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Chair

Mr. Larry Miller

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

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● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC)): I will call our meeting to order.

I'd like to welcome our witnesses here and thank them for attending. We'll get right into statements.

First of all, we have from Farmers' Markets Canada, Mr. Robert Chorney. You have 10 minutes or less, please.

Mr. Robert Chorney (President, Farmers' Markets Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Merci beaucoup. Bonjour.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

When one thinks of being a witness and appearing before parliamentarians, one thinks of these hearings in Washington, or hearings that have been held in Ottawa, and one thinks of an adversarial kind of thing. I realize that it's not the case here. I'm here with friends.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): We can be that way if you want.

Mr. Robert Chorney: Not with farmers' markets; farmers' markets are like motherhood and apple pie. I'm here with friends and friendly dialogue, and I really welcome the opportunity.

The Chair: I apologize. We do have a lawyer on our committee, but there's nothing we can do about that.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Robert Chorney: I have a son who is a lawyer, so that's okay.

Thanks again for giving me this opportunity.

Farmers' markets have enjoyed an incredible renaissance over the last 15 or 20 years. I represent Farmers' Markets Canada, as its national president, and that is a volunteer position. My day job is as the executive director of Farmers' Markets Ontario, which is the provincial association of Ontario's 175 farmers' markets.

As I indicated earlier, farmers' markets are enjoying quite a rebirth in our country, primarily in Ontario and British Columbia. There are three reasons for that. The first reason is that shoppers and consumers want fresh, local produce. That's the number one reason we have this renaissance. The second reason is that farmers want to market directly and they want to cut out the middlemen. It's as simple as that. The third reason is that communities are looking for good things to do for their communities. For example, an economic development committee will help organize a market for its reasons. A chamber of commerce will do the same. An agricultural society will organize a farmers' market to make better use of its land and buildings. A service club will do it to raise funds not on the backs of the farmers, certainly. And on and on. These community groups want to do markets.

So we have shoppers wanting fresh food, farmers wanting to market directly, and community groups wanting to do something neat in their communities. Those are the main reasons for this renaissance of farmers' markets.

Less than 20 years ago we had 60 of them in Ontario. We're sitting at 175 today. Less than 20 years ago we had 5 or 6 markets in British Columbia, and we have well over 100 today. Across the country there are about 550 active farmers' markets. I've given you a copy of our last economic impact report, released in 2009. Sales over the last couple of years at Canada's 500 or so farmers' markets exceed $1 billion, and 70% of that happens in Ontario. I'm not here to plug Ontario; I'm just giving you the facts.

I'll speak about the economic impact of these markets. We just had an economic impact study done, and the experts tell us that farmers' market sales have a multiplier effect of 3.24. So with sales of $1 billion across our country, the economic impact of these farmers' markets across Canada is over $3 billion, very much a sleeping giant. When we put those numbers out there, people are pretty shocked.

There are probably 10,000 vendors in our sector—farmers, artisans, and secondary producers. The support we get from shoppers is incredible: 92% say they want to deal with the farmers; 62% say absolutely, and 92% say yes, we want to deal with the farmer.

I'm not going to get into it, but you are well aware of the Galen Weston comment. The Conference Board of Canada organized a Canadian Food Summit in Toronto earlier in February, and I attended it. Mr. Weston made his ill-timed remarks, and the media and the social network went wild. We have tracked it, and just hang onto your seats. There have been 40 million impressions from people supporting farmers' markets. That's Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and all the media—and 40 million impressions.

I can tell you that 99.9%—it doesn't get closer to 100% than that—are from people saying how objectionable that was, and how much they support farmers' markets. That's the kind of support we have.

We think that farmers' markets are very pivotal to the food supply chain. Young people today don't know much about a farm, and one of the things a farmers' market does is reconnect shoppers with our farmers. Shoppers can go to a market, eyeball the producer, find out what went into or on that product, and how to prepare it for the table. So farmers' markets are reconnecting society with our land, and we think that's critical.

Another thing about farmers' markets is that it's a great place to incubate small business. We have any number of small businesses who came to the market, started selling, and the first thing we know they're running a retail store, or whatever. It's a great place to incubate a small business.

It's also a great place for young farmers to get into the sector. A young farmer is not going to be buying quota and spending all kinds of dollars. With a small piece of land, some hard work, and a feel for the soil, a young person can very quickly get into the farmers' market sector and make a reasonably good living—part-time at first—and build from there.

● (1535)

I'm not going to tell you any more, other than the fact that I have a passion for these markets. I've been at it 20 years. I say one of my reasons for being is to help farmers be price makers not price takers. That is critical.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada was great four or five years ago. They funded us to be able to do our economic impact study, our logo, our incorporation, and our website, but those funds dried up. We're hopeful—I realize times are tough in government—that Farmers' Markets Canada will be able to get some help fairly soon. We're a dormant organization right now. I'm trying to keep it going with some volunteer board members across the land, but we're hoping to be able to get some funding to do some things.

With that, I'll turn it back to you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll move on to...and I'm going to apologize; I can't pronounce your organization very well.

Mr. André Nault, please, for ten minutes or less. We also have Mr. Busque here as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Nault (President, Les amiEs de la terre de l'Estrie): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would first like to thank you for inviting us to participate in this study on agriculture in Canada.

I would like to introduce Laurier Busque, a former professor from the University of Ottawa. I am the President of Les AmiEs de la Terre de l'Estrie and the president and founder of markets for regional solidarity. We are both volunteers. Neither of us receives any money from anyone for this.

The mission of Les AmiEs de la Terre de l'Estrie is as follows. Sherbrooke's Marché de solidarité régionale was established out of respect for the earth and humankind, and offers numerous quality local products from area farmers. The market advocates food self-sufficiency by developing products and jobs locally.

To achieve its mission, the Marché de solidarité régionale has adopted a unique approach that blends the flexibility of e-commerce with the pleasure of buying locally.

Let us talk about knowing where our food comes from. Currently, the greatest challenge in the food industry is the lack of information on where food comes from. That is why farmers' markets are so popular in Quebec. Farmers' markets are growing; there are about 20 in the Eastern Townships. Agricultural methods vary significantly from one country to the next; knowing where a product comes from is essential in determining whether a product is socially acceptable. In Canada, the equitable food supply chain is hampered by the simple fact that corporate research on transgenesis is kept secret.

By making local products available, we know where our food comes from and often get to meet the producers. We can ask questions about production and processing methods, if applicable. This direct contact between producers and consumers creates a relationship of trust, and as a result, consumers are willing to make a certain amount of effort to maintain a relationship with the people who feed them. Communities are based on human ties, not financial ties. These days, the food supply chain tends to place more emphasis on the latter rather than the former.

What do we want for our future? Development based on capitalism with all its familiar impacts, like social alienation, or a community in which the economy serves the people instead of the other way around? People-centred development is not only a social obligation but an inevitable obligation. The system as we know it will no longer have the energy or resources to continue on its current path; it will falter in the short or medium term. Therefore, we must replace it with a system that consumes less energy. Short-channel distribution networks are a very interesting alternative.

The Marché de solidarité régionale recognizes that the only way to save the planet is to buy locally. Historically, agriculture has been the linchpin of community development. Rethinking agriculture based on feeding one's community is part of the desire to reconnect with the communities in which we live. Despite the tendency for people to migrate to urban centres, there has been a growing trend across Canada to buy local products.

With the depletion of oil resources, we will no longer be able to count on regular access to agricultural products from faraway places. Consequently, we will have to restructure food distribution around both urban and rural communities. Oil is a limited, non-renewable resource, and our society is only just beginning to feel the impact of its depletion.

Let's look at fair deregulation. Given the deregulation taking place around the world and especially in Canada, we must review the systems that have brought deregulation to our own agricultural system. If we deregulate on the one hand, but continue to subsidize the major corporations that control the market on the other hand, nothing will change in terms of local product development. These major corporations are involved in seed genetics, processing and distribution.

They must be stripped of their protected access to the free market so that they are on the same footing as community-based businesses. Here is a simple and convincing example: during the listeria crisis, inspectors took a very heavy-handed approach to the raw milk cheeses produced by Quebec's artisan cheese makers, but did not touch the raw milk cheeses imported by companies like Agropur and Saputo. If the two systems were on an equal footing in terms of deregulation, we would begin to have a fair arrangement.

● (1540)

Let's now look at the food supply chain serving the people. We would like to share with you our vision of a food supply chain based on four parameters that can be arranged in a way to help guide the public: self-sufficiency, democracy, diversity and fairness.

The challenge for the public and for our leaders is to implement these four parameters interdependently. Making a community food self-sufficient means giving it the ability to meet its food requirements in the face of any disaster that may arise.

At present, Canadian cities do not have adequate food self-sufficiency beyond a two-week period. The democracy we hold so dear can be truly achieved only if we have a say in what we eat. It is certainly not democratic to import garlic from China and cucumbers from India when these two products are traditional elements in our diet and agriculture. We have no democratic input with producers from outside Canada.

The relationship we have to rebuild with our own producers is based on participatory democracy in which the members of a community have a say in what they eat. We must trust the collective wisdom of our fellow citizens when it comes to feeding ourselves.

In terms of diversity, history offers an excellent example of what happens when there is a lack of plant diversity. The famine that struck Ireland in 1822 was caused when insufficient varieties of potatoes were planted and the crop was devastated by disease. Diversity brings balance. The industrialization of agriculture has led to a reduction in the varieties of nutritional plants and an emphasis on the most popular species—hence a lack of diversity—with the result that we are facing imminent danger. The advent of genetically modified foods works against biological diversity.

Last but not least: fairness. Only short-channel production can bring back fair prices for producers' work. With the globalization of the agri-business, we have lost contact with local producers, who are no longer able to compete. Major supermarkets refuse to display local produce, saying that the food supply chain must be consistent in all of their stores across the province. There will always be a link between the principles of fairness and democracy.

Should revenue benefit a single person or the community? That is our justification for sustainable development, and experience has shown that, if we ignore these four parameters, we will end up undermining our resources. What will be left for future generations?

Thank you.

● (1545)

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

We will now move on to questioning.

Mr. Atamanenko, five minutes.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Thank you very much to all of you for being here.

Bob, it's certainly good to see you again. I haven't seen you for a couple of years. I'm just going to throw some questions out and then maybe I'll get you to answer.

On the first one, we've been back and forth over the last years, Bob, in regard to farmers' markets and the need for some kind of assistance from the federal government. Help is given to other organizations in other areas, but it seems that farmers' markets don't receive any. I would like to see if you could comment on that. You're saying that the organization is dormant.

[*Translation*]

I would also like to talk about the national food strategy. For example, we know that the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the national farmers union, the UPA and other organizations are interested in a national food strategy. But we see that the government is focused on exports.

How can we develop our exports and have a Canada-wide food strategy at the same time? What would be the basis of this strategy? How can we protect farmers and promote local markets as part of a food strategy?

[*English*]

We're looking at a national food strategy, which has been thrown out there by the Federation of Agriculture, our party, the Liberal Party, other organizations. I'm just wondering how all this fits in.

Maybe we'll just stop there.

Perhaps, Bob, you could just give us a few comments on the dormant organization.

Mr. Robert Chorney: Thank you, Alex, very much, and thank you for always being so responsive and supportive. We appreciate that very much. Our board members across the county know you and appreciate what you do in trying to help us.

In 2008, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada very kindly provided some funds to us. We were able to do this major economic impact study, as I mentioned earlier, on our website, our incorporation, and our logo. We engaged Brent Warner, a retired B.C. ag person—whom you know, Alex—to travel across the country to get a feel for what was going on out there.

Over the last 15 or 20 years I've worked in every province in Canada, trying to help organizations organize farmers' markets. I've gone there under the auspices of Farmers' Markets Ontario, which isn't fair to that organization because it doesn't really have the funds to be sending me across the country. I've helped do farmers' markets in Grand Falls, which is just a beautiful little market; in Bouctouche; and out in B.C.

We reached a point where we decided that Farmers' Markets Canada would have to come into being to sort of carry the load, and it did, in 2006. We got some funding to be able to do some things, but then the funding dried up. We don't have access to dollars to be able to continue our programming. Those provincial associations out there, which are our members, are run by volunteers. They don't have big budgets.

The only provincial association with any kind of financial strength is Ontario, and that's thanks to the Government of Ontario. The Government of Ontario has been incredible over the last 20 years in terms of helping us with our market program. I think of Vankleek Hill and Kapuskasing, and places I've gone to help do markets. The Government of Ontario has been wonderful.

We're not getting that kind of help in other provinces, and we also need this help federally. I've asked our volunteer board for a teleconference; we were able to do some teleconferencing via a patron. We're trying to do our AGM. I'm getting discouraged, quite frankly—and Alex, I think you know that—but I don't want to give up.

Farmers' Markets Canada is a really good organization. We've done some good stuff. We reach out to the people of Canada, but we need help doing that. It's easy to say go to some corporate sponsors and so on, but their funds are tight as well.

I think we're going to renew our approach to Minister Ritz and his staff to see, perhaps with some help, what we can do to access some funds to continue our work. Our work is really worthwhile. We're not going to give up. Even though we're dormant, we're not going to give up. We want to keep moving forward.

● (1550)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Yes, go ahead.

Mr. André Nault: Thank you. It would be interesting for the members of the committee to try to picture the future. We have to go back to the foundation of agriculture, which is to feed the community. If we have a surplus, it is easy to sell abroad. But right now, we are selling what we have too much of, the five million hogs in Quebec, for example, and we are buying what we could grow locally, such as garlic, cucumber, cabbage, tomatoes, and so on.

We have somewhat changed the balance of agriculture. Access to inexpensive oil has completely turned things around. Between 1950 and 1960, we started importing and exporting pretty much shamelessly. Today, we are assuming the responsibility, as producers, to feed the planet while our communities are starving to death. So we need to go back to the origins, to the basic principle of agriculture, which is to feed the community first.

We have to feed our communities first. Farmers' markets—both in Quebec and in Canada, I am sure—work because there is a direct contact with producers. We need to rediscover those ties. Regardless of what we can accomplish, there is definitely an export market, but this market does not have a lot of ties with producers and the community. For example, an entire production might be exported. The community would have no link to that production.

So we need to go back to basics. To do so, there are two potential markets: the export market—which has to continue because it has been around for almost 50 years—and the other market that we are in the process of rediscovering. With public markets for regional solidarity and online markets, we are rediscovering the ties with producers.

Mr. Laurier Busque (Member, Board of Directors, Les amiEs de la terre de l'Estrie): I would just like to add something to your question. It has to do with drawing a parallel between the increase in exports over the past few years and the number of producers. There is no correlation, on the contrary. This becomes a major concern when agriculture is export-driven.

Why is it not possible to have more producers working?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Thank you.

● (1555)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Hoback, you have five minutes.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen, for being here this afternoon. I'll keep going along these lines, because I want to challenge you a little bit. I'm looking for some good debate and some different ideas here.

I come from an area in the prairies in Saskatchewan where I don't have a major centre close by. My closest centre is an hour away. Major centres like Calgary or Winnipeg are six to eight hours away.

When we look at farmers' markets, or markets where farmers can sell their goods directly to consumers, how do you accommodate somebody who's not in the local area and still wants to participate in that market? They want to be able to cut out the middleman and still have contact with consumers, but they aren't in an area where they have the bulk of consumers—the demographics.

How would you accommodate that situation?

Mr. Robert Chorney: That's a good question. Thank you.

Each farmers' market is autonomous. However, for almost all of them I think the rules would allow a farmer to drive a great distance if he or she wanted to. A lot of that occurs. I know farmers who drive 100 or 150 kilometres to come to a market because it is buoyant and they have a chance to sell their products. They're welcome.

There's a big market in Saskatoon. As you know, it's one of the better markets in your province. I'm sure there are vendors there who come great distances to sell their products.

Mr. Randy Hoback: What if I wanted to sell in Toronto? How would you accommodate me there?

Mr. Robert Chorney: I would wonder why a farmer would want to do that. He'd have to have a pretty unique product, and I can't even think of one.

We have vendors from Quebec who come to the ByWard Market and the Parkdale Market here in the city. We can accommodate them, and we work hard at doing that.

You know, the whole thing is to put fresh product in front of shoppers. Our duty is to get the farmers in there and get the product to shoppers. They're just clamouring for it.

The whole eating locally thing is here to stay. We've been preaching eating locally for 20 years. We've been a voice in the wilderness. Now we're a voice riding that wave, because it's a very strong and very real wave. We're thrilled with it.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Nault.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Nault: With the exception of Saskatchewan that has a lot of them, local communities used to be able to sustain themselves in the past. Actually, our dependence on export or import makes us slightly more vulnerable. We have put our resources aside and we choose to focus on exports because they are profitable.

We have created an imbalance in our markets and we have lost sight of our agriculture's primary objective, which is to feed our communities. I can give you examples from Alberta because I lived there for four years. Falher, in the north, Saint-Isidore and Peace River are all small communities that are able to sustain themselves, as they always have. That was not the case in the 1980s when they decided to give their food products to the world's large distributors, some of whom used it freely, I believe.

[*English*]

Mr. Randy Hoback: The problem I have in my region—and I'm going back to the example of where I'm at—is that two farmers could feed the community, no problem. And we have maybe 200 or 300 farmers. You need to find a market for those goods, so exports are very important. We need to have that valve to release the products somewhere; otherwise those farmers won't be there.

When I look at farmers' markets...I don't argue that they are growing in demand. There is one in downtown Prince Albert, and I know the community loves it. People come out every Saturday morning, and it actually rejuvenates the downtown core of Prince Albert.

In Saskatchewan we have so many producers of similar products that they just need to have a better venue or more options of venues to go to. It would be nice to have something outside of the Loblaws and Safeways, and go through that process to cut out that supposed middleman.

The other concern I want to talk about is regulation. When this food is being produced locally you assume that the farmer is presenting the product to the market in a safe manner. Do you have any checks and balances to ensure that what's packaged or being claimed to be sold is actually what's in it?

Mr. Robert Chorney: That's a very good question. Thank you.

We're very proactive in terms of working with local health units. Here in Ontario there are 36 health units. We've helped them identify a champion in each local unit who has responsibility for the farmers' market. It's the same thing across the country. We urge them to visit our markets. We try to file vendors' lists at the beginning of the market season, and we encourage them to come to the markets.

We do all kinds of food safety training. If you were to go to the Farmers' Markets Ontario website, there's a really dynamic food safety training manual that's downloadable. Really, the health units are key to farmers' markets, because they're local, and the inspectors are local. We tell them that we think their first duty to us—not that we preach to them—is one of education, and certainly compliance comes afterwards. If there's a need for compliance, we think they should clamp down.

We just gave the boot to a lady in one of our markets in Toronto because she was selling eggs under the table. They weren't graded. We're just not going to put up with that. It's very clear that ungraded eggs can't be sold beyond the farm gate.

So we do our due diligence and we're concerned about food safety. There's a very high level of trust. Eighty per cent of shoppers feel that the food is as safe as or safer than at a supermarket, so there's a great feeling that food is safer coming from a farmers' market. That's a high level of trust that we can't play around with. If we ever had a food scare, it could be really tough on us, so we work very hard to make that not happen.

I'm going back to that ill-timed remark at the national food summit of a few weeks ago. *The Toronto Star* did a major story. Jennifer Bain, the food writer, was in touch with CFIA about when the last time there was a food scare or a recall at farmers' markets. They didn't have any, because we really work hard at that. But it's not to say it couldn't happen. If it did, we'd get really worried about that.

● (1600)

The Chair: Mr. Valeriote, for five minutes.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Thank you, gentlemen, for attending today. It's important that you be here to inform us.

I know the University of Guelph makes every effort to buy locally. In season they will buy over 70% of the food that's needed to feed the students' residence and the cafeterias locally. I know St. Joseph's hospital is making an effort to buy locally where they can.

One of the problems—and I had this discussion with some farmers at a CFA breakfast the other morning—is with the ability to buy in large quantities and consistent quantities of food. We've had others around the table here who have talked to us about building terminals in more convenient locations so farmers can have their food collected, and then institutions and others can buy more in bulk.

I'm totally supportive of buying locally and buying fresh and those other things you speak of, but if we're going to promote that, we have to have the capacity. What plans do you have to build that kind of capacity, if any, and what can the government do to help you?

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Nault: If I may, I would like to say that the major challenge in agriculture is that our producers are no longer used to producing all year round in order to sell their products to major supermarkets, or large markets, such as hospitals. In Sherbrooke's Marché de solidarité régionale, we have trouble getting producers to provide us with vegetables all year round. Do you understand that?

Producers are no longer used to properly stocking food products in order to sell them all year round because the import market has taken over. We can get cucumbers and strawberries in January, and so on. We have changed Canadians' eating habits. I feel we need to go back to the origins. In the region of Sherbrooke, 37% of the city's territory is farmland. There is not one farmer who produces potatoes and vegetables. Our producers produce milk and beef, end of story.

So we have lost diversity in production. We need to re-educate producers. They have always been directed to the outside, not within the country. We now want to do the opposite because everyone is pretty much aware of the problems to come: climate change, a decrease in oil resources around the world, and so on. We are now doing what could have been done 10 years ago. Our producers could have then started to produce for those hospitals and schools, because they would have had the possibility to do so.

[*English*]

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Okay.

Robert, you mentioned that you received some money from the government. I'd like to know how much specifically. Was it a lot? Was it a little? Perhaps you could be specific.

Secondly, you talked in generalities about the moribund state, or the dormant state, of your organization.

There's nothing I look forward to more than going home and going to the market on Saturday morning with one or both of my kids. Believe me, it's become a tradition; you meet people there, and there's a really strong sense of community. It bothers me to think that it could die. It really bothers me.

I'm not suggesting that's where you're headed, but we need to know numbers. Is there a business plan? Do you need more market space, or money to expand markets? What is it you need to support growing local, and specifically the local market?

● (1605)

Mr. Robert Chorney: What we need is a national association.

First of all, I seem to recall that in 2008-09 the grant was in the range of $350,000. That allowed us to do the economic impact study and the things I talked about earlier.

We need dollars to be able to bring our board members together a couple of times a year. You know, that's a $10,000 expense each time for airfares and hotels and so on. We need money to be able to market the whole sector to the public out there. We want to be able to tell our story. We don't have any dollars for that.

Infrastructure dollars and all that stuff—that becomes a matter for the provinces to work with. As a national association, though, I think we have to tell our story in a very powerful way, and we don't have the dollars to do that.

We also have, I think, a major obligation to our provincial people to offer training programs and so on, and we can't do that. We're really hamstrung in terms of trying to do some positive stuff.

Thank you to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada for the help they gave us, because it gave us a really good foothold.

Now, as I said, we're dormant, and it really worries me.

You spoke about the markets in your area. You have some wonderful markets—Guelph, Cambridge....

You know, there's something I should tell you, sir, if I can digress a little bit. In Ontario, 30 of our markets are over 100 years old. Two of them, Kingston and Toronto, are over 200 years old. There's a very rich history and tradition of farmers' markets in Ontario particularly. The only other jurisdiction in North America with an older kind of tradition is the state of Pennsylvania.

So there's a very rich history of markets in this country, and we need money to keep on telling our story.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Mr. Zimmer, five minutes.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Thank you for coming.

I just wanted to mention that I'm from the prairies in B.C., so we've experienced Taylor corn and like to buy local beef whenever possible.

But I did have a question for you, Bob, specifically. You mentioned that people have a high level of trust for the market gardens and stuff. What are your recommendations with regard to concerns for food safety at farmers' markets?

And I'm not saying that in a.... You know, we want to help that as opposed to limit that.

So what would be your solution to that?

Mr. Robert Chorney: I think it's really important, as I said earlier, for the farmers' markets to be proactive in terms of their training programs, the awareness, constantly talking about it with vendors, liaising with local health units, and, if there are CFIA people around, keeping open channels.

It really is a matter of being proactive, of training and awareness, and of talking about the fact that we're concerned and we want the right things to happen. It's just a whole awareness connectivity thing.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Right.

Mr. Nault, could you first of all explain the name of your organization? It's in French only, and I just don't know what it means.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Nault: The Marché de solidarité régionale—

[*English*]

It's market online.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Market online?

Mr. André Nault: Yes. We've been doing that for the last six years.

[*Translation*]

I'm sorry, I am going to speak to you in French.

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Zimmer: They'll translate it. Don't worry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Nault: This year, we are celebrating our sixth anniversary. We have a small market in the City of Sherbrooke. Producers make around $3 million in six years. So we make $500,000 a year, which is enough to keep six sheep and beef producers. And we have grass-fed beef. We pay attention to that.

In terms of food safety, I would like to answer that question. We have a direct contact with consumers. As a result, if there is something wrong with the product from a producer, we will get an immediate reaction from consumers, because they will call the person in charge to say that they have been poisoned. So we would directly contact the producer in question to say that we received two complaints, for example, about their product.

We once actually had to deal with a similar situation. I am not saying that education is not important. Recently, there was an E. coli contamination of spinach, but that cannot happen in local markets because producers don't use that type of production. They are not in a huge inaccessible market. They look after their clients' well-being.

Food safety is a consideration when there is a direct link.

● (1610)

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Zimmer: You had mentioned too about keeping the production local. A lot of us are supportive of that anyway; we like going to markets, as Frank mentioned. You spoke of the local market, but what are your thoughts on the export market? Certainly, farmers in my riding rely on the export market for their sustenance and needs. What is your position in having both, in having a balanced....

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Nault: There is no problem with that. Both can definitely survive and thrive together. However, genetically-modified crops can contaminate the productions of local producers who don't use that method.

The popularity of local markets or local products—

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I didn't want to go down that road. I just wanted to ask you specifically if you're okay with local producers producing to consume locally and export.

How about you, Bob? Are you okay with that?

Mr. Robert Chorney: It's not a problem. The great majority of our market farmers are small producers; they're not into wholesale or export. Certainly we have some, and certainly it's a part of life; it's a part of our economy.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: That brought up another question, but I'm assuming by your answer that you'd be okay. What are your thoughts on our governments opening up foreign markets in terms of CIDA agreements and foreign trade agreements? Do you have a position as an organization? Is that good or bad?

Mr. Robert Chorney: It's support, simple as that.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Okay, good.

André.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Nault: That depends on the regulations in place. If that forces us to lower our standards... We are already below certain regulatory standards. If markets are open—

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Could I have more than a yes or no answer? Simply put, are you okay with pursuing foreign agreements and foreign trade agreements?

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Nault: Local producers should not be penalized.

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Your time is up.

Ms. Raynault, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for accepting the committee's invitation.

Mr. Nault, Mr. Busque, as I have been involved in agricultural production—including cucumber production for a Quebec-based company I will not name—I can tell you that, in 1985, we already knew there would be no more local production. That was later confirmed in Lanaudière. I would like local production to make a comeback because it would provide young people with summer jobs.

In your paper titled "Chaîne agroalimentaire: un défi pour les citoyens", agri-food chain: a Canadian challenge, you say that, in our cities, food self-sufficiency would make it possible to survive for only two weeks. That is worrisome. How can the situation be remedied? Should we start with provisions right away?

Mr. André Nault: It is all a matter of dependence. In rural areas where farming is more developed and people are in direct contact with a producer who provides beef or various other products, they will be able to survive a while longer. However, in cities—and I am thinking of the situation in Sherbrooke, which has some 15 super-stores—if disaster struck, stores would be empty in three days, and homes two weeks later.

In the area of public safety, people are being educated and encouraged to be self-sufficient for a two-week period, as far as water and food go. We don't know what can happen. In 1998, the ice storm went on for 28 days, in some cases. Therefore, a certain level of food self-sufficiency is necessary. Food dependence was created when we started to rely on foreign markets. I think that is the root of the problem. Things would be different if we produced our food and imported our surplus. The surplus has become essential. In these conditions, if I need a banana on a daily basis, there is a problem with the local agriculture, which has failed to provide a product that could replace the banana.

I am not against people eating a banana once a week or once a month. I have nothing against imported products, but they should not take the place of our local products. However, since 1980, imported products have slowly been replacing our local ones.

● (1615)

Ms. Francine Raynault: What you are saying is exactly right. Monoculture led to a famine in Ireland in 1822. Locally, there are fewer diversified crops; we have only one or two kinds of corn, one kind of tomato, and so on. How can we convince producers to grow several kinds of tomatoes?

Mr. André Nault: That is why public markets and solidarity markets are important. Our markets provide great variety. People can buy a type of carrot called the "*crotte*". They can buy a blue potato whose name escapes me. Do you understand? We have a great variety of products available. Our local producers are slowly bringing back older strains of produce. I think people are being educated. You can buy turnips, black radish, and so on. That kind of produce had disappeared from our diets. Almost 147 kinds of corn were being produced in 1893. In 1983, that number had dropped to barely 17. I am not sure how many there are today.

As standardization increases, so do major consequences that make us more vulnerable to a food crisis. That is because our food production lacks balance. Exportation does not inhibit variety and diversity. However, if producing a single kind of produce is easier, that is the kind that will be produced.

When potato variety dropped to only four different kinds, a disease developed that resulted in a famine. Nearly one million people died of hunger.

Ms. Francine Raynault: So they immigrated to Quebec.

Mr. André Nault: Some of them immigrated to Quebec. Those who did not die immigrated.

Ms. Francine Raynault: Do I have any time left?

[*English*]

The Chair: You still have a little time if you'd like.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Raynault: Of course, I would prefer our farmers to have a diversified production—as you just said—of fruits and vegetables, in order to ensure their revenue.

Mr. André Nault: That is what sells, whether we are talking about small- or large-scale agriculture. I think we'll have two systems that will become distinct in time. Those systems should not be contaminated. That is all I'll say on the topic.

Ms. Francine Raynault: Very well, thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Lemieux, for five minutes.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here. First of all, I want to ask a question about farmers' markets. I have four of them in my riding.

Mr. Robert Chorney: And some good ones.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Yes, some good ones, and they've been there a long time. They're smaller markets. In the larger city centres, even though they're farmers' markets, they turn into big businesses, in a sense. When you look at the farmers' market, for example, here in Ottawa, you have to buy the stall. It's big money to buy the stall. You have to have a permit. Your stall has to measure such and such. There are all sorts of regulations. It's not like a farmers' market in my riding, meaning that if I go to Vankleek Hill, it's just not regulated like that and it's not the big money. In fact, farmers are encouraged to come and just sell their produce.

I'm wondering if you could share with us the impact of what I consider to be major differences between big centre farmers' markets and small, rural farmers' markets.

Mr. Robert Chorney: I think it's all relative, a matter of scale. Here in Ottawa the city passed the bylaw two or three years ago. It was just a free-for-all up until two or three years ago. Now they have different classifications of vendors, so there are some real farmers there now. If a huckster is a huckster, a huckster is identified as a huckster.

Certainly they all pay stall fees. Somebody has to pay the freight in terms of the expenses to run a market. Over at Vankleek Hill, for example, I suspect a farmer probably pays $20 a day to be at the market, but they have to raise funds to pay for their advertising. They have an insurance premium they have to pay, and membership in Farmers' Markets Ontario, which is not onerous.

But the big markets have probably tighter rules because a lot of funny stuff over the years has happened at the ByWard Market in Ottawa. I couldn't even begin to tell you the horror stories, but in the smaller markets it's more a sense of family. You don't get that at the ByWard Market, and I'm not down-speaking that market, but if you go to Vankleek Hill, it's a nice big family. Some of the folks there help do that market. It's just a nice family.

Yes, there are rules and regulations, certainly, in almost all the markets. Some are tougher than others, and they probably should be.

● (1620)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Looking at the supply chain—because that's what we're looking at here—and how farmers' markets fall into that, some of the farmers at farmers' markets, particularly in rural communities, which I know more of...sometimes it's a small producer, a hobby farm type of set-up, and they are selling their product at a farmers' market, but I don't think they're really able to live off that—maybe so on the ByWard Market where there's a lot more pedestrian traffic. In the smaller communities, although there might be good commerce, I don't think there's enough for anyone to live off. So I would imagine that some of the other farmers there have other commercial operations under way to sell their produce, or they are feeding into a local food chain, meaning they're supplying local grocery stores or perhaps even larger distributors.

I'm wondering if you could comment on the different supply chains, just from your experience in travelling around the country. When you start getting into the rural communities, how do you see the balance between the person at the table...? Is it a small hobby farm or is it a committed farmer who's earning his livelihood, a small portion of which comes from the farmers' market and a greater portion from the larger food system in Canada?

Mr. Robert Chorney: I think you're bang on. A lot of the vendors one sees at a farmers' market—not here in Ottawa or Toronto's St. Lawrence—are part-time farmers. They hold day jobs and they're tilling the soil nicely on weekends and bringing their product to market. The larger farmer—I think of Bert Andrews at Milton, for example, who sells at ten farmers' markets, but he has Mexicans working in the fields; he has staff he's trained. He goes to ten markets in one week.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Are they small, rural markets or are some of them the larger, urban markets?

Mr. Robert Chorney: He does two or three. He does one in Milton and two or three in Toronto, Georgetown, Orangeville.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Does he earn his living solely from farmers' markets, or does he feed into the larger chain?

Mr. Robert Chorney: He's a big retail operator. He has a farm-gate business. Absolutely, his sales are in the millions.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: From farmers' markets or from farmers' markets and other—

Mr. Robert Chorney: He's selling at the farm gate.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: So he has a commercial operation and his farm gate.

Mr. Robert Chorney: That's right. A lot of the farmers and vendors you see at a farmers' market are small operators; they have day jobs and they're working to make ends meet. They build, they incubate in their markets. Everyone started small, and a lot of them grew pretty big.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Good.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You're pretty well right on time.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I'm doing my best, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Rousseau for five minutes.

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Many questions come to mind.

I would like to begin by addressing the amiEs de la terre organization.

Two of the pillars of the supply chain model you talked about today are diversity and democracy. That is a matter of great concern to me. Being from the Estrie region, I am well aware of how my local farmers are surviving.

I think consumers must be provided with all the tools they need to choose their food properly and make their selection among a wide range of products. There is always a wide range of products.

According to an OECD survey, 76% of Canadian respondents opt for organic food products for health reasons.

In addition, over 50% of respondents thought that GMO information was essential and should be provided on food labels. We have often discussed labelling here. It seems rather clear that Canadians want to make informed choices in order to preserve their right to a healthy diet.

I assume that you have concerns and that you have received complaints from Canadians. Could you talk about that, please?

● (1625)

Mr. André Nault: That is a broad topic.

In terms of democracy and our food, GMO labelling—or the presence of GMOs—becomes a concern. That concern is not due to the fact that GMOs are present, but rather to the fact that they are concealed. Relevant studies are secret; we have no access to them.

I have contacted the Canadian Food Inspection Agency a number of times, and I was told that information was not available to the public. I was assured that rigorous studies were being conducted that met all the criteria. However, when I asked to see those rigorous studies, my request was denied.

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Which link of the agri-food chain should be in charge of labelling?

Mr. André Nault: The Canadian Food Inspection Agency should be allowed to regulate that area. If that organization's role is a regulatory one, it should do its job fully.

A complaint was recently brought forward about Bt corn, regarding the fact that it crosses the animal's intestinal barrier and ends up in the food chain. That information was said to be untrue from the outset. When something is deemed to be harmful, the companies are always inclined to deny it because, if they admit it, they can be sued. That is what happened in the case of shale gas. For that same reason, the harmfulness of cigarettes was also denied in 1973. Companies are not going to say they intend to put GMOs on the market and that the food chain could be affected.

GMOs have been on the market for 15 or 16 years, and private studies now show that they are part of the food chain. I am talking about long-term studies here. On February 22, 2012, I submitted a complaint to the ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation du Québec, Quebec's department of agriculture, fisheries and food, regarding the presence of Bt corn in the food chain. So far, I have received an acknowledgment, but no response whatsoever.

Mr. Jean Rousseau: A few days ago, the Canadian Press talked about U.S. farmers' concerns regarding the drop in bee populations.

Is the same kind of corn involved? Do you have any information about that?

Mr. André Nault: According to the published studies, the drop is mainly due to systemic herbicides—the kind that penetrate the plant. When it comes to genetically-engineered crops, herbicides are already in the plant. However, no connection has yet been established with the bee, except in the case of a very specific systemic herbicide whose name I cannot recall.

Be that as it may, there is an impact. In 2000, German zoologist Hans Hinrich Kaatz conducted a study, which concluded that the transgene crossed the bee's intestinal barrier. In 2008 or 2009, other similar studies were conducted.

Mr. Jean Rousseau: According to what you are saying, it is clear that, if there was proof that certain modified foods are really harmful to consumers, the trust between consumers and producers would be broken.

Mr. André Nault: In 1996, the president of Calgene said that, if GMO information was put on product labels, it would be tantamount to placing a skull and crossbones on them. Therefore, adopting that practice was out of the question.

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Mr. Busque?

Mr. Laurier Busque: Regarding your first question, I would like to add that the amiEs de la terre, a citizen organization, submitted an official complaint concerning Bt corn. That same week, the French government asked the same thing of the whole European community —that is, to ban this type of corn. We are no longer talking about citizens, but of the French government.

Much is being said about who does what and who is responsible for what. However, you can see that, in Europe, it was the French government—and not a few citizens or citizen organizations—that took on the responsibility of calling for that ban. If that situation was applied to Canada, you would be calling for the ban.

Mr. André Nault: At that time, we had no link of communication with the French government.

Mr. Jean Rousseau: You talked about the stark change in farmers' production habits. Could you provide more details on that?

What will happen to the agri-food chain if we continue to ignore diversity and farmers' production habits?

● (1630)

Mr. André Nault: Agriculture will disappear. We will always have to rely on others to feed us. I think we will lose all around. The best way to control a population is to control its food. If our food comes from abroad, it will be difficult to control our population.

Diversity will come from small markets such as farmers' markets, solidarity markets or some 50 on-line markets across Quebec, most of which have roots in our Sherbrooke regional solidarity market. So, that diversity will come from small producers. Large producers will use the seeds provided to them because they won't be able to afford trying to certify seeds. However, small producers will be able to do that.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Lobb, you have five minutes.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The first question is for Mr. Chorney. I apologize. I missed the first part of your presentation.

What is your estimate on the number of farmers' markets in Canada?

Mr. Robert Chorney: Between 550 and 600. Last year we received nearly 35 million shopper visits.

Mr. Ben Lobb: So of those 550 to 600, how many would run 12 months of the year?

Mr. Robert Chorney: Of 175 markets in Ontario, less than 20 would be year-round. Across the country I'm guessing it's probably 60 or 75—less than 100.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Okay. So of those vendors, how many would be selling Canadian-grown, or in my case Ontario-grown, produce 12 months of the year?

Mr. Robert Chorney: Well, hopefully, they're selling all Ontario-grown.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Hopefully.

Mr. Robert Chorney: That's right.

We have a program here in Ontario called the MyPick program, where farmers have to register their crop production planning. We visit the field to make sure that's what's happening, and then we accredit that particular farmer as a MyPick farmer, with posters and cards and so on.

It's really about the whole credibility thing. Reselling has been a major issue certainly, probably more in Ontario than elsewhere in the country.

Mr. Ben Lobb: So with a MyPick vendor, it would be guaranteed that the produce they're selling is from—

Mr. Robert Chorney: Absolutely. When you go to a market and you see the poster and the cards of a MyPick vendor, that person is the real deal.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Okay. That's helpful.

I'm also curious. If we go back to Mr. Weston's comments at that conference about two months ago now—you put in your material that you're the number two source of groceries in Canada—do you think those comments were aimed specifically at discrediting the farmers' market movement, or was that just a slippage of verbs and adjectives and nouns in his speech?

Mr. Robert Chorney: One of the things I was really hammering at afterwards with his vice-president of corporate affairs and communications was whether he meant what he said. If he didn't mean what he said, fess up and say it was a blunder and that he shouldn't have said it. We're not getting that, and we're going to leave that alone.

I don't know how he feels about farmers' markets, but I think it was a bad comment on his part. Giving Mr. Weston the benefit of the doubt, I think if he had a chance to not say that again, he wouldn't. I want to be charitable with him. I would hope that he didn't mean what he said, but he did say it.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Right. He did say it.

Could you tell the committee a little more about your relationship with the CFIA, and things that are going well and things that could be improved?

Mr. Robert Chorney: We don't have that much contact with CFIA. Most of our work with the farmers' markets is through local health units.

Any contact we have had with CFIA is quite positive. I think they're helpful and positive. We have no complaints certainly, not at all.

Mr. Ben Lobb: In this literature, this study you've done, there's a lot of good information. I think one of the things that's missing—maybe it's another thing, and maybe you have that—is the advantage for a farmer today who is more traditional, growing corn, wheat, soybeans, etc., to look at diversifying even further, maybe allocating 5 to 10 acres, or a percentage or whatever, in growing produce, and the return on investment on that acreage.

Do you have any of that information available to the committee or to farmers?

Mr. Robert Chorney: I don't have stats, but I can tell you that enlightened farmers are diversifying. With the various ethnics we have in our country, particularly in the city of Toronto, for example, farmers are diversifying and coming up with crops we hadn't heard of before. They're responding to the marketplace. Smart farmers do that; they respond to the marketplace.

Particularly with stuff coming out of the Holland Marsh, for example, they're responding to the marketplace. The shoppers come to market looking for product they can buy in their country and we don't have it here, so farmers are responding.

● (1635)

Mr. Ben Lobb: Okay.

The Chair: Mr. Nault wanted to jump in, if it's okay with you. It's your five minutes.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Oh, sure.

The Chair: Mr. Nault.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Nault: Thank you.

In 2006, the magazine *L'actualité*, from Montreal, published a study on a number of local products available at supermarkets. Mr. Dumoulin, the author of that study, conducted it again in 2010. On April 1, 2010, *L'actualité* published statistics indicating that the amount of local products in superstores was zero, but that the number of signs that read “Product of Quebec” had doubled.

Mr. Weston is surely concerned by the fact that local markets are not bringing in the money they could be making.

[*English*]

Mr. Ben Lobb: This is a good point, and I'm glad you brought this up, Mr. Nault.

I've asked a number of questions in this committee on the supply chain study about accessibility in grocery stores for local producers, and I think you've hit on that.

Do you have members who have examples of where they've tried to get on grocers' shelves and have been unable to do so? If you could give us some examples from Quebec, it would be very helpful.

Mr. André Nault: Yes, there are so many.

[*Translation*]

Small producers have to buy shelf space by the foot. In a Metro grocery store, in Sherbrooke, three or four feet can cost as much as $8,000. Those producers cannot afford that. They are faced with another difficulty as well. In Coaticook, an IGA grocery store used to carry many local products. Every four years, the shelf layout must be redone. So all local products have disappeared from the store. Bringing them back again would be a lot of work for those people when they redo the shelf layout.

[*English*]

Mr. Ben Lobb: I appreciate that information, because I think we've had a hard time getting that out so far. If you have more of your members who would like to provide testimony or provide more examples of being unable to get on grocers' shelves, and the $8,000 they have to pay to buy space, please send it to us because we want to get that out to the public and to the grocery stores.

Mr. Robert Chorney: May I comment further, sir, for a quick 30 seconds?

The Chair: I'll hold you to that.

Mr. Robert Chorney: I'm not trying to nail our friends at Loblaws, but the word is, had that organization done a better job at treating farmers right, we wouldn't have as many farmers' markets as we have.

The Chair: Mr. Chorney, I would like clarification on something you said a couple of minutes ago. I moved on before asking about it. You made a comment about some of your organizations having to buy memberships in various things. Basically I took it that you implied that government should pick it up.

When I farmed I belonged to the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and in effect the Canadian Federation of Agriculture for 30 years, and I bought my membership. I was a beef farmer, so I joined the OCA and the Bruce County Cattleman's Association. I belonged to a few other groups.

I'm asking you, should the government have been picking up my membership costs there as a producer?

Mr. Robert Chorney: I don't think so, not at all. I think these are professional associations, and if you want to be part of that I think it's your obligation and your duty. Individual farmers' markets have membership fees for the right to sell there, and there are stall fees by the day, that sort of thing—

The Chair: I hear you. I just wanted clarification on that. So governments shouldn't be picking up—

Mr. Robert Chorney: I don't think so, not at all.

The Chair: On both sides of the issue?

Mr. Robert Chorney: I don't think government should be picking up membership fees to belong to professional associations. That's up to the farmer.

The Chair: Okay, but you implied that government should for markets and what have you. Was I taking that the wrong way?

Mr. Robert Chorney: What I'm stating is that Farmers' Markets Canada, in order to market the sector, needs help from government to tell the farmers' market story nationwide, to provide training to members, to further increase the awareness with health units. All of those programs we should be doing nationally, helping the provinces with those things. Some provinces don't have—

The Chair: Okay. You're getting away from what I was asking. You talked about memberships, and that's good.

Ms. Blanchette-Lamothe.

● (1640)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: As I mentioned to you two minutes ago, Larry, I'm going to take the five minutes that we have to introduce a motion I have, and I gave Pierre a heads-up on this. I'd like to read this motion into the record, please.

The Chair: Okay. You certainly have the right, Mr. Atamanenko. We talked about this earlier today. I think you're abusing your privilege here because this meeting isn't for this, but, again, you can go.

A point of order.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Yes, I have a point of order, Chair.

I think this should be moved to the end of the meeting, and I'm saying this because this is the way we normally deal with this. When we deal with motions, we deal with motions as part of committee business. They don't pop up during our question periods.

Chair, I think you should consider what it is that he's asking. He may have spoken to me, but I'm telling you what I told him, and I'm telling my committee members what I told Alex, that it is inappropriate to raise it when we have witnesses here, when the theme of today's meeting is to look at the supply chain, to discuss with witnesses. So it's not following due process as set out by this committee. This is normally committee business.

If Mr. Atamanenko wants to have committee business on his motion, for example, at the end of the meeting, then I think it's appropriate for us to do it at the end of the meeting as part of committee business, as we would normally do. This is very disruptive, Chair. It's not fair to committee members who are here to dialogue with witnesses. It's being foisted upon the committee.

We have a protocol for dealing with this, and the protocol is that it falls under committee business. Committee business is not on the schedule, so, Chair, you could quite rightly say, not today, there's no committee business on the schedule, and this is clearly committee business. Or, Chair, you could also say, I'll move this to the end of the meeting when we will have committee business because we might wrap up this meeting early.

That's my point of order, Chair, that this is irregular. We have a process and a protocol for dealing with this, and I would say that's the way we should deal with it.

The Chair: I take that comment. As I think I've basically verified what you said, I think this is inappropriate.

However, I would respectfully ask you, Mr. Atamanenko, if you would move it to be dealt with after the rounds of testimony are done.

But again, the way the rules are set out, if Mr. Atamanenko insists right now, I will have to accept that.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: On that point of order, I'm wondering if, when Mr. Lemieux suggests it be moved to the end of today's business and the end of the witnesses' testimony, he would commit to Alex's motion not going in camera. In other words, when he suggests it be moved to the end of the meeting, will that remain in the open meeting, and would he commit to not bringing a motion that it go in camera?

The Chair: If you want to have those kinds of negotiations, Mr. Valeriote, go and talk to Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: No, I just want clarification.

The Chair: I'm dealing with this right now, and I asked Mr. Atamanenko....

We have witnesses here. But the ball is in your court.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I'd like to read it into the record.

The Chair: Read it into the record then.

Is it a point of order, Mr. Hoback?

Mr. Randy Hoback: No, this is a comment, Mr. Chair.

In light of what's going on here and how embarrassed I am—I apologize to the witnesses—I move that we go in camera.

The Chair: There's no discussion on the motion.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We are now going in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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