (Philippe Roy, Associate Professor, Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, Masculinities and Society Network, Université Laval).

136 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 October 2018, 0930 (Eduardo Huesca).



Given this lack of justice, people in the agricultural business community know full well that farmers will have no recourse. Without an agriculture ombudsman, acting as a negotiator, we will have a David and Goliath situation.¹³⁷

Some witnesses also called for the government to make funding commitments. Increased federal funding for agriculture could help to reduce the stress factors affecting farmers, according to Chris van den Heuvel. He recommended increasing risk management funding under the Canadian Agricultural Partnership. He believes this increased support is essential to reconcile mental health objectives with export growth targets, such as those in the [Economic Strategy's Agri-Food Table](#), which require farmers to make significant investments and assume considerable risk.¹³⁸

Amber Fletcher stated that addressing the root causes of farmers' mental health problems means providing the sector with strong economic support, particularly with regard to market certainty, farm incomes and input costs.¹³⁹ In its brief to the Committee, the Union des producteurs agricoles (UPA) echoed this view and prepared a list of recommendations to address specific socioeconomic problems affecting mental health in order to "head off crisis." For example, the UPA recommended implementing "programs to facilitate the transfer of intergenerational farms" and "an appropriate risk management program" to counter the economic, political or climate problems facing farmers.¹⁴⁰

On the subject of health care, Fred Phelps found it unacceptable that the mental health services provided by social workers, psychologists and other regulated professionals are not covered by the publicly funded system. In his view, this situation leads to accessibility issues, where "only those with the means to pay out of pocket and the ability to access private employment insurance plans are able to receive mental health services."¹⁴¹ He recommended that the federal government allocate "a mental health envelope of money" over and above the funding transferred to the provinces for their respective health care systems.¹⁴² Lastly, Pierre-Nicolas Girard suggested that the

137 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 October 2018, 0855 (Maria Labrecque Duchesneau).

138 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 1 November 2018, 0935 (Chris van den Heuvel).

139 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 23 October 2018, 0850 (Amber Fletcher).

140 Union des producteurs agricoles, [Mental Health Challenges That Canadian Farmers, Ranchers and Producers Face](#), 3 October 2018.

141 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 1 November 2018, 0900 (Fred Phelps).

142 Ibid., 0925.

Canadian Mental Health Association create an agriculture program so that the health care system can better reflect the realities of farming.¹⁴³

143 House of Commons, AGRI, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 27 September 2018, 0845 (Pierre-Nicolas Girard).



CONCLUSION

The mental health of farmers is a troubling issue that has been overlooked for a long time. Many agricultural stakeholders stated that the human dimensions of agriculture are still not given the same attention as the economic and financial dimensions. However, many awareness and intervention activities have been developed to address mental health problems in the agricultural sector and rural areas. In short, “Canada cannot expect its agricultural sector to grow and expand if it does not invest in farmers’ foundational well-being.”¹⁴⁴

144 House of Commons, AGRI, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 22 November 2018, 1000 (Mary Robinson).

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
Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food Tom Rosser, Assistant Deputy Minister Strategic Policy Branch	2018/06/13	101
Farm Credit Canada Michael Hoffort, President and Chief Executive Officer	2018/06/13	101
Canadian Federation of Agriculture Ron Bonnett, President	2018/09/27	107
Contact Richelieu-Yamaska Alain d'Amours, General Director	2018/09/27	107
Do More Agriculture Foundation Lesley Kelly, Co-Founder	2018/09/27	107
Groupe Leader Plus Inc. Pierre Beaulieu, Chief Executive Officer Agriculture	2018/09/27	107
Union des producteurs agricoles Martin Caron, First Vice-President Pierre-Nicolas Girard, Consultant in Mental Health	2018/09/27	107
University of Guelph Andria Jones-Bitton, Associate Professor Ontario Veterinary College	2018/09/27	107
As an individual Sean Stanford, Farmer	2018/10/02	108

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Au coeur des familles agricoles René Beauregard, Director General Nancy Langevin, Field Worker Le travailleur de rang	2018/10/02	108
LPG Farms Mehgin Reynolds, Owner Operator	2018/10/02	108
Pierrette Desrosiers Psychoaching Pierrette Desrosiers, Occupational Psychologist	2018/10/02	108
Ag Women`s Network Mary Ann Doré, Team Leader Online Services	2018/10/04	109
Canadian Agricultural Safety Association Marcel Hacault, Executive Director	2018/10/04	109
Canadian Horticultural Council Elizabeth Connery, Chair Labour Committee Rebecca Lee, Executive Director	2018/10/04	109
Ontario Sheep Farmers Jennifer MacTavish, General Manager	2018/10/04	109
As individuals Andrew Campbell, Partner Bellson Farms Murray Porteous, Past National Labour Chair, Canadian Horticultural Council and Vice-President Lingwood Farms Limited	2018/10/16	110
Farm Management Canada Heather Watson, Executive Director	2018/10/16	110
Mental Health Commission of Canada Louise Bradley, President and Chief Executive Officer	2018/10/16	110
Ontario Federation of Agriculture Keith Currie, President Peter Sykanda, Farm Policy Analyst	2018/10/16	110

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities Ray Orb, President	2018/10/16	110
As individuals Maria Labrecque Duchesneau, Founder Au coeur des familles agricoles and Le travailleur de rang Stewart Skinner, Chief Farming Officer Imani Farms	2018/10/18	111
Canadian Mental Health Association Patrick Smith, National Chief Executive Officer	2018/10/18	111
Canadian Young Farmers' Forum Paul Glenn, Past Chair	2018/10/18	111
Centre for Research and Intervention on Suicide, Ethical Issues and End-of-Life Practices Ginette Lafleur, PhD Candidate, Community Psychology Université du Québec à Montréal Lucie Pelchat, Training Advisor Association québécoise de la prévention du suicide	2018/10/18	111
Canadian Farmers with Disabilities Registry Bob Guest, Chairman Jonas Johnson	2018/10/23	112
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Katy Kamkar, Clinical Psychologist and Director Badge of Life Canada	2018/10/23	112
Mobile Crisis Services John McFadyen, Executive Director	2018/10/23	112
University of Regina Nicholas Carleton, Professor Department of Psychology Amber Fletcher, Associate Professor Department of Sociology	2018/10/23	112
Manitoba Farm, Rural & Northern Support Services Kim Hyndman-Moffat, Counsellor Janet Smith, Program Manager	2018/10/25	113

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Université Laval Philippe Roy, Associate Professor Université du Québec à Chicoutimi Masculinities and Society Network Gilles Tremblay, Researcher Professor Masculinities and Society Network	2018/10/25	113
Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick Lisa Ashworth, Director, Region 6 Board of Directors	2018/10/30	114
Issues Ink Shawn Brook, President Devyn Brook, Community Manager Do More Agriculture Foundation	2018/10/30	114
Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers Inc. Eduardo Huesca, Community Outreach and Program Coodinator Migrant Farm Worker Program, Hamilton Michelle Tew, Occupational Health Nurse Hamilton Clinic	2018/10/30	114
Alberta Health Services Robert Johnston, Clinical Psychologist, Manager Addiction and Mental Health	2018/11/01	115
Canadian Association of Social Workers Fred Phelps, Executive Director	2018/11/01	115
Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture Chris van den Heuvel, Director and Past President	2018/11/01	115
As an individual Hon. Ted Menzies	2018/11/22	119
Canadian Food Inspection Agency Rick James-Davies, Senior Director West Operations	2018/11/22	119
Canadian Psychological Association Karen R. Cohen, Chief Executive Officer	2018/11/22	119

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Prince Edward Island Federation of Agriculture Mary Robinson, Past President	2018/11/22	119
4-H Canada Elizabeth Jarvis, Director Government Relations Erin Smith, Interim Chief Executif Officer and Director of Programs	2019/01/29	125
Farm Credit Canada Michael Hoffort, President and Chief Executive Officer	2019/01/29	125
Farm Management Canada Heather Watson, Executive Director	2019/01/29	125

APPENDIX B LIST OF BRIEFS

The following is an alphabetical list of organizations and individuals who submitted briefs to the Committee related to this report. For more information, please consult the Committee's [webpage for this study](#).

Dairy Farmers of Canada

National Farmed Animal Health and Welfare Council

Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers Inc.

Union des producteurs agricoles

University of Guelph

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. 101, 107 to 115, 119, 125, 126 and 138 to 141](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Pat Finnigan
Chair

Supplementary Report

To the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Foods

**Mental Health – A Priority for our Farmers
May 2019**

Introduction:

The incidence of mental health problems in the Canadian agriculture sector is reaching crisis proportions. Farmers, ranchers, producers and their families are increasingly experiencing high levels of stress, depression and even suicidal thoughts.

The causes are many and varied. Farmers and producers face increased stress and hardship arising from recent government initiatives like the federal carbon tax and concessions made by the government in recent trade agreements. Market volatility, prices, the high costs associated with farming, and succession planning can also result in increased anxiety and stress levels.

More recently, social media attacks from environmental and “animal rights” activists are targeting farmers and their families, resulting in significant distress.

The Committee heard that Canada cannot have a sustainable food system without sustainable farmers. We heard from most witnesses that Canada needs a coordinated and a national approach to help farmers access the help they need.

Many witnesses described the important role the federal government can play in educating the public about the truth of food production, while countering many of the falsehoods perpetrated by anti-farm groups.

The federal government can also play an important role in supporting farmers and producers by eliminating programs not supported by science or facts.

As well, the Committee heard that the federal government must better consider the needs of Canada’s agricultural sector in its legislative and regulatory initiatives and must stop using Canada’s agricultural sector as a “pawn” in free-trade negotiations. Action on this front would help to reduce government-generated stresses for farmers and producers.

The Members of the Committee who have produced this supplementary report agree with many elements and many recommendations of the main report, *Mental Health – a Priority for our Farmers*. However, we believe that the report does not adequately reflect a lot of testimony with regard to the urgency of the problem as well as the need for action on several fronts such as education and social media attacks.

The Standing Committee heard evidence from many witnesses that “psychological distress is a real problem in the farming sector, indeed it is a huge problem.¹” The Committee also heard from several witnesses that “a failure to address farmer mental health poses a serious threat to the sustainability and viability of Canadian agriculture.²”

Today, Canada’s agriculture and agri-food industry contributes over \$110 billion annually to Canada's gross domestic product (GDP). That represents more than the national GDP of 2/3 of

¹ House of Commons, AGRI, Evidence, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 27 September 2018 (Martin Caron First Vice-President, Union des producteurs agricoles)

² House of Commons, AGRI, Evidence, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 4 October 2018 (Jennifer MacTavish, General Manager Ontario Sheep Farmers)

the world's countries. Canada is the 5th largest agricultural exporter in the world, and the agriculture and agri-food industry employs 2.3 million Canadians.³

Threats to the viability of Canada's agriculture sector represent threats to the viability of our economy and our future economic growth. Stakeholders and all levels of governments need to act quickly.

PART 1 – PUBLIC EDUCATION

Farmers, ranchers and producers have for generations endured market uncertainties, uncertainties related to the weather, price fluctuations and other factors beyond their control. Dealing with uncertainties has always been part of the farming reality. Today there is an added complication which is causing a great deal of distress and anxiety and threatening the viability of our food system. Many witnesses at committee referred to it as a public perception of farming.

Until recently, many Canadians may have had at least a distant connection to farming. This is no longer the case. The vast majority of Canadians have never even visited a farm. They know nothing about the system of food production. And what they think they know comes largely from misinformation supplied by individuals or organizations with a vested interest in promoting alternate lifestyles.

“Farmers feel scrutinized. They feel attacked by the public, anti-agriculture groups, people who don't understand farming who are speaking out openly. You can make fun of me as a professor, and I can go home, and I have a whole bunch of other stuff to my sense of identity. Farmers don't have that. Their occupation is their identity, it's their culture.”⁴

The Standing Committee heard from several witnesses that the Federal government should play a more proactive role in supporting farmers, ranchers and producers through public education.

Currently, Saskatchewan offers a program called Agriculture in the Classroom. Alberta has a similar initiative. The Committee also heard about an initiative in the United Kingdom called “Facetime with a Farmer” which is offered in the classroom.

“As fewer and fewer people understand how extremely complex an agricultural business is, and as society is tending to consider the work of farmers less natural and less valuable, an enormous amount of education needs to be done, starting at the base, in the schools, to explain it and to re-establish its value. I think we have no choice. In order to counter the misinformation, we are going to have to inform the public at large, and educate young and old

³ Agriculture and Agri-Foods Canada.

⁴ House of Commons, AGRI, Evidence, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 27 September 2018 (Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton, Associate Professor, Ontario Veterinary College, University of Guelph).

alike, so that they understand how much respect farmers have for the environment and for animals, and how excellent a job they do.⁵”

Committee members also heard that product labelling can play a big role in influencing public perceptions. Members associated with this supplemental report concur.

Recommendation 1: *The Federal government should work with provincial and territorial governments, stakeholders and education professionals to develop programs that could be added to current education curriculums so that Canadians are better educated about the nature of food production and the care that farmers take in managing their animals or their crops.*

Recommendation 2: *To help educate Canadians, the Federal government should implement regulations to ban false and misleading product labelling, such as those which suggest that GMOs are a food ingredient.*

PART 2 – GOVERNMENT REGULATION

Like many business owners in Canada, farmers and ranchers often find that engaging with the federal government can be time consuming and stressful. Witnesses at committee repeatedly suggested that the government is itself contributing to major stress levels within the farming community by implementing new policies or regulations without consulting or even in some cases notifying farmers or farm stakeholder organizations. This includes initiatives like the federal carbon tax, changes to the Canada food guide, the front of packing labelling proposal, PMRA regulations, and the unfair tax changes.

Many of these most recent initiatives have clearly been proposed or implemented with little thought to Canada’s agriculture and agri-food sector. The front of package labelling for instance would require food to be labelled with warning signs giving the impression the food grown by Canadian producers is unsafe. The Canada food guide was also designed without input from producers. Changes like this are difficult for dairy and meat producers which already under attack by misinformation campaigns against their products.

The tax changes proposed by the government in 2017 were also responsible for uncertainty and distress for many farmers. The portrayal of family farmers as wealthy “tax-cheats” showed that decisions taken regarding Canada’s agriculture industry showed a lack of understanding of how family farms operate in Canada. Changes to the lifetime capital gains exemption, amongst others, would create unprecedented complexity for multigenerational farms looking to transfer to the next generation.

The Pest Management Regulatory Agency’s re-valuation process is also a cause for stress. As things currently are the PMRA does not have the capacity to perform all the mandated re-evaluations of pesticides in the coming decade.

⁵ House of Commons, AGRI, Evidence, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 2 October 2018 (Pierrette Desrosiers Occupational Psychologist)

Concessions made by the federal government within free trade agreements are also causing significant financial hardship and increasing the levels of uncertainty for farmers.

“We know that farming is a high-risk industry that requires an incredible capacity to deal with volatility and uncertainty. Over the course of this last year alone, Canadian farmers have endured drought, porcine epidemic diarrhea, and the financial impacts of the negotiation and subsequent signing of NAFTA 2.0, the U.S.-Mexico-Canada agreement.⁶”

On the latter note, however, some witnesses suggested that the Federal government must do a better job of protecting the interests of farmers.

“Our government of whatever political stripe that negotiates these trade deals has to stop using agriculture as a pawn when it comes to negotiating.⁷”

Members of the committee associated with this supplementary report concur that the Federal government should play its part in helping to reduce stress amongst farmers by putting in place mechanisms to better consult with farmers and stakeholders while also ensuring that the interests of farmers are taken into account as regulations and other initiatives are developed.

Recommendation 3: *The Federal government should take into account the interests of farmers when proceeding with regulatory or legislative changes (ex. Crop input reassessments, fee increases, carbon tax, etc.) and better consult with farmers and stakeholder groups before proceeding with such changes or give full consideration to withdrawing said changes if the impact is found to be of great negative impact on the Canadian agriculture sector.*

PART 3 – SOCIAL MEDIA ATTACKS

Today, farmers, ranchers and producers come under attack from many different sources. As one witness put it: “Our ancestors only had to worry about weather and prices. Today, we farmers have the added worry of being a target of an extreme activist, something that takes a serious toll on me mentally.⁸” Committee members heard extremely disturbing testimony from witnesses relating how they had been verbally assaulted, threatened and called murderers or rapists over social media channels by environmental terrorists and “animal rights” extremists.

⁶ House of Commons, AGRI, Evidence, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 4 October 2018 (Jennifer MacTavish, General Manager Ontario Sheep Farmers)

⁷ House of Commons, AGRI, Evidence, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 1 November 2018 (Chris van den Heuvel, Director and Past President, Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture)

⁸ House of Commons, AGRI, Evidence, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 October 2018 (Stewart Skinner, Chief Farming Officer, Imani Farms, As an Individual)

Such social media attacks are not tolerated in most urban settings, or among teenagers. Yet little has been done to curb these attacks targeted to farmers.

“Whom do these animal rights activists target? Of course, the first ones in their sights are the producers. Today, as well as being called polluters, they are accused of being aggressors and rapists, because of artificial insemination, and child kidnappers and killers. You know, those words have extremely serious consequences. As one farmer told me, when he gets up in the morning and he sees that type of thing on Facebook, he's already wondering how he is going to cope. It adds a lot of stress and distress.⁹”

Such testimony is troubling and deeply disturbing. Sadly, it is quite common to see many instances of bullying or intimidation towards farmers go unpunished.

Recommendation 4: *That the Federal government should take any and all measures necessary to prevent these unprovoked attacks as well as to make sure individuals who perpetrate them face justice.*

PART 4 – GOVERNMENT ACTION

Most witnesses suggested that Canada needs a national strategy “that would focus on farmer and rancher mental health so that we could coordinate and share resources and know what’s happening across Canada.¹⁰”

“We have to be more innovative. In a country the size of Canada, we can’t build mental health clinics on every street corner. We need to rethink the way in which we are delivering services, in order to get these important programs to people, particularly when they are feeling suicidal.¹¹”

Tragically, the committee heard that rural youth under the age of 20 are four to six times more likely to commit suicide than those living in urban areas. One witness suggested that “youth across Canada have identified mental health as one of their greatest challenges and have indicated the need for more support and resources.¹²”

In order to be successful, any national service for Canada’s farming community must reflect the realities that most farmers face. “We need to recognize that, for farmers, their workplace and

⁹ House of Commons, AGRI, Evidence, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 2 October 2018 (Pierrette Desrosiers Occupational Psychologist)

¹⁰ House of Commons, AGRI, Evidence, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 4 October 2018 (Marcel Hacault, Executive Director, Canadian Agricultural Safety Association)

¹¹ House of Commons, AGRI, Evidence, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 16 October 2018 (Louise Bradley, President and CEO, Mental Health Commission of Canada)

¹² House of Commons, AGRI, Evidence, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 2 October 2018 (Erin Smith, Interim Chief Executive Officer and Director of Programs, 4-H Canada)

their business is also their home.¹³” As one witness put it: “Mental health services have to be adapted to farmers’ realities. Farmers diagnosed with a mental illness should not be told to rest at their farm along with their hundred or so cows.”¹⁴

Recommendation 5: *Calls for additional federal government leadership should at a minimum be considered and explored with our partners and stakeholders.*

PART 5 – REPEALING THE CARBON TAX

The federal carbon tax which came into effect on April 1st, 2019 and its implementation are responsible for much stress to Canadian producers. As discussed earlier, new regulatory burdens contribute to financial difficulty and uncertainty for producers across the country. The Carbon tax rollout has been no different.

In many cases the tax is being imposed on provinces where it is overwhelmingly unpopular, especially with Canadians living in rural areas. The imposition of the tax disproportionately affects rural Canadians, and especially farmers who rely on diesel and petroleum to fuel their farm equipment, transport livestock and grain, and heat their buildings.

Although there have been exemptions for agriculture the carbon tax rollout overlooked several important areas. Firstly, fuel purchased at cardlocks would not have been exempt under the federal government’s previous plans. This was reversed only after public outcry. Still, producers must deal with the carbon tax on heating barns, transporting grain or livestock and drying grain.

One witness described it like this, “You see, I cannot raise the price I sell my crops for to help cover the rising expenses associated with growing my crops. When I need to move grain to pay bills, I try to find the best contract possible, but ultimately, I have very little control over the price. I’m usually forced to sell at a time when prices are low from harvest pressure to cover bills that have been accumulating over the year. If a carbon tax is forced upon me, I stand to add an additional \$30,000 to my expense list as well.”¹⁵

Financial pressures contribute to the overall mental health picture. It is one of the primary threads that weaves through the testimony of all witnesses. The carbon tax is another stress factor that contributes to this financial pressure.

Recommendation 6: *The federal government should recognise the economic damage and financial stress caused by the federal carbon tax and should immediately scrap it.*

¹³ House of Commons, AGRI, Evidence, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 2 October 2018 (René Beaugard Occupational Psychologist)

¹⁴ House of Commons, AGRI, Evidence, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 27 September 2018 (Pierre-Nicolas Girard, Consultant in Mental Health, Union des Producteurs Agricoles)

¹⁵ House of Commons, AGRI, Evidence, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 2 October 2018 (Mehgin Reynolds Owner Operator, LPG farms)

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