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Chair

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC)): I'd like to bring this meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, meeting number 5. We are studying prison farm closures and food provisionment. We'd like to welcome today, as witnesses from the Correctional Services of Canada, the regional deputy commissioner, Mr. Ross Toller.

You have with you some other people from the department, and I will ask you to introduce them. Will there be more than one opening statement?

Mr. Ross Toller (Regional Deputy Commissioner of Ontario, Correctional Service Canada): Just the one.

The Chair: We'll give you ten minutes approximately, and I think you know how it works at the committee. After the opening statement we'll go over to the official opposition.

You have a point of order, Mr. Holland?

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): If I could quickly, Mr. Chair, you and I had an opportunity to speak briefly prior to the meeting with respect to the establishment of witnesses. I think most times we can come to a consensus on witnesses, but there was some confusion before this meeting. I'm going to suggest, just to avoid further confusion, that perhaps in the future we could submit, say a week in advance, who our witnesses are and try to come to a consensus by way of direction to the clerk. If there isn't a consensus, then we obviously would have to come to the committee. I anticipate most times we could come to some form of consensus on the witness list, but in the event we couldn't, then we could ensure that matter would come back before the committee.

The Chair: You've all heard that. Do you have any comment on that point of order?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): My only comment is that when this session started we were trying to be as non-partisan as we'd ever been. Mr. Chair, as you know, the other side hijacked the committee agenda and filled it up. We have taken the approach that we want to continue to be agreeable to work with the other side. We have been told the agreement among the whips was that there would be an equal number of witnesses; the committees would work on that. I think there are some other issues there that we have agreed to.

We've abided by that. We didn't like what the opposition did when they filled the agenda with things and moved government business and others off to the side. We're more than happy to work in a manner that is fair to the House and to the people of this committee,

but to load up a committee agenda without discussing it among ourselves when we've already had people scheduled to be here is a little bit less than what we had understood the whips had agreed to.

The Chair: We'll leave it at that then.

Mr. Mark Holland: I don't have a problem with working with one another, and as I said, most of the time I think we can establish consensus around the establishment of witnesses. My only point is, in what I hope to be a rare event that we don't have consensus on witnesses, to avoid confusion in the future and putting the clerk in an awkward position, if there isn't consensus, then we would bring it back to committee.

The Chair: Okay. My understanding was that there was an agreement among our whips that there would be an equal number of witnesses on both sides. We'll try to work with that. I agree we should try to reach a consensus as much as possible. If there are no other comments, we'll continue with the meeting.

Mr. Toller, when you are ready, you may begin.

Mr. Ross Toller: Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and committee members, and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I have with me Liette Dumas-Sluyter, acting assistant commissioner of corporate services; Pushkar Godbole, director general of technical services and facilities; and John Sargent, the chief executive officer of CORCAN.

It's our pleasure to appear before you to respond to any questions you may have about CORCAN farm closures and food procurement this afternoon. As you are aware, the Correctional Service of Canada will be closing six federal CORCAN farms by March 31, 2011, as a result of the Government of Canada's strategic review. This review requires all existing government programs to be reviewed on a four-year cycle to ensure that programs are effective and efficient.

In 2008, the Correctional Service of Canada assessed its programs and services to ensure that funding is focused in the areas where they are most needed and to identify better ways that we can deliver services and programs. This process has given the Correctional Service of Canada the opportunity to further align its budget, programs, and priorities with the new vision for federal corrections in Canada. The service is committed to both providing correctional programs to offenders and assisting them to develop employability skills that will facilitate their obtaining and keeping a job in the community.

In order for us to be successful in this aspect, our employability skills development opportunities for offenders must reflect labour market demands of today and the future. This is something CSC does not take lightly. With the help of local business and government departments, we are working towards the development of alternative employment training that will help offenders with the successful reintegration into society.

The experience and skills obtained from working in the farms have been valuable; however, the decision to close the remaining farms was based on the fact that offenders were not gaining the maximum employability skills through agriculture. This becomes evident as over the last five years less than 1% of all offenders released into the community found work in the agricultural sector.

While offenders participating in the farming program did gain employability skills such as responsibility, team work, accountability, punctuality, and farming skills, relatively few offenders found work in agriculture once released into society. Therefore, CSC is looking at developing alternative training that will help meet the needs and realities of today's labour market and improve opportunities afforded to the inmates in the six minimum security penitentiaries across the country. This in turn will reflect a better integration of correctional programs, education, and vocational skills development.

These opportunities will be closely aligned to CSC's transformation agenda and will foster further employment skills development. CORCAN will continue to operate the other business lines, which include manufacturing, services, construction, and textiles. In addition, plans are currently being developed to produce new work opportunities and training to offenders that will include providing offenders with labour market-driven training and employment, formal vocational training programs that will provide offenders with marketable third-party certification, as well as several other opportunities that are being actively pursued with both government and the private sector.

As for other areas of CSC operations impacted by the farm closures, I can say that the service will use all available human resource tools and processes to ensure that all affected CSC staff are offered appropriate employment elsewhere.

I can tell you that no final decision has yet been made on future use of the land that was used for farming, but for the time being, the commissioner is open to discussions about leasing portions of the land to local farmers, provided the security of the facilities are not jeopardized.

As farms supply a range of produce, meat, eggs, and milk to federal institutions, once they close down, CSC will purchase these items through existing contracting authorities and mechanisms, including the government tendering system. The service does not anticipate a significant impact to the annual cost of food procurement due to the closing of the CORCAN farms. In general, we have found that some CORCAN products such as beef, pork, and chicken were more expensive on average than from local Canadian vendors, whereas other CORCAN products such as eggs and milk were less expensive.

Our financial records indicate that during the fiscal year 2008-09, CSC purchased a total value of approximately \$4 million for inmate food from the CORCAN farms out of a total of approximately \$27 million spent for inmate food that year.

CORCAN farms previously operated in three of our five regions. In Atlantic Canada and Ontario, meat products, milk products, and eggs are purchased from CORCAN. As of April 2009, the prairie region ceased purchasing meat products from CORCAN as the meat production operations in the prairie regions were discontinued. In the Quebec region, eggs and milk products are purchased from Ontario CORCAN operations. In the Pacific region, food products have been purchased using regular government procurement processes.

● (1535)

CSC is also currently examining the use of national and regional contracts for certain food commodities to realize economies of scale in the procurement of food commodities. In fiscal year 2010-11, Public Works and Government Services Canada intends to introduce a new national commodity strategy that outlines how the Canadian government will purchase food and beverage commodities over a multi-year period. The goal of this new strategy is to provide a more consistent procurement process for all government departments and an increased value to Canadians as best pricing for commodities should be obtained. Pricing will be obtained from the vendors on a more frequent basis in order to take advantage of market fluctuations in cost of commodities.

As for the farm equipment and livestock, CSC is obligated to seek fair value for all disposed assets. Any assets not required by CSC will be offered to other government departments. Some farm-specific equipment has already been sold to Agriculture Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Any remaining assets will be disposed of in accordance with government policy.

Although farm closures will introduce new challenges, I'm confident that CSC will continue to fulfill its mandate and to ensure that we deliver good public safety results to Canadians.

Thank you, and we welcome your questions today.

● (1540)

The Chair: Thank you very much. We'll move over to the Liberal Party.

Mr. Holland, please. You have seven minutes.

Mr. Mark Holland: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to the witnesses for appearing today. Our time is limited, so if you could keep your responses brief, it would be deeply appreciated.

My first question is with respect to the mandate of the prison farm program. What was and is the mandate of the prison farm program?

Mr. Ross Toller: Well, it's the mandate of the Correctional Services of Canada and it includes all programs, which is to manage and administer the sentences that are imposed by the courts and to aid inmates in their reintegration and rehabilitative process.

Mr. Mark Holland: Okay. On that point, if one of the principal objectives of any program in Corrections Canada is rehabilitation, what I didn't hear you address is the efficacy of the prison farm program from a perspective of rehabilitation. What we know is that there are a variety of international studies that say that animal husbandry, working with animals, is on the leading edge of rehabilitation. It's one of the most successful things you can do to rehabilitate somebody. We also know, from talking with Correctional Services officers who've worked in some cases more than 30 years in prison farms that they don't know a better program at rehabilitating inmates.

With all that evidence on the one side, can you give me any evidence that you have on the other side that these programs aren't effective in rehabilitating inmates?

Mr. Ross Toller: As I said in my opening comments, there is no question that working on a farm does contribute to valuable skills, such as reliability, punctuality, and teamwork—elements associated with working in any sort of level of environment. However, the difficulty is very clear, that for those people who leave our facilities to seek employment, the agricultural sector is not a viable, realistic market right now. I mention some statistics here that were presented to this panel before, that in only 99 cases out of 25,000 were jobs actually obtained in the agricultural market. What we do know is evidenced by some of the Canadian council boards, that there is a strong demand and a continued need for labour in the vocational trades skill area.

Mr. Mark Holland: One of the things I've heard time and time again with this program is the fact that, because it's a voluntary program, because these inmates are going in at 4:30 or 5 o'clock in the morning and working a full day, one of the skills they learn that is critical—is it not?—to employability is the value of a good day's work, understanding the motivation of getting up in the morning and doing a good job, the pride that comes with doing a good job. Are those skills not critical skills in whatever job you're going to pursue afterwards?

I have a general arts degree. I took political science and history. I can apply almost none of it directly to what I do in my everyday job. But the point is about giving base skills. Don't you find those skills critical to somebody's employability once they get out of prison?

Secondly, when you said at the beginning that the mandate is rehabilitation, I don't recall you saying that the principal mandate is jobs skills. I admit it's important, absolutely, but why all the

emphasis on job skills when we know they do get this base and we know it's so effective at rehabilitation?

Mr. Ross Toller: There's no question that skills learned in any position relative to punctuality, teamwork, the things that I mentioned there, are important in an inmate's progress towards rehabilitation. There's no question of that. However, to me, our perspective is that learning those skills in a job that is more likely to give you employment at the end would be quite reasonable.

On the second part of your question, a very high number of inmates, almost 70%, come to us with unstable work histories; 60% of the inmates who come to us have no skill, no trade, or no vocational experience. There's lots of information that notes that inmates in vocational trades have a 33% less likelihood to recidivate. So, to me, the essence of training in skill development with an employability aspect to obtain a job that's real in the market and needed is the best recipe for rehabilitative public safety results.

Mr. Mark Holland: You just mentioned recidivism statistics for vocational training; do you have recidivism statistics for the prison farm program?

Second, if you don't have those statistics, do you have the success of employment when they come afterward? I ask because employers I've talked to who've hired them have said they are some of the hardest-working people they've ever met.

Third, what are you replacing it with? We're a week and a half away, and I've yet to get an answer on the incredible, amazing thing that is so much better than prison farms that you're replacing it with. What are you replacing it with?

• (1545)

Mr. Ross Toller: We don't have the statistics that break it down relative to the employment aspect that you asked about in terms of specifics on where the jobs went. There are a number of areas that we are looking at to replace in different levels of programs. If you just give me half a minute—

Mr. Mark Holland: Well, let me ask you this: how can you make a decision that something doesn't provide strong employment skills if you don't have the statistics on whether people are getting jobs when they come out? What evidence are you basing that on?

Mr. Ross Toller: Well, I just mentioned evidence that only a very small portion—

Mr. Mark Holland: You just said agriculture, though.

Mr. Ross Toller: Very few of our inmates who are released from prisons get any jobs in the agricultural sector—

Mr. Mark Holland: Well, what about construction? I've talked to all kinds of those involved in construction who say the people who come out of this program have an incredible work ethic and understand the value of a job and understand the motivation needed to get a job. So I'm asking the question for all types of jobs, not just agriculture. It's about broad skills. What percentage of people, when they leave, are getting jobs?

I'm hearing there is tremendous demand, so I'm just wondering. You made the decision to cut this and you're saying people aren't getting employment. What are you basing it on? What are your statistics for employment for people coming out of this program?

Mr. Ross Toller: I can refer you to what we have in terms of offender job placements. These are placements for people who go through the CORCAN employment group. I'll use figures from 2008-09. Of 2,560 areas where job placements took place, 476 offenders got jobs in construction trades, 367 in general labour types of trades, and 14 in agricultural and horticultural areas.

Mr. Mark Holland: Maybe you're not understanding my question. People come through the prison farm program and come out the other side. What are the statistics for them, in terms of how many people are engaged in meaningful employment once they come out, relative to the other programs you are putting on? That's a much more important statistic.

Mr. Ross Toller: I really am not sure if I understand your question. Sorry.

Mr. Mark Holland: The point is that for some reason you think that if you get these skills, you can only work in agriculture. What I am hearing from construction and many other industries is that they value this program because of the work ethic it teaches and that they desire people coming out of these programs for things like construction and other programs. So a real comparison would be the statistics of those coming out of other programs versus those coming out of the prison farm program in terms of employment, period, and not just in agriculture.

Mr. Ross Toller: As I mentioned, we don't have that broken down, but again I go back—

Mr. Mark Holland: How can you make the point that...? You don't know whether it's not effective, but you're saying it's not effective. You're telling me that it doesn't give good job skills, yet you're telling me that you don't have comparative job statistics for people who are coming out of these programs.

Mr. Ross Toller: What I am telling you is that the labour market demand for agricultural work is very low—

Mr. Mark Holland: That's for agricultural work. I'm talking about—

Mr. Ross Toller: Construction trades and general labour are very clear here, and I think that's evident in the statistics we have there. Many construction workers look for employability, marketable skills, such as areas where there's apprenticeship and vocational training.

Mr. Mark Holland: Chair, I want to make one point, and we're going to come back to this. Please make the distinction.... I think this is the problem with all the information we're getting. I am not

suggesting that every person who comes out of the prison farm program is going to get a job in agriculture. It's quite the opposite. What I am saying is that the skills they're learning are actually vital and fundamental, so much so that they become very desirable when they come out. That's everything that I hear from every person I talk to. What you're telling me is that you don't have any statistics to demonstrate the contrary, so what I want and what we need and what we should have before a decision is made to shut down prison farms is the actual numbers. If it's not actually working to get people jobs, then show me the numbers.

Mr. Ross Toller: I believe what I did say to you is that the skills that are learned in any job are applicable to any other type of job, and I think that goes without saying. Those are the things we talked about: teamwork, punctuality, reliability, dependability. There is no question of that in my mind.

Mr. Mark Holland: I just want a comparison of program to program.

The Chair: We'll have to leave it there.

Go ahead, Ms. Mourani, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I thank you for your presence and for your statement.

My questions are more for Mr. Godbole. I believe that you are from Quebec. Is that the case?

Mr. Pushkar Godbole (Director General, Technical Services and Facilities, Correctional Service Canada): No.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: You are not from Quebec?

Mr. Pushkar Godbole: No.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: But I expressly requested that there be someone able to talk to us about Quebec. I was told that Mr. Godbole would be able to talk about Quebec and the food provisionment system.

Mr. Pushkar Godbole: I believe I am able to respond regarding this issue.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I asked to hear Mr. Vaillancourt and I was told that Mr. Godbole would be here. You are therefore able to answer the questions.

• (1550)

Mr. Pushkar Godbole: Indeed.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I sent you a series of questions relating not only to the entire food provisionment system, but also the suppliers, the food products, the prices and the portions that can be found in Quebec and those originating from Ontario. I would like to have information on that. Do you have this information?

[English]

Mr. Pushkar Godbole: If I understand your question correctly, you're asking what percentage of the products that are purchased from CORCAN are used in Quebec. Is that what you're saying?

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: No, let me clarify my question.

Mr. Pushkar Godbole: Very well.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I will clarify. At the present time, in Quebec penitentiaries, what proportion of the food products — eggs, meat, vegetables, etc. — provided to prisoners is purchased in Quebec, from our Quebec farmers, and what portion originates from outside of Quebec?

[English]

Mr. Pushkar Godbole: I don't have a specific answer to that question. I can say that in general in Quebec we purchase our food through the standard government procurement methods, which involve local standing offers, local purchases, and basically the same methods we use in other areas where we do not buy from CORCAN. I don't have a percentage as to how much of that food is local, but generally speaking it would be procured through the standard government tendering process. A small portion of the food that we buy for the Quebec region is in fact supplied by CORCAN, at present from the CORCAN Ontario—

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I know that, I can read, it is written here.

Mr. Chairman, on a point of order.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Yes.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: On a point of order.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): I am listening.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I requested that Mr. Vaillancourt appear, because he would have been able to answer all of the questions that I have just put. Indeed, he knows the numbers. However, I am being sent someone who is not able to respond, apparently, because he is not the person in charge of the food provisionment system. I put very specific questions to Correctional Service Canada.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Yes, I understand, but...

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I asked that Mr. Vaillancourt be present. We were told that the person who would be replacing Mr. Vaillancourt would answer all of our questions, but this individual is not able to do so.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Give me a moment. If I understand correctly, you asked to hear a witness who is not present, and the person's replacement is not able to answer your questions. This is very unfortunate, but...

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I do not understand.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): I could ask if it would be possible that another witness...

Mrs. Maria Mourani: ... return...

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): I could ask them to return on this matter at our next meeting, because the committee will be pursuing its study of this issue next week.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Would it be possible for those people able to answer Ms. Mourani's questions to attend next week?

[English]

Mr. Ross Toller: Again, I can't speak to their availability next week. We can pursue that quite quickly. The other thing we could do is that if there are elements that are not able to be answered today, we can undertake to get back to the committee. That's another option.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): There are therefore two options, but...

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I would prefer that Mr. Vaillancourt be present.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): There is a problem, because a lot of witnesses will be attending next week. I believe there will be ten of them, but it is certainly very important that there be someone able to respond to your questions next week. Would it be possible to send them Ms. Mourani's questions and to have them supply answers to the committee as quickly as possible?

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Chairman, they have all received these questions. The questions were forwarded long ago. I had made a specific request, but there was no response.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): I understand full well. This is why I asked that a person able to answer your questions be present at next week's meeting. That is a valid point, I agree.

• (1555)

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): But, if possible, responses should also be given...

Mrs. Maria Mourani: In written form, as well.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Yes, between now and the next meeting.

Ms. Glover.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): I just have a suggestion with regard to the point of order. I see that Ms. Dumas-Sluyter might have wished to contribute a few times. Might we ask if it would be possible for another witness to answer the questions?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): That is a good question.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Because there is a possibility that someone else here might have the answers.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Does anyone have an answer?

Ms. Liette Dumas-Sluyter (Acting Assistant Commissioner, Corporate Services, Correctional Service Canada): I have no specific answer to Ms. Mourani's question, but what I can say is that Mr. Godbole is here as a person of authority with regard to provisionment at the national level, and as such for all regions within the jurisdiction of Correctional Service Canada. He has a good understanding of the provisionment mechanisms and processes at the national level. That is why he is at the table with us today.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): I would recommend to the witness who will be replacing the individual absent today that he or she read all of Ms. Mourani's questions, consult those persons in charge and ensure that he or she have answers for the committee the next time. Are we agreed?

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will continue on with my point.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Yes, please.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: In the Quebec region, eggs and dairy products came from Ontario, from CORCAN Ontario. You are saying that that portion will be replaced. By whom will it be replaced? Do you already know by whom?

[English]

Mr. Pushkar Godbole: The procurement of eggs and dairy products will be replaced using standard government procurement practices. We don't currently buy all of the eggs and dairy products for Quebec from Ontario; we buy them at a few institutions, I believe four, but it's a small number of institutions. What we will do as we stop buying from CORCAN is to use the standard government procurement processes that we use at the other sites to buy those products for those sites.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: What I understand is that at the present time, for example, you are purchasing some of the eggs and dairy products from CORCAN Ontario, but where are you buying the rest? Are you buying the rest in Quebec? In British Columbia? Where are you buying these eggs and the remainder of the dairy products?

[English]

Mr. Ross Toller: If I could, Mr. Chair, perhaps I could give an example here.

In Ontario region we buy eggs and milk from CORCAN, which of course is our special operating agency. We spend under \$2 million on those purchases. When we stop buying milk and eggs from CORCAN, when it no longer has those products for sale, we will be going to government tenders for the provision of those eggs. So now I buy from CORCAN, but tenders will go out and we will buy from whoever is the successful bidder in those tenders.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: But you have still not answered my question. You are presently buying eggs from CORCAN. Once it is closed down, you will buy them elsewhere, but you do not know yet from whom. Where do the eggs that are not provided by CORCAN come from?

[English]

Mr. Pushkar Godbole: I don't have the information on exactly where all the eggs come from—

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: You do not have it.

[English]

Mr. Pushkar Godbole: —in terms of institutions in Quebec.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Very well.

[English]

Mr. Pushkar Godbole: We will know once we put tenders on the street and contracts are awarded. Then it will be known where the eggs will be coming from. Until we put a tender and award a contract, we can't—

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I understand, sir, that, for the time being, you do not know what the situation is for CORCAN. But, at the present time, where do the eggs that you do not purchase from CORCAN come from?

[English]

Mr. Pushkar Godbole: I don't have the list of where the suppliers come from. We can provide it to you. I had not received that question or known you had wanted an answer to it, so we'll follow up on that.

Mr. Ross Toller: If I may, if you're actually looking for the specific supplier—

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Do I still have some time, Mr. Chairman?

[English]

Mr. Ross Toller: Could I just finish?

• (1600)

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Yes, go ahead, sir.

[English]

Mr. Ross Toller: I'm sorry. I apologize, but I just wanted to say that we will buy them from where those are forwarded or whoever owns that contract. What Mr. Godbole is saying is we don't have the name of who owns that contract. We can provide that to you, but the system is that we would buy from whoever was successful in the bid for that contract that we would put out. It could be John's Grocery, Mary's Grocery—

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I understand that perfectly.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Ms. Mourani, your time is up. Thank you very much.

Mr. Davies, you have seven minutes.

[English]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Just today this committee received two very compelling letters from inmates who work at the Frontenac prison farm. I'm just going to quote from one of the letters. It says:

Each offender learns many skills on this farm, welding, training, forklift training, 1S6 milk production machine operation, mechanic training, producing well maintained milking cattle from birth to heifer to cow for milking and maintaining land for growing and good land production. Offenders also learn shipping & receiving skills, computer skills for production, registration, filing, cattle inventory and roll-ups for institutional orders of milk, juice and eggs.

I just want a quick answer from all of you. Do you agree with this sentiment?

Mr. Ross Toller: I agree that inmates do learn skills, as noted in the letter. However, when you talk about welding, the skills of those who are not in vocational welding are not credited as quantifiable hours toward an apprenticeship, which in my view would give them more employable skills down the line. But, yes, inmates do learn generic skills.

Mr. Don Davies: Good.

Do you have any plans to bring in welding ticketed programs then?

Mr. Ross Toller: Yes, a lot of the programs we are now looking at are apprenticeship types of programs with vocational hours that will lead toward vocational apprenticeships.

I should also note the employment aspect is but one aspect, as there are still inmates with other deficits, and there are many ongoing programs for substance abuse, violence prevention, and elements along that line, plus the educational component. Many inmates require certain levels of education as well.

Mr. Don Davies: Right, and I take it that you would agree with me that there are also a lot of other kinds of soft skills that inmates learn from prison farms: working together, responsibility, having to be at a certain place at a certain time, team work, and following instructions. Would it be fair to say that the prison farms and these kinds of operations deliver these kinds of skill sets to prisoners as well?

Mr. Ross Toller: All jobs that inmates work at, whether farm skills, cleaning jobs, or vocational training, afford those skills for inmates.

Mr. Don Davies: Okay. Let's get to something that might be unique about this.

As you know, we're doing a study on mental health, and there is a very high percentage of people in the federal correctional system who have a variety of mental health problems, combined with social and cultural deficits. I am told that working with animals is something that can be therapeutic. It can be very helpful for a person who has had difficulty with attachments, people with anger management issues. So working with animals and forming those attachments can be very therapeutic and helpful for those people.

Am I wrong?

Mr. Ross Toller: We have no programs right now that lend themselves toward mental health improvement based on working with animals.

Mr. Don Davies: Should we?

Mr. Ross Toller: I think that is a matter of looking at research and what's available and giving that some consideration.

Mr. Don Davies: Prison farms have operated in this country in one form or another for 100 years. Suddenly we have a decision taken to shut them down. I've been to 20 institutions over the past six months. Not one person I have spoken to at an institution, from guards to wardens to inmates—not one person, and I've talked to hundreds of people to this point—said they favour shutting down prison farms as a good idea.

Do you know anybody in the correctional system who thinks it's a positive development for corrections in this country to shut down the prison farm program?

Mr. Ross Toller: I think it's a very positive aspect in terms of the public safety results, and that is what we've been talking about here, the relativity of obtaining an employable skill. It is very intuitive and very well understood that if you gain employment, the likelihood of recidivism is less.

Mr. Don Davies: That may be, but I'm not sure it answers my question.

It is just that I can't find anybody who actually works in corrections who thinks it is a good idea to shut down prison farms. What I am asking you is whether you are aware of any warden or any people in a position of authority within the correctional system who say this is a positive thing for corrections, that these things should be shut down and that corrections would be better in this country as a result.

Mr. Ross Toller: Yes, it is a positive thing in terms of public safety results.

Mr. Don Davies: What do you mean by public safety results?

Mr. Ross Toller: I mentioned the ability of inmates to obtain employment in the first six months of their work, to have real, sustainable employment that can have them return to work as productive citizens. There's a very good correlation between recidivism and staying out in the community.

● (1605)

Mr. Don Davies: I agree with you, sir, but how does shutting down a program that delivers those things help to provide those skills?

Mr. Ross Toller: Because, as has been communicated here, the jobs available in agricultural work right now are very wanting, whereas other jobs in vocational training right now are in strong demand, to the point where in some cases we know that supply will not be able to be filled until 2015. There's a market for inmates to gain employable skills.

Mr. Don Davies: My grandfather was a homesteader in Alberta. He was a blacksmith and he worked on a farm. He told me that working on a farm delivers just about every kind of skill set you could possibly imagine. I would put to you that working in this kind of environment is very beneficial for prisoners in finding work elsewhere, not only for the hard skills they have, but also for the softer skills I mentioned earlier.

What's going to replace this program? I want to know what program, where, and when it's anticipated would replace these programs and would develop the kinds of skills you think are necessary.

Mr. Ross Toller: I'll speak to you about some of the planning elements for the Ontario region, and perhaps Mr. Sargent can speak to the other ones we have.

One of the elements we're looking at right now at Frontenac Institution is a CORCAN demolition program. This will be third-party certification in construction skills. This will include carpentry, asbestos removal, safety training, and workplace hazard training. The thing we're looking at is CORCAN's construction. This has been ongoing, but we're exploring avenues for minimum security inmates to work in construction certification and do project proposals. This will create opportunities for the hours they log to be considered against apprenticeships.

In office trailer construction, market survey shows demand. This will generate carpentry, welding, electrical, and plumbing skills.

In commercial laundry, market survey shows demand. Skills development would be in computerized equipment, inventory control, and shipping and receiving.

Again, we will continue with our other internal jobs—groundskeepers, maintenance staff, cleaners, and kitchen staff.

The programs I mentioned before and some educational ones are what we're looking at.

Mr. Don Davies: When will these programs be put in place, and how many prisoners will participate?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): There's time for a quick response.

Mr. Ross Toller: Fourteen, 24, 15 to 20, 10 to 12—they're all under consideration. If I had time to get to the Pittsburgh Institution...some have started in some of the areas.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Thank you.

To finish the first round, Mr. MacKenzie for seven minutes.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the panellists.

First, I'd like to get something clear. I think my friend who is sitting as the chair indicated we're a week and a half away from these being closed. My understanding is that we're a year and a week and a half away from these being closed.

Mr. Ross Toller: March 2011 is the closure date, but we are closing in gradients. Different things will close at different times.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Okay. Just so we're clear.

I come from a farming community. I understand what people who work on the farms get from that. One of the problems I also understand is that to transfer the skills people need, particularly coming out of prisons—because I dealt with those people many times before they went to prison; they end up going to prison because they don't have marketable skills. Not to belittle what people learn in agriculture, because I think it's very valid, but if they don't have any marketable skills coming out of the institutions, all we're doing is setting them up to go back in, and there's no benefit to that.

The other part is—maybe Mr. Toller or someone else could illustrate this for us—the products that CORCAN sells to the penitentiaries now are food products; they will be bought from other Canadian farmers.

Mr. Ross Toller: It will go to the normal procurement process and be put out to tender. Canadian farmers will be able to apply for those tenders.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Sure. So we're going to take that production out of wherever—there is an expanding market for those who produce the commodities you use?

Mr. Ross Toller: Yes.

I'll just use the Ontario region as a reference. I still will be required to purchase milk and eggs. CORCAN will no longer be a supplier for me. I have to put those out to tender for consideration by others.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: The other thing we have frequently heard is that there are plans to use that farmland for something else. Can you answer?

• (1610)

Mr. Ross Toller: Yes. There is no planned use for the land at this point in time. Our commissioner has indicated an interest in maintaining land as agricultural tract utilization here. We are actually, right now, exploring how we will make that work in a security environment. Obviously, there are local bylaws that have to be considered for elements such as pesticides for weed control. There are also elements that we have to consider in just working within a farm environment, such as a security area.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: My colleagues on the other side spent a great deal of time talking about the skills and the personal growth that people enjoy from their farms. As I said, I come from a farming community. Mr. Easter knows; he comes to my riding every time there's an election. So he knows we have a strong agricultural community.

That said, if we do that only for our people who are inmates in the federal institutions, what do they go out and find in terms of occupations? I think you've indicated that a fairly small percentage out of that large body actually gets agriculture-related jobs.

I don't want to offend anybody, but it seems to me that a number of the issues that people on the other side have indicated are also things that people will learn by taking part in a variety of other things. They won't lose all those opportunities for punctuality, teamwork, and so on, because the farms don't exist.

Mr. Ross Toller: As I mentioned, close to 70% of inmates come to us with unstable work histories, and 60% have no skill knowledge or elements. So if there's market availability out there, as we know very clearly, in terms of trades and vocational schools, if you have a person who's working in areas where he or she can actually accumulate hours towards vocational training and experience, those same skills of punctuality and teamwork will apply, with a stronger likelihood to have a market reality job upon release. That's where public safety comes in. When you grab the job, the job that's available here, the likelihood for you to return will be that much lower.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: I understood recently from a press article that a number of inmates from one of the correctional facilities in Canada spent a great deal of time, from that facility, working on building a house in the community, which has translated into skills and jobs.

Mr. Ross Toller: Yes, there was an example given. Actually, CBC put it on the radio. Out in Saskatchewan, 19 inmates worked on reserve land. I believe it was Lac La Ronge. They built a house for the first nation reserve. A number of those inmates have already gone on to obtain work.

This is exactly what the commissioner continues to challenge us with in terms of those types of elements, where job skills are transferable to market realities. Again, it's also the essence of the community's interest to work with our offenders in elements such as that.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): You have one more minute.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: That in itself would tell me that it also involves punctuality, teamwork, all the skills that are needed, but in addition it's a direct skill that's marketable when the offender comes out of the institution.

Mr. Ross Toller: Yes, very much so.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: As I think one of my colleagues mentioned when we talked earlier, over the years we've had these farms across the country. How many might we have had 50 years ago? Would you know?

Mr. Ross Toller: How many farms might we have had 50 years ago?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Would it have been a common thing that each of the federal penitentiaries had a prison farm associated with it?

Mr. Ross Toller: No. Again, I don't have the dates when all the farms came online. Many of them were born out of annexes at the time, related to an institution. I believe agriculture had more marketability in those particular days, but I don't have the exact dates of when they came online. I'm sorry.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Okay.

I know that in Ontario there were some farms associated with prisons at one time, but I believe most of them have been closed down for a variety of reasons.

Mr. Ross Toller: I'm not sure of that.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: They were in the provincial system, not the federal system.

Mr. Ross Toller: I'm sorry. I wouldn't know.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Thank you, Mr. MacKenzie.

Now we'll move to the second round.

Mr. Easter, for five minutes.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

And thank you, folks. I wish I had 25 minutes, but we'll start.

Today, Mr. Toller, you said in your remarks:

Our financial records indicate that during the fiscal year 2008-2009, CSC purchased a total value of approximately \$4 million for inmates' food from the CORCAN farms....

On June 17 of this year, in response to an order paper question, the same words are there, but CSC purchased a total value of \$2,949,166 for inmate rations from CORCAN. Which is it? There's a 26% difference.

• (1615)

Mr. Ross Toller: It's \$4 million.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Then why did I get that answer to the order paper question? Do you really know what the figure is?

Mr. Ross Toller: Yes, the actual total is three million, nine hundred and....if you want the exact—

Hon. Wayne Easter: In any event, we'll look further into those figures.

Having been Solicitor General and toured the prison farms, having toured them last February, and having spent considerable time talking to inmates, I personally think—and I think many of us who have toured the farms think—that this is one of the dumbest decisions I could ever see CSC making.

Look at the people in the back of the room. These are community people who are here supporting prison farms, not just for the value to the farming community, but especially for their value in terms of rehabilitation to inmates.

I don't know how much time Mr. Sargent spends talking to people who work in those dairy operations. I don't know how much time he's spent there. But before a decision of this magnitude is made, this committee, and the minister, should be spending time on those farms actually talking to the people.

[Applause]

Hon. Wayne Easter: The people I've talked to on those farms were people who had no life. They gave them a life by working with livestock and dairy cattle—the dairy herds in Kingston and Westmorland. That's rehabilitation.

I'm a dairy farmer, and others around here are farmers as well. When you walk into that barn, you see a herd and you see the pride of those inmates.

I really think this is a bad decision.

Anyway, Mr. Toller, in response to a question from Mr. Davies a moment ago, you mentioned you do not have a program that is important to mental health. I submit to you, sir, that you're wrong. You do, and that's the prison farm system and working with livestock.

Have you done any studies in terms of the rehabilitative impact of working with livestock and on these farms? Are you aware of the garden project in San Francisco?

Mr. Ross Toller: To answer your first question, we have not done a look in terms of work with mental health and livestock.

No, I'm not aware of the program that you referred to in San Francisco.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Before you go ahead with this decision, you should have a look at it. The study in San Francisco, called the green project, which is operated by the San Francisco county jail, indicated that 29% of the inmates released were rearrested within the first six months, while those who took part in the prison farm programs had a recidivism rate of only 6%. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, on the same project, said it is "one of the most innovative and successful community-based crime prevention programs in the country".

Sir, if these herds are going to be sold right away, we can't bring them back. Based on the evidence in the United States, this is a system that works. We're going to destroy the system and not get it back. What for? Is it for economics?

In your opening remarks, you said "a four-year cycle to ensure the programs are effective and efficient". Ottawa and the bureaucracy around here look at the economics, but have you considered the people in that prison system?

You said you didn't do a study. Are you going to do one before this decision is ultimately concluded and it's a *fait accompli*?

•(1620)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): There is time for a very brief response.

Mr. Ross Toller: I'm sorry, do a study on the people? I didn't quite understand.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Are you going to look at the impact on people? I'll give you a paper, too. You're wrong on your skills, because there's a major shortage of skills. I'd ask the question, have you talked to the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council about their concerns about the shortage of labour in the agricultural community? They're saying they will be short by 50,000 in 2013—that's farm skills.

Your question to me was on people. I'm saying that rather than just looking at the numbers—I said in the beginning we have a difference, a dispute in the numbers—are you looking at the other impacts, mental health, recidivism, and the impact on people in the prisons?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): A very short response, please.

Mr. Ross Toller: Like I said before, it's an integration. It's more than employability. It's the programs we continue to deliver, it's the

violence prevention programs, the substance abuse issues, the education.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Ms. Glover for five minutes.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Welcome to the witnesses.

I want to make something clear right off the bat here. Our interest is clearly to do whatever we can to help these offenders find some prudent, functional jobs and to be able to integrate into a society where they can do well. I know that the Correctional Service of Canada has that very same view on trying to make sure that we give these offenders the best possible tools to make sure that's a reality. I know many of the committee members agree with that, regardless of what side we sit on.

I'd like to focus my questions on some of the costs, but I want to say very clearly that there were some statements made here today that were uneducated statements. I have been to a prison farm. I'm sure, Mr. Easter, many people here have been, so some of your assumptions are without any research or validity.

Nevertheless, I come from a family who farmed as well. My mother grew up on a farm. My mother then went on to be a prison guard. So she too agrees that we need to give prisoners and offenders the best tools possible so that they can succeed.

With that statement made, I would like to touch on some questions, again, about the finances of this. You did state earlier that during the fiscal year 2008-09 a total of 14 offenders found job placements in the agriculture sector, right?

Mr. Ross Toller: That's correct.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: That was out of about 2,560 who received offender job placements, right?

Mr. Ross Toller: That's correct.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: So how much does it actually cost to run the six prison farms?

Mr. John Sargent (Chief Executive Officer, CORCAN, Correctional Service Canada): In fiscal year 2007-08, the last full fiscal year before the strategic review was completed, the cost to run the six farming operations across Canada was \$4,113,000.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: And to run CORCAN's program for the entire 2,560 was how much?

Mr. John Sargent: For the fiscal year 2007-08, the total cost of running the CORCAN program across Canada was \$4.99 million, or \$5 million.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Okay, but I'm curious about the numbers with regard to all of the programs that CORCAN runs. My understanding was that CORCAN's program spending in 2008-09 was \$47 million.

Mr. John Sargent: In terms of the total expenditures for the operation of our manufacturing and our programs, the total cost of our goods sold was \$75.6 million, and the bulk of that came from manufacturing and construction revenues.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: If we do the math, we have 14 offenders who successfully go into agriculture and it cost \$4 million to run the six farms. It cost approximately \$285,000 to train them to successfully integrate into a successful job, correct?

Voices: No. No.

An hon. member: Rhetoric.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Order. I know there's a lot of enthusiasm, but we do have to try to maintain order. Thank you.

• (1625)

Mr. John Sargent: As I said, the total cost for running the farms in that particular year was \$4 million, and among the number of people we placed in jobs through our community employment coordinator system, 14 of them did get jobs in agriculture. I couldn't comment on where other people went.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: That's \$4 million for farms, and 14 people finished. That's \$285,000 per job placement for 14 people.

And when we look at the 2,560 and the amount you talked about, which was a little higher than what I had foreseen, it's more along the lines of about \$36,000 per job placement. Is that correct?

Mr. John Sargent: As I said, the total operating cost for the year was \$5 million, and then we have the various job placements, as Mr. Toller introduced earlier. We placed 476 people in the construction trades, we placed 367 people as general installers/repairers—

Mrs. Shelly Glover: I don't want you to go through the list, only because I have about 30 seconds left.

But it's clear that if we look at value for these offenders to successfully gain tools to get a job, that is \$285,000 compared to... And you can do the math later, but I've done the math. It's about \$36,000, which is substantial. And again, I want to give them the best opportunity.

I learned French in a French program. I would never, ever take away the fact that while I was learning French, I also learned to study properly. I learned a number of valuable things: to be able to communicate with others, to be able to be punctual, to be able to be tolerant, to be patient. I've learned that punctuality, I've learned that patience, I've learned those linkages, but I would never go to a Chinese language course to learn French.

I want to give these offenders the best possible opportunity, and I don't think we're doing it with the farms.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Mr. Carrier, you have five minutes.

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If I have any time left, I will be sharing it with my colleague.

Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. I salute Mr. Sargent, who is CORCAN's Chief Executive Officer. We have some of this organization's institutions in my riding, in Laval, but we do not have any farms.

According to your information, CORCAN runs no farms in Quebec. There must certainly be an explanation to this, but we have

questions, such as those put to you by my colleague. Indeed, we see that CORCAN purchases eggs and dairy products for Quebec from CORCAN in Ontario.

If you stop running these farms, are you prepared to commit to launching calls for tenders in the Quebec region? Indeed, Quebec produces a lot of eggs and dairy. I think this is a specific question to which you might be able to respond today.

[English]

Mr. Pushkar Godbole: We are required to follow the government tendering process, and through that tendering process farmers and others in Quebec will have an opportunity to bid. It goes out through the MERX system. Who gets the contract and who wins is based on the best value and the best price in the tender.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Carrier: Thank you.

Given that the closing of the farm program is giving rise to much agitation among those who use it, has Correctional Service Canada consulted and informed the inmates who participate in it with regard to the replacement programs you will be offering them, programs that could be as good or perhaps better with regard to employability?

[English]

Mr. Ross Toller: Again, I would point out that we are just starting the process for replacement. A number of these items require seeking opportunities that exist. As these become more realistic and advance, certainly without question we will be talking with inmates about replacement jobs. Some discussions are under way as we speak, but we're too early in the process to be able to completely communicate all the different things we're going to do. As I've said, sometimes it takes time to get further contracts. We still have to work with some trade schools, but inmates will, without question, be provided opportunities for employment.

• (1630)

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Carrier: You are aware that there were major demonstrations on the part of the parents of inmates in Ottawa, because they are very concerned by the abolition of the program. It seems to me that it would be in your interest to as quickly as possible inform the people of the replacement options.

[English]

Mr. Ross Toller: Okay.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Carrier: You agree with that?

[English]

Mr. Ross Toller: Okay.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Carrier: Yes, thank you. I will give the time I have left to Ms. Mourani.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Thank you.

I would like to come back to your numbers, Mr. Sargent. I hope that I am pronouncing your name correctly?

You talked of the cohort of inmates working on prison farms. You stated that upon their leaving, 14 of them wound up working on farms. In what sector did the others find jobs exactly? Have you done an analysis of this cohort?

[English]

Mr. John Sargent: No, we do not track separately the workers on the farms or in our manufacturing production sites, our services, or our construction services. These numbers represent the offenders who have utilized the services of the CORCAN employment coordinators who are out in the community assisting the offenders to get jobs.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: You therefore have no detailed information with regard to those who worked on the prison farms and who, upon their discharge, found work, be it on a farm or in another sector. Do you have the numbers?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): You have time for a very quick answer.

[English]

Mr. John Sargent: We don't track the people from the different programs out into the community separately. It's purely just what jobs they've found.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: In that case, how can you determine that these prison farms must be shut down if you have no analysis, no follow-up as to what happened on the outside?

[English]

Mr. John Sargent: Based on the information we have and where the people are finding the jobs, we will be looking at alternate employment opportunities and training opportunities such as the previously mentioned experience that the offenders at Riverbend Institution got. They were building community housing and were able to work towards their certification and receive apprenticeship hours for working on that type of project. We know that the construction trades are the best area for our offenders to get employment.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): *Merci beaucoup.*

Now we'll go to Mr. McColeman for five minutes, please.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): I too would like to express my gratitude to the witnesses here today. Thank you for spending some time. I've got several directions I'd like to go in and not much time.

The first question is for Mr. Toller. How long have you been with the correctional services?

Mr. Ross Toller: Thirty-three years.

Mr. Phil McColeman: You've been with them for 33 years, so you'd be aware....

I looked up statistics in terms of total funding for the employment and employability programs, the programs we're specifically talking about here. We're talking about a portion of it, but I mean the overall

program spending. I'm looking at the statistics from 2001. I'm looking at the period from 1999 to 2010, roughly a 10-year period, and I'm looking at 2001-02; approximately \$42 million, or just under \$43 million, was spent in that year. In 2002-03, the spending went to \$22 million, which is almost half of what it had been. What was the reason for that?

Mr. Ross Toller: I don't actually have that information with me. I could hazard a guess, but I prefer not to. If you'd prefer, I'd like to go through the detail, unless you have them, Liette. No?

Mr. Phil McColeman: Interestingly enough, Mr. Easter, who is visiting our committee today, was actually the Solicitor General during that period. Now, I'm not asking him to explain the answer to that question, but this is half the program spending in that period of time, the time when he was indeed in that position. It did rise in subsequent years, and in fact peaked out to almost exactly what it is today last year.

I point that out because I also have to.... It skirts the question, as we heard from the opposition member here, of the importance of these. Why he didn't expand them during those years is perhaps another question. Is there a reason they didn't get expanded? In fact, Quebec doesn't even have this type of facility and never did have. Could you explain that to us? Why weren't they expanded during that period of time?

• (1635)

Mr. Ross Toller: Do you mean why farm operations were not expanded?

Mr. Phil McColeman: Yes.

Mr. Ross Toller: There were no considerations, no executive committee conversations, about looking to expand the farms at those points in time.

Mr. Phil McColeman: The other part of this that I do want to talk about on a very personal level is the following. For all of my working life, or until October 2008, I had my own construction company, and I know, having looked into this, that the construction trades are the biggest employer of inmates. In fact, I had an aboriginal carpenter who worked for my company who had run into trouble from time to time and spent some time in institutions. I have to tell you he was one of the best employees I ever had. The skill set he had developed during his life, which didn't only include the time he was in prison, was among the best I've ever had.

You mentioned the CBC documentary on or commentary about this. I also went to that website and got some information. I just want to talk about one individual, Jessie Hoover, whose name is not confidential because it was mentioned in the documentary. He worked on the house project you mentioned and he said he was now apprenticing at framing houses. I quote him:

Some of the skills that I learned in this project would be, you know good work ethic, coming to work on time, working hard when you're at work, plus the carpentry side of it, learning how to frame the house from the ground up.

Now that is not to diminish the fact that these kinds of skills can be acquired as well through farming and the agricultural route. That said, I truly appreciate your comment that we will achieve greater benefits by taking this action and helping people acquire the skill sets, trades, and things they will need when they get through the programs you're moving towards.

I'll open it up for you either to debate me on this or reinforce my comments.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): There is time for a brief response.

Mr. Ross Toller: As I've said here before, the reality of an inmate finding a job after release from penitentiary is very strongly associated with their ability to stay and function in the community as a productive citizen. Having a job that's not seasonal, a job that's permanent, a job that gives an economic livelihood is a strong measure of offenders' ability to stay out in the community as productive people.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Now we go to Mr. Easter, and I believe you're splitting your time with Mr. Kania.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I have just one quick question and then I'll turn to Mr. Kania.

The impression was left by Ms. Glover, who I'd say took substantial liberty with the numbers, that of all the people who went through the prison farm, only 14 became employed.

Could you give us the numbers on how many inmates who came through the prison farm system attained employment? If you don't have those numbers with you today, could you add to that list of numbers in a further response a comparison of the recidivism rates of those who came out of the prison farm system and those who came out of the other CORCAN programs?

Mr. John Sargent: As I previously stated, we do not track the rates of recidivism separately for the individual components of the programs within CORCAN or the other elements. We can undertake to look at that area, but I think in previous submissions we've stated that we do not track the offender separately based on the work opportunities they may have had within the system, because they may have had multiple opportunities to work in different programs, plus receiving some of our other programs and educational—

• (1640)

Hon. Wayne Easter: However, you're certainly not saying that only 14 people who came through the prison system attained jobs. That's what Ms. Glover's figures say. That's what she said, in referring to the costs.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: In agriculture.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Let's keep the questions to the witnesses.

Mr. John Sargent: Well, as I stated, the information I gave was for fiscal year 2008-09 for the people who came through the employment centres run by CORCAN out in the community to assist those offenders to find jobs in the community. The figures show that 14 out of the 2,560 offenders who found work found it in the agricultural or horticultural field.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Let me come at it a different way. Did the ones who came out of the prison farm system find employment or are they still out in the wild blue yonder without employment? We want to know if they found work. They don't have to be working on farms. There are all kinds of lawyers around this town who are politicians. Even some policemen are politicians.

Mr. Ross Toller: As was communicated, 2,560 who went to the CORCAN employment centres obtained work in this particular field. I don't have it broken down for those who come from the farm, but the essence of this is that the availability of farm work is significantly lower than that in the construction trades.

Hon. Wayne Easter: And as I submitted earlier, and I'll give you this, you're wrong.

Andrew.

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): You indicated that in terms of the decision to close these farms, you relied on studies, empirical evidence. Is that accurate?

Mr. Ross Toller: The closure of the farms was as a result of a strategic review exercise that looked at effectiveness, efficiencies, in terms of—

Mr. Andrew Kania: What's the document called?

Mr. Ross Toller: The document? It's a strategic review document.

Mr. Andrew Kania: What is its name, and can we have it? I'd like you to highlight exactly where in that document...and what you're relying on for the shutdown of the farms.

Mr. Ross Toller: Strategic review documents are not accessible to the public.

Mr. Andrew Kania: I am asking as a member of this committee for you to produce the document to the committee so that we can read it and then have you re-attend so we can question you on it.

Mr. Ross Toller: I don't have the authority to release that document.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Okay. That's something we'll deal with by way of a vote.

In terms of your presentation, you indicate:

The experience and skills obtained from working on the farms has been valuable, however, the decision to close the remaining farms was based on the fact that offenders were not gaining the *maximum* employability skills through agriculture.

During your oral remarks you focused on agriculture, yet we know the offenders get skills in terms of milk production, machine operation, training in mechanics, production of well-maintained milking cattle from birth, welding—there's so much. You'll agree with me they obtain so many other skills. They may not be to full completion. They may not be certified to be welders, but they do obtain other skills through this program, not just in terms of agriculture. Correct?

Mr. Ross Toller: I'd say every job an inmate—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Time for a brief response.

Mr. Ross Toller: An inmate does learn skills in every job, but at the end of that, availability for employment is stronger in certain areas than others.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Ms. Brown.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for being witnesses.

I too am a visitor to this committee today, but I do have some questions I would like to ask.

Until October of 2008 I ran a company that specializes in disability management, and we have worked with some major corporations across Canada putting return-to-work programs in place for them, focusing on rehabilitating injured workers, and getting them back into the workplace. So although what we're doing is not exactly the same, because we're dealing with physically disabled people, there are some principles that I think apply in this case.

What we have seen in our work is that if a person is put back into a job where they are earning less income than they were in their previous employment, the rate of re-injury is much higher and there's much more potential for them to end up on benefits once again. So in our work we try, whether it's through retraining or reorganization or new ergonomic equipment, to help that person back into a place of employment where they are returned to their previous full income.

Would you agree that having a person earning a profitable income significantly lessens the likelihood of them re-offending?

•(1645)

Mr. Ross Toller: Yes. I mentioned that when you look at close to 70% of the intake of our inmate population that come to us with unstable work histories, part of our mandate is to provide programs that will help to keep them from re-offending. Employment that offers steady available income is without question supportive of reintegration.

Ms. Lois Brown: Right now, in Ontario—and that's where the majority of my work has been done in this field—in the construction trades, and I'm going to pick up a little bit on what Mr. McColeman was saying, we have a demand in the market, which is one of the reasons why there are so many people who are emigrating to Canada. Right now, the average age of drywallers in Ontario is 57 years of age and the average age of plumbers is 53 years of age, which means there is going to be a tremendous demand.

If I just look up here on my BlackBerry, under skilled industry and manufacturing, I find: bricklayers, an average hourly rate for income, \$21.92; carpenters, \$17.93; electricians, \$18.66; labourer, construction and helpers, \$16.57; plasterers or drywallers, \$21.58; and plumbers, \$24.56. This is an hourly wage that people who have attained the skills and the paperwork can claim; they can go out to the street and say, "I'm qualified. I am eligible to earn \$21.58 per hour."

Would you say it is a reasonable expectation for someone who you have trained in these employment opportunities that you're providing that they would be able to command this kind of a wage?

Mr. Ross Toller: I think it's a very reasonable expectation. It's why we work very closely right now with the trades association to

have our hours of apprenticeship marketable, transposable, so that the hours that are being learned inside the correctional institutions are hours that will count towards their certification in the future.

Ms. Lois Brown: Are you providing the assistance for a person who has gained those skills? Are you providing the bridging or the transition, and helping them find employment?

Mr. Ross Toller: This is where the community aspect really comes in. I mentioned a bit earlier, I believe, the example of Lac La Ronge. The idea of having work releases...this is where the community can really respond in terms of inmates in minimum security who are eligible for work release to go out and work on projects. We've done it in other situations with Habitat for Humanity; we've done it on restoration types of projects. Any available employment that moves the skills into the community is really a strong part of our mandate. And in a scenario where our commissioner has challenged all of us across the country to find stronger partnerships with communities, it can aid us in this endeavour.

Ms. Lois Brown: So you're building agreements with these employers.

Mr. Ross Toller: Exactly.

Ms. Lois Brown: There's accountability both ways.

Mr. Ross Toller: Yes.

In fact, in one of the situations I can speak to in Ontario, one of the contracts we have that does give transposable skills or apprenticeship types of skills actually will call for the utilization of inmate labour in that particular process.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Thank you.

With the indulgence of the committee, I'll pose my questions for my round here, from the chair, if that's okay. Otherwise, I can have Mr. Davies replace me as a second vice-chair.

Do I have the permission of the committee to pose the questions from here?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Thank you.

I've got to watch my own clock here.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to be in the chair.

I'm teasing.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): You would have done a fine job.

If I could, I'm going to make a bit of a statement here up front. Let's be straight. I've had an opportunity to visit almost every single federal facility across this country. I've had an opportunity to visit almost every program that the Correctional Service offers. Without question, the farm program is the best one that I've seen. But here is the thing that irks me. There's another standard applied to this program that isn't applied to any other program. When I walk in and see inmates building birdhouses, no one asks, "How many of them go and get jobs building birdhouses?" When I go and watch inmates who are sweeping floors, nobody asks, "How many of them get jobs sweeping floors?" When I go and look at a literacy program, which, believe me, I support and it needs to be done, no one asks, "How many of them go and write books?" This is, to me, an absolutely ridiculous standard that's applied to no other program in corrections.

So my question—or not even a question, but I'll put it in the form of a statement and then move on to a question. When comparing programs, we need to compare program to program, employment to employment. What we've been told today is that we don't have those statistics. We can't say that for those who take this vocational program there is this rate of employment; for those who take the prison farm program there is this rate of employment. For those inmates who I saw sewing pockets—a worthy job for the military because they're sewing pockets onto things that are going to go to Afghanistan—what's their rate of employment when they come out of that program? Why this standard for this program? It makes no sense.

The second point I will make is with respect to recidivism. The principal mandate of the Correctional Service of Canada is to ensure that when people come out they don't reoffend, that they get better. What all the leading-edge research from across the world is telling us is that there is nothing better, that the process of working with another life—animal husbandry, farming—is demonstrated to breed empathy, to help in the rehabilitation process. We've been using this prison farm program at the end, right before inmates leave.

To hear the stories.... Mr. Easter tells a story of inmates who had a cow with foot rot, which would under normal circumstances be put down, but those inmates refused to let that animal be put down because they had developed such a bond for it. To look into the eyes of the men who have gone through this program and see the change they talk about in their lives, the difference it has made to them, sir, I have to submit to you that it breaks my heart to see this being done to this program. It absolutely breaks my heart.

[Applause]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland) With respect to the costing, we're told that it costs somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$4 million to continue the prison farm program. It's going to be replaced; we don't know exactly with what—some vocational programming and other things. Those things are going to have costs obviously associated with them.

There was an incorrect statement made here earlier with respect to where we source it. We don't know that it's going to be Canada. It's subject to NAFTA, so it could be coming from Mexico; it could be coming from the United States. We have no idea where this stuff is going to be coming from.

Show me the costs. Can you give me a breakdown of what the new programs are going to cost and what the old program cost? Give me an apple-to-apple comparison here.

• (1650)

Mr. Ross Toller: A lot of our new programs right now are under development. We can have a cost breakdown on some of the ones that have started, but as I say, many of these areas are not yet fully developed. It takes a transition period, obviously, to close things down and start things new.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): This is a major decision. This is giving up on something that Canada has been involved in for the last 100 years. So can you do this, then? Can you refer this matter?

If we can't have it as a committee, can Corrections refer this matter to an independent third party to look at its impact on employment, to take a look at its impact on recidivism, to take a look at its impact in terms of costing? Can you turn it over to an independent third party in whom we can all have trust on those questions?

All we need to know is the end result. We don't need any other information. Can you do that for us before making a decision to shut this down, so that we're making a decision based on fact, not on whatever else this is being made on?

Mr. Ross Toller: Well, the decision has been made and the continuation towards the advancement of the decision will continue. The reality for us, as I said before, is what we know in terms of economic realities of job availability, where we're moving this organization in terms of our transformation agenda.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Let me ask this final question, and then I have to cut myself off because of time.

Would it not seem reasonable to you that before making a decision of this magnitude you would have clear, concise information on its relative performance in terms of recidivism, employment, and costing? What we've heard today is that we don't have that information. Why on earth would we proceed with a decision in the absence of that information?

Mr. Ross Toller: I think we heard here today that we have very relevant information in terms of job availability, real jobs that are available in the labour market that unfortunately don't exist in agriculture today.

• (1655)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): I have to cut myself off.

I am going to turn to Madame Mourani

[Translation]

Madam Mourani, you have five minutes.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: My question is for Mr. Toller. If I understand correctly, you have no analysis of the recidivism rate. You do not have the numbers for the cohorts. You do not have the breakdown, in other words the number of people who went through the farm program and who then found a job on a farm or in another sector.

You only have 2008-09 statistics for all of the individuals who went through CORCAN, for the number of individuals who found work in construction or in farming. As a criminologist who carries out analyses on various important issues, I never base my analysis on impressions, but rather on facts, numbers, and I then conclude whether a program is effective or not.

I therefore conclude that this is not a decision based on numbers and facts, or on a lack of effectiveness on the part of the program, but rather a decision that was imposed upon you. I know that the primary mission of Correctional Service Canada is the rehabilitation of offenders and inmates based, obviously, on management of the recidivism risk and of the protection of society, to some extent. I know that Correctional Service Canada would not make a decision without having statistics and facts. This is what leads me to believe that this is a decision of the government that has been imposed upon you. Am I mistaken?

[English]

Mr. Ross Toller: We go through cycles in every government department, what's called a strategic review process that looks at our elements in terms of effectiveness and efficiency.

We have an employment area here that is important to instill skills in inmates able to demonstrate marketable skills. It doesn't have availability in there. There is no vocational training.

I mentioned that 60% of our inmates who come to us have no skills or no trade certification. We know very clearly from the economic councils that jobs are available in this particular area, so reinvesting our money in this particular area with a stronger likelihood of getting a job in this area will have public safety results. The reality is, not everybody will be a carpenter; not everybody can be a carpenter. That's why I mentioned the integration of all the programs. We still have to look at the elements associated with some of their anger issues. We still have to look at some of the educational —

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Toller, has this decision been imposed upon Correctional Service Canada by the government, yes or no?

[English]

Mr. Ross Toller: This was a strategic review process, which is part of the normal government operations we fit into.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Who requested this strategic review and who carried it out?

[English]

Mr. Ross Toller: The strategic review process is part of normal government operations. In four-year cycles, every department, over various times, is called upon to look at its efficiencies in terms of all its programs.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: If I understand correctly, it is therefore a national strategy, as you call it, established and imposed by the government.

[English]

Mr. Ross Toller: Strategic review processes are normal government cycles we go through every four years.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: The strategy is therefore carried out by the government.

[English]

Mr. Ross Toller: It's a normal part of our cycle every four years, yes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I understand, but by whom is this strategic annual review carried out? It is carried out by the government and not by Correctional Service Canada or by you.

[English]

Mr. Ross Toller: Each government department does its strategic review process. It's considered in government operations and then it's determined whether budget allocations will be put in certain areas of reinvestment.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: That is indeed what I had understood, because I do hold Correctional Service Canada — for having worked there — in high regard, and I believe that...

[English]

Ms. Lois Brown: A point of order.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Don Davies): Excuse me, there's a point of order.

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Chair, a point of order.

I believe Mr. Toller has said repeatedly that the strategic review is something every government agency goes through in a four-year process. So it's not something that is imposed by the government of the day; it is a regular process that government goes through to evaluate its programs. Every government in Canada does that—provincial, municipal, federal—and it's just part of what government has to do to verify to taxpayers that taxpayers' money is being appropriately spent.

Mr. Toller, would you agree with that?

• (1700)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Don Davies): There's a point of order. The questioning is being done by the Bloc member, so I believe she has the floor—

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I did not understand the point of order.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Don Davies): Excuse me, Madame Mourani; it would be my ruling that it may be a fair point to make, but it is a question of debate, I think, as opposed to a point of order.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Allow me to resume. I understand that the government — as many governments do every four years — carried out its analysis and decided that prison farms were not useful programs that are important to maintain.

I am familiar with Correctional Service Canada. I worked there and I hold in high esteem the people who work there. I know that all of the internal decisions that you are called upon to make are based on facts, concepts and directives. This is why I am having so much difficulty understanding how a decision such as this one could have simply fallen from the sky, without there being any analysis nor statistics.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Madam Mourani...

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I would simply like to finish. I wish to thank you, Mr. Toller, for your frankness and honesty. I unfortunately observe that this is not a decision of Correctional Service Canada, but rather a revision on the part of the Conservative government.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): There's time for an extremely brief response, if you choose. No? Then we'll go Mr. Davies for five minutes, please.

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I have a theory. My theory is that this land, when the farms close, will be sold, or it will be used to build additional prison space. Has this been discussed in any discussions you've had with anybody in Corrections or with the ministry?

Mr. Ross Toller: Not at all. In fact I'd like to say, actually, that there is absolutely no planning, no future determination of the land use.

Mr. Don Davies: I'm reading from some notes prepared for us. This note says:

The independent review of the estimated cost of constructing and operating a new correctional facility conducted at the request of the Correctional Service of Canada Review Panel found that the resale value of property would be \$2 million for Joyceville/Pittsburgh (from the sale of farmland) and \$17 million for regional headquarters.

Does that not directly contradict what you just said?

Mr. Ross Toller: No, not at all. That was an illustrative example that I think you're referring to from this particular document, "A Roadmap to Strengthening Public Safety". It's actually contained in a number of the annexes in which they looked at reinvestment feasibilities, but again, no decisions have been made whatsoever.

Mr. Don Davies: I didn't ask about decisions. I asked if it had been discussed. Has it been discussed?

Mr. Ross Toller: It has not been discussed with me.

Mr. Don Davies: Oh, it was not with you.

Mr. Ross Toller: In the panel report there were discussions, obviously, for illustrative purposes.

Mr. Don Davies: I see.

There's something I want to quickly bring up. I think I've heard a couple of fundamental flaws expressed here today that I'd like to clear up, in my mind, anyway. One is that it's not the purpose of the prison farm program to put people directly in agricultural jobs, is it? It's one program that teaches a wide array of skills that could lead to employment in other related occupations, occupations other than agriculture. It's not exclusively to put a farm worker onto a farm, is it?

Mr. Ross Toller: All our programs are designed to create levels of employability. That's why we look at the markets available for jobs out in the community.

Mr. Don Davies: Another flaw I've heard—and I won't spend too much time on this—is that Ms. Glover talked about \$14 million for 14 jobs. I think there's a bit of voodoo economics going on there, because I've heard Mr. Sargent say you don't track exactly where the people go once they leave Corrections.

It's possible that people who went through the prison farm program did get employment, but just not in direct agricultural jobs. Is that possible?

Mr. Ross Toller: That is possible, yes.

Mr. Don Davies: Then it's true that more than 14 people who went through the prison farm program got jobs. That's a certainty, isn't it?

• (1705)

Mr. Ross Toller: Well, it actually refers to job availability in certain sectors. That's why I say we don't have the data on that. What we do know is that the sectors, in terms of agriculture, are not in the hiring business right now.

Mr. Don Davies: Let me ask this: you don't have too many vocational skills training programs in the federal corrections system at present, do you?

Mr. Ross Toller: Well, actually, we have a number. Yes, we have hairdressing, culinary, food, welding, carpentry—

Mr. Don Davies: Can you stop? I'm sorry, I know I'm sounding rude by cutting you off, but it's just that I have limited time and I had asked you another question. I didn't ask you to list what programs you have, but simply said: you don't have too many programs, do you?

Mr. Ross Toller: We have lots of programs in the Correctional Service of Canada.

Mr. Don Davies: Okay, but I didn't ask you if you had lots either. You don't have too many, do you? It's not as if you have so many vocational skills training programs just sitting there waiting for inmates to take advantage of.

Mr. Ross Toller: We have waiting lists for programs, without any question, yes.

Mr. Don Davies: Right.

I'll tell you, at every institution I've been in—and I'll just make this blanket statement—there is a grotesque shortage of programs to provide inmates with vocational and skills training, at least from what I've seen. In fact, at the Kent Institution, I was in a room this size that used to be used by a CORCAN program for inmates to make furniture to be sold to the federal government. It was this big, but it's now empty. It's being used as a storage room. There's not one vocational program at Kent Institution, and I visited it three months ago.

So would you agree with me that there are institutions in this country that don't have sufficient vocational programs? Would that be a fair statement?

Mr. Ross Toller: Yes, I would agree without question, and that is the reason we're looking at reinvesting in vocational programs where there are needs. I mentioned before that we're in the early development phases of improving and developing more in these particular areas.

Mr. Don Davies: Right, so why don't we keep the prison farm program and add these other programs you're talking about, which will lead to welding tickets and—

[Applause]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Order, order.

Mr. Don Davies: What's the harm in that?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): There's time for an extremely brief response.

Mr. Don Davies: Is there any harm in that?

Mr. Ross Toller: Harm in keeping the farm and—

Mr. Don Davies: Yes, and adding these other good programs.

Mr. Ross Toller: Well, again, unfortunately for us the skills that are learned on the farm, notwithstanding the transposable skills, are ones that don't lead to a better likelihood of gaining employment in the vocational area.

Mr. Don Davies: So it sounds like a hundred years of bad planning, then.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): I'm going to have to interject, sorry.

Mr. MacKenzie, for five minutes.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Thank you, Chair.

Unfortunately, today is one of those days where some of my colleagues have played to the crowd, as entertainers do from time to time. However, the real issue here is that we're looking at what is good for public safety and what is good for the prisoners when they go into prison and when they come out.

Some of us do come from agricultural communities. Some 28% of the GDP in my riding is agricultural, so I understand agriculture. I wouldn't tell you that I'm a farmer. I'm told by other people that they have been on farms, which doesn't mean they're farmers, but what we are seeing here are a lot of suggestions that only the people who have been on the prison farms have learned certain skill sets. I know from past experience that people have used silly examples, and I'm

not saying that's the case here, but they have used silly examples to say that a certain percentage of people who do this or that were people who ate mashed potatoes. This is not in the same context, but my concern is that we have some people trying to play a game here that the only way people get skills is to work on prison farms.

When you've indicated that 14 of these people have gone on to have jobs in the agricultural community, I think those 14 are great, and if they stay at those jobs they'll learn a great deal in life, but the problem is that the skills cited here, which some of these folks claim to have learned, are not marketable. When I look at the list of jobs that people have obtained, some of them you simply can't learn by being a good team player or being punctual on the job, or any of those things. They have to learn them when they come out, so that employers are prepared to hire them. That collection, hopefully, will grow with the money that comes from CORCAN.

We have already heard that when my colleague across the floor was Solicitor General, those funds were cut in half. If he really believed in this, we would have doubled those funds and put more prison farms out there. We didn't do that. So now that the decision is being made to provide these opportunities for the prisoners to come out with skills—

• (1710)

Hon. Wayne Easter: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, that's misinformation. There was no cutting of the funds in half.

Don't go that far.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: I think the record will show it, but I don't have any problem with that.

What I really want to know is how do we help people coming out of prison not to reoffend? Is it not by providing them with the opportunity to learn skills and to get jobs when they come out?

Mr. Ross Toller: As I mentioned a few times here, the integration of looking at correctional needs with inmates are very prolific. Many of our inmates have significant substance abuse problems. Many have mental health issues. With many there are gang-associated elements, and many have violent tendencies. So we invest much effort and activity and many dollars towards addressing those particular deficits.

Similarly, in terms of education, a significant number of inmates come to us sorely lacking in education, to the point where 70% have not finished high school and close to 82% of that group don't even have grade 10. Again, Stats Canada really emphasized the fact that at least 84% of jobs right now in the market require secondary school completion. So we work on that particular element as well.

Employability is the connectivity of the third integration piece of this, which really calls for looking at employability skills that can be readily available to sustain a job and to have a job when one goes into the community. It can't be one without the other.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Mr. Kramp, for one minute.

There will be another opportunity.

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Okay, thank you. Maybe I'll just correct the one statement, then.

There was an inference that this is a government directive. I sit on the public accounts committee, as our chair has as well. I also sit on the finance committee. The basic duties are oversight and accountability, and as such we are mandated by the Auditor General in making recommendations to these committees as to how a government should best do its job. One of the recommendations that the Auditor General brought forward was to have systematic, strategic reviews of departments. That is in place. The government has initiated that, and those departments are mandated to do periodic reviews. That just happens as a normal course of action based on the recommendations of the Auditor General. Those recommendations have been implemented and we do that.

I'm located in proximity to the prison farms. I certainly understand the local concerns and the costs and benefits to local communities, which of course is another factor that we definitely have to take into account. But I think primarily there are two concerns. One is securing an inmate. The second concern, of course, is the rehabilitation—is it cost-efficient, is it effective, and do we have the most successful form of placement? I think that's the crux of the argument here, the crux of the information that has been brought forward, and really it's going to come down to that particular decision with all the local information and—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): After Mr. Kania, if we can, there will be an opportunity to come back to that.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Mr. Kania, for five minutes.

Mr. Andrew Kania: When I was last questioning you, I asked about empirical evidence. You mentioned the name of a report. Is there one study that you're referring to?

Mr. Ross Toller: I'm sorry, in which area?

Mr. Andrew Kania: I'm asking about the evidence you relied upon when coming to the decision to close the prison farms.

Mr. Ross Toller: For the strategic review process?

Mr. Andrew Kania: Correct.

Mr. Ross Toller: There is a document. It's important to note that the strategic review did not just look at farms.

Mr. Andrew Kania: What's the name of the document that you're relying upon?

Mr. Ross Toller: Again, I believe it's the strategic review process that is looked at and examined.

Mr. Andrew Kania: But is there a document to be read?

Mr. Ross Toller: Yes, there would be information that would have been considered in all the arenas we looked at for performing more efficiently. I don't know what the name of the document is.

Mr. Andrew Kania: I am moving a motion:

That the committee calls upon the Minister of Public Safety to table forthwith the Strategic Review document referred to by CSC officials on March 25, 2010, during their testimony before the committee.

• (1715)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): That motion will be noted, and in 48 hours there will be an opportunity to deal with it—at the next meeting.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Well, I would imagine it will be in 48 hours.

[Translation]

There will certainly be a French version available after 24 hours.

[English]

Mr. Andrew Kania: I'd like clarification that the document you've referred to today is the only one you relied upon in terms of making the decision to close down the prison farms. Is that accurate?

Mr. Ross Toller: Yes. Each department goes through all of its operations that are designed in terms of programs, looks at these from the perspective of effectiveness and efficiency, considers—

Mr. Andrew Kania: That's fine. So my question is, other than what we've mentioned—which is the topic of this motion now—if there's anything else that you're aware of, or come to be made aware of, that you relied upon to make this decision, I would like you to advise us in writing of the name and the date of this document, so that if you won't produce it, we can also bring a similar motion for the production of that documentation.

I want whatever there is, in writing, that was relied upon before the decision was made, what you relied upon to make the decision to close down the prison farms.

There was a question that Mr. Davies asked: why not improve the prison farms rather than simply close them down? You're taking this from a financial perspective. You say there's an annual loss to operate these prison farms of how much? What's the number?

Mr. John Sargent: The number we had quoted was from the final fiscal year prior to the strategic review being carried out. That was fiscal year 2007-08. The figure was \$4.1 million.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Okay. So would you agree with me that it would be a better use of public funds to spend that approximate \$4 million to keep the prison farms going, as opposed to spending that money on the increase of \$5 million that was just made in the budget to further advertise Canada's economic action plan?

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Chair, if we're going to be that ridiculous, let's do it right now and let's get it cleared out. This is just ludicrous.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Sorry, talk through the chair, please.

I'm going to rule the question in order. It's a fair question.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: A fair question?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): The question, as I understand it, is whether they feel the expenditures in one area are of more importance or relevance than the other area.

Mr. MacKenzie, that, to my mind—and you're welcome to challenge the chair—is a fair and legitimate question.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: On a point of order—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): I do have a problem where, in a couple of instances, people have inferred motive to people and the questions they asked. The members who are before this committee are good and decent people. We may disagree on the substance of policy matters, but I would ask the committee to refrain from inferring motive to members of the committee. That would be a legitimate point of order. I would have ruled if somebody had raised that, but in terms of asking whether one matter is a priority over another, I rather suspect that this is much ado about nothing, in the sense that I very much doubt Mr. Toller will respond, because it would probably be a question better placed to a minister than to somebody within the bureaucracy. It's going to be more a rhetorical question, I imagine, than anything else. Of course, a member is able to ask a question about relative priority of different government expenditures. I can't find a reason that I would rule that out of order.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: I challenge the chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Okay, there has been a challenge to the chair. That's non-debatable. I'll take a vote.

All those who wish to uphold the decision of the chair, please raise your hand. All those opposed?

It's left to the chair to decide if the chair's decision should be upheld. I think my reasoning in this matter is good and sound; therefore, I'll uphold my own decision.

(Ruling of the chair sustained)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Mr. Toller, I imagine you don't want to respond, but should you want the opportunity, you're given it.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I have a point of order.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Mr. Kramp, on a point of order.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Thank you.

I think it's really sad that this whole process is degenerating. We have witnesses and there are people here who have come to deal with the issue, the problem, and the situation. It would be no different right now if I were to just go ahead and say, "Let's talk about Café Henry Burger and the \$40 million—"

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Mr. Kramp, you will have—

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Is that where we need to go? I suggest not.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Order, please. You will have an opportunity in five minutes to ask about the relative

importance of any program relative to any other program, or any expenditure over any other. I will uphold that right for you, as I would for any other member.

• (1720)

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): I would caution members that when they ask questions they know to be rhetorical, it will not necessarily be the most productive use of their time—

Mr. Daryl Kramp: That's my point.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): —but that is an opportunity for a member to ask that question.

I am not going to censor a member's ability to ask a question. So if you should choose in the round that immediately follows this one to ask a question in the same vein, you are certainly entitled to do so.

Mr. Kania.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Just so that we're clear, we're in an economic recession. There's only so much money, and I understand that. We all understand that. So I'm looking at reorientating this in terms of priorities for the people of Canada, including Corrections.

My thought is that there was a recent announcement that they would increase the budget for advertising Canada's economic action plan by \$5 million, and you've indicted that it would cost less than \$5 million per year in order to keep these prison farms going. My simple question is, do you not think it would be better in terms of public safety, rehabilitation, helping the inmates, and helping the people of Canada to take that \$4 million to \$5 million and divert it from further spending on advertising Canada's economic action plan and instead use it to keep the prison farms going? That's my question.

Mr. Ross Toller: It's not my determination to make a comment on the prioritizations that are decided on government priorities; that's for Parliament.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Mr. Kramp for five minutes.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Thank you, Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): I apologize. It's Mrs. Glover first. You'll be splitting your time with Mr. Kramp, I understand.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to ask a couple of quick questions.

Do you think the \$40 million that was lost in the sponsorship scandal under the Liberal government might have perhaps been useful in producing some programs that would have been of benefit in allowing these offenders to seek jobs, or even the \$25 billion in health care cuts made by the previous Liberal government in the mid-1990s, or maybe even the cuts to the CBC that were made? Do you think those amounts of money made by this previous Liberal government might have helped to develop programs for offenders to rehabilitate and become productive individuals who would not reoffend?

Mr. Ross Toller: Again, it's not my determination to determine how government sets their priorities.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: I understand that, sir, but those amounts of money are huge of amounts of money that the taxpayers unfortunately lost. In particular, there's the sponsorship scandal; we have yet to recoup taxpayers' money on that blatant misuse—I would call it theft—of taxpayers' money. I don't see anyone clapping in this room today, but these are all taxpayers sitting here—

Hon. Wayne Easter: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I would say that the \$56 billion deficit of this government is a theft from my grandchildren.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: It's my five minutes, sir.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Order.

Again, on the matter of the point of order, I have instructed members that I do not think it is constructive to pose rhetorical questions that you know the witnesses cannot respond to. You are free to ask those questions. I cannot restrain members from asking questions. Others will make judgments on the validity of the questions that members pose. It is not the position of the chair to do so, but I would ask members to consider the efficacy of asking rhetorical questions of the witnesses who have kindly taken time out of their schedules to be with us here today.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: I just want to finish before I pass my time over. It's Mr. Easter who actually cut this program in half—

[Translation]

Mr. Mark Holland: Madam Mourani, you have a point of order.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Mr. Chairman, on behalf of all of my colleagues around the table, I would like to apologize to the witnesses. What is going on right now is absurd. The witnesses should not be subjected to this. I would like to see a minimum of decorum, Mr. Chairman, out of respect for our witnesses and for the other people in attendance.

[English]

Mrs. Shelly Glover: That's why we challenged the chair.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Thank you for your comments.

I would ask you, please, to think before putting your questions. If the question is rhetorical, the witness will obviously not be able to answer. It is not a good use of time, but it remains the prerogative of all committee members. I am not here to manage committee members' questions; it is their choice. But please, I ask members to think before putting their questions.

Madam Glover, you have the floor.

•(1725)

[English]

Mrs. Shelly Glover: I'm passing my time to Mr. McColeman.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Thank you very much.

There was a further comment from the prior Solicitor General in terms of spending. I'll give the actual statistics. The cut was from \$42,892,557 in his administration, the Liberal government's, when

he was the minister, to \$22,438,557. Those were the overall program cuts to the employment and employability programs. That's just to clarify, for the record.

The other thing I will mention is that it seems amazing to me that the other side would suggest and compliment a California-based program with statistics that show a program working really well when all prior comments from the Liberals on this committee have done nothing but trash the U.S. correctional system. It's an amazing chain of events at this committee today, to find there's a program in the United States....

Perhaps you'd like to comment on the last question I'd like to ask you. What it boils down to is that part of the review of developing a strategic plan is to make sure all things are considered, that there's good value for taxpayers' dollars and we are getting the safety of our citizens put first and foremost in all the programs we do in corrections. Would you please comment on whether or not that complete analysis was done prior to making these decisions to move away from this model?

Mr. Ross Toller: As I mentioned before, we know very clearly that our offenders come with unstable work histories, with a significant lack of vocational skills training. We know very well there are trades, vocational skills, and labour markets. We work closely with a number of people to get third-party accreditation for the skills required to lead them to a more sustainable future and likelihood of a job. We know very clearly that landing a job, maintaining a job, will have an impact on recidivism rates.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Thank you. I'm going to pass my time onto—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): You've got ten seconds.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Might I ask the chair for a little bit of forgiveness on one point only?

Certainly I couldn't agree more with the statement made by Madame Mourani. This committee should deal with the issues. It's regretful that it started; it shouldn't have, and I apologize to our witnesses too. This is about decisions we have to reach for the Canadian taxpayer, for the efficiency and operations of government. As we move forward, we have responsibilities to the Canadian taxpayer to be custodians of the dollar, to get the best value for money.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): Okay, that's—

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Our local community needs have to be brought into consideration as well.

Is the cost-effectiveness there in the success of the programs? That's for this committee to evaluate.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): I understand that. I appreciate the comments very much. There's about a minute and a half.

[*Translation*]

There is one minute and thirty seconds left, just enough for a very short question.

Mr. Carrier, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert Carrier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

You know, this is my first time sitting on this committee. I am however very interested in matters relating to public safety given that there are detention facilities in my riding.

I am very surprised at the lack of information provided in order for us to discuss a matter that is so important for all of the people who are here today. I hold little hope with regard to the strategic review we have asked to be provided with.

Could you at least give us the employability rate and the recidivism rate for each program category? It would have been interesting to have these statistics in order to have a debate on your decision. We could have understood the importance of your decision to abolish the farms. Might we be provided with this information, by program?

[*English*]

Mr. Ross Toller: I mentioned in some cases we don't have them. We can provide you, without question, any material we have on recidivism rates. Some of those are very strongly oriented to some of our programs of violence prevention.

● (1730)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier: This information will therefore be forwarded to the Clerk?

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mark Holland): *Merci beaucoup.*

Let me take the opportunity to thank the witnesses for appearing before committee today. I know passions were high. I appreciated your appearance today and the time you took to answer the questions. It was very informative. I wish you good day.

Thank you.

The committee is adjourned.

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